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1978

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN CARIBBEAN PROSE FICTION

by

Maria Cristina Rodriguez

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
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1978

This manuscript has been read and accepted for
the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature
in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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INTRODUCTION

There is no looking-glass here and I don't know what I am like now. I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me. The girl I saw was myself yet not quite myself. Long ago when I was a child and very lonely I tried to kiss her. But the glass was between us--hard, cold and misted over with my breath. Now they have taken everything away. What am I doing in this place and who am I?

Wide Sargasso Sea, Jean Rhys

Today there is a great interest in the subject of women, an interest which has produced several literary studies dealing primarily with women in European and North American literature. In Latin America, too, there have been some studies of female characters and women writers, especially from Argentina and Mexico, although the role of women in these countries has been studied mostly from a sociological, rather than from a literary point of view. In the Caribbean, however, the subject of women has barely been touched upon. I chose, therefore, as the limited aim of this dissertation to provide the beginning of a study of female characters by analyzing certain literary works of the Spanish and English-speaking Caribbean in order to form a picture of the role women have been conditioned to play in these societies.

It is in this century that women have become protagonists in Caribbean prose fiction, although they were always present before as secondary characters, especially in the Romantic novel. If literature is a critical transformation of the reality in a society, then a close examination of the history and literature of the Caribbean will reveal how women come to the fore as protagonists and, at times, as writers, when society is transformed by economic and political changes. Since writers respond to the values of their society, they portray women in the roles assigned to them. Depending on the writer's awareness, then, these roles may be upheld or challenged. Thus, a study of the historical and literary background of each country should reveal the authenticity of the way women are portrayed in Caribbean prose fiction.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, male and female roles have acquired a fixed structure that has resisted the

changes of this century. Even in those countries isolated geographically and politically from one another, the most outstanding images in literature are still Pandora in Greek mythology, and the temptress and redeemer of mankind in the Bible: Eve and the Virgin Mary. Women as a mystery and a harbinger of good and evil is the substance behind the myth of Pandora:

fue la primera mujer sobre la tierra, zeus la colocó junto al primer hombre, epimeteo, y le regaló una caja donde estaban encerrados todos los bienes y todos los males de la humanidad. pandora abrió la caja fatal y su contenido se esparció por el mundo, no quedando en ella más bien que el de la esperanza.¹

In the Bible, good and evil are separated into two distinct characters. Eve, disobeying the natural order of things, is the seductress who brings sin and death into the world, while hope and redemption are embodied in the Virgin Mary, who passively accepts her role as wife and mother and becomes the perpetual martyr, bearing all humanity's sins and suffering as her destiny on this earth.

From these archetypes several stereotypes found in literature in general can be drawn. Mary Ann Ferguson, in her introduction to the anthology Images of Women in Literature, states that literature is both a reflection and a creator of reality. Thus, by studying literature, archetypes and stereotypes are discovered which, having been preserved by years, in turn influence behavior and reality.²

1 Rosario Ferré, Papeles de Pandora (Mexico: Joaquín Mortiz, 1976), p. 7.

2 Mary Ann Ferguson, Introd., Images of Women in Literature (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977), p. 10.

Although the characteristics of each stereotype vary according to the character's social class and political awareness, there are six basic images of women that continually appear in the works I shall deal with. The presentation of women as sex objects who spend their time looking pretty to please and attract men, and who also take care to preserve their virginity and reject intellectual development in order to get a better match in the marriage market, is the stereotype of the adolescent woman in her early twenties. Once she has fulfilled her first and, perhaps, only goal in life--marriage--two apparently contradicting stereotypes are created: the submissive wife and the dominating mate or "bitch". The passive, obedient role is the ideal--the woman who follows the archetype of the Virgin Mary, who is generally pitied but also admired by men and women alike. The bitch is the nagging, rebellious woman who with age will become the hateful mother-in-law.³ The mother stereotype is also ambiguous; she is loving and protective but also nagging and chastising.

Two other stereotypes have been created for women who do not fit into the marriage pattern. One is the mysterious woman who is feared by the wife and mother, since she seems to possess the power to seduce any man. This role of mistress portrays a woman as strong, independent and passionate; nevertheless, she is rejected and morally pressured by society. In Spanish-speaking countries she is not the poetic querida but the prosaic corteja of another woman's husband.

The old maid is the last stereotype and other role for

3 Ernest Hemingway's definition of the bitch falls into the mistress-seductress stereotype.

single women. She is bitter and jealous of married women, overcurious, unattractive to men and considers sex as a repulsive and sinful act. She is doomed to spend the rest of her life alone, preserving her virginity to the grave. At times she is the spinster aunt who is respected for her closeness to a nun's life style; however, she is often ridiculed for her antiquated ways and sexless existence.

Thus, women can only fulfill themselves in society by accepting their sole role as married women according to these stereotypes. If, by choice or chance, they are left out of this female destiny, they will be rejected as rebels or frustrated human beings.

Although these basic patterns: the sex object, the submissive wife, the bitch, the mother, the seductress and the spinster, are recurrent in most literature, the variations that exist among them are a reflection of the economic and political reality of a country. These roles assigned to women will vary according to social class. Thus, the bourgeoisie woman is portrayed as more fragile and tender while the proletarian woman is more self-sacrificing and physically stronger.⁴ Nevertheless, the stereotypes remain and women are stifled in these roles.

The three basic approaches in genetic structuralism⁵ used in this study are first, the identification and analysis

4 Jorge Gissi, "Mitología de la femineidad," Opresión y marginalidad de la mujer en el orden social machista (Buenos Aires: Humanitas, 1976), p. 137.

5 Lucien Goldmann considers Structuralism as an attempt to analyze a work of art as a systematic structure in which every literary element must be seen in relation to the whole, to the concept of system. The Hidden God (New York: Humanities, 1964).

of a certain structure within the texts. Throughout this work, the roles in which women are portrayed will be the chosen structure. Second, these roles will be related to concrete historical and social conditions in the periods to be discussed in order to arrive at a world vision of the social classes portrayed in the texts.⁶ Third, the emphasis throughout this discussion will be on the text itself as a whole, and on history as a process in which literature is another structure that is defined and in turn defines a world vision in society.⁷ As the role of women in the Caribbean fiction is studied, it will be shown how events in the history of these countries have shaped and revolutionized women's position in today's society.

For this study the Caribbean has been divided into the English-speaking, here referred to as the West Indies, and the Spanish-speaking, which in turn will be divided into two countries: Cuba and Puerto Rico. Although dealing with writers and not with nationalities in the case of Cuba and Puerto Rico,

6 The writer as a social and historical being presents, consciously or not, world visions which are "the expressions of social classes at particular historical moments, and the writer, philosopher or artist articulates this consciousness." Diane Lawrenson and Alan Swingewood, "Literature and Structuralism," The Sociology of Literature (London:Paladin, 1972), p.67.

7 Victor Erlich in Russian Formalism: History and Doctrine (London: Mouton & Co., 1965), p. 209 quotes Jan Mukarovsky as stating that the literary work is a sign which may indicate the characteristics and the state of society, but it is not the automatic by-product of its structure. Thus literature signifies all the factors with which it comes into contact: the author, his milieu, his audience, but without ever becoming a proxy for any of them.

this distinction must be made because their political processes are now quite different. The period to be studied has been limited from 1950 until the present, since the fifties is the period when social, economic and political changes begun a decade before accelerate and acquire form, thus, at times, changing drastically the position of women in these countries.

In the Spanish Caribbean I will deal with Alejo Carpentier, Severo Sarduy and Dora Alonso from Cuba; and René Marqués, Pedro Juan Soto and Rosario Ferré from Puerto Rico. In the West Indies, I will deal with Roger Mais (Jamaica), V. S. Naipaul (Trinidad), and Jean Rhys (Dominica). This selection has been based on the varied characterization of women in the writings of these authors based on the six stereotypes most often found in literature. Through the analysis of the works of these writers, a greater understanding will be reached about the roles women are portrayed in and the degree of distortion involved in these literary images.

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL AND LITERARY BACKGROUND

Nuestro símbolo no es pues Ariel, como pensó Rodó, sino Calibán. Esto es algo que vemos con particular nitidez los mestizos que habitamos estas mismas islas donde vivió Calibán: Próspero invadió las islas, mató a nuestros ancestros, esclavizó a Calibán y le enseñó su idioma para poder entenderse con él: ¿qué otra cosa puede hacer Calibán sino utilizar ese mismo idioma--hoy no tiene otro-- para maldecirlo, para desear que caiga sobre él la 'roja plaga'? No conozco otra metáfora más acertada de nuestra situación cultural, de nuestra realidad.

Calibán, Roberto Fernández Retamar

Caribbean literature must be studied together with the history of its colonial past. Some basic historical events may prove helpful before going into literary background. The countries of this region were formed by European economic enterprises in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; Spain and Great Britain determined the ethnic groups, the economy and the political system that would prevail in the twentieth century.

The first ethnic group enslaved to serve Spain's purposes were the Amerindians. In a matter of thirty years the original inhabitants of the Caribbean islands were nearly exterminated. The mistreatment, extreme hard labor and illnesses to which the Spaniards exposed them were the main factors, but in addition there was among women a high percentage of infanticide and a refusal to bear children.¹

When the British and other European countries began establishing themselves in the Caribbean at the beginning of the seventeenth century, African slaves were imported in large numbers, thus bringing to that area another ethnic group. Since British interests lay in the great potential of the European market for sugar, black slavery became the foundation of their islands' economy. The triangular trade, with its tragic Middle Passage, was thus established.² Once more the family structure and cultural tradition of another group was destroyed or drastically altered.

1 Adalberto López, "The Beginning of Colonization: Puerto Rico, 1493-1800," Puerto Rico and the Puerto Ricans (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974), p.19.

2 Eric Williams, From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean 1492-1969 (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 140-141.

After the Haitian Revolution Spain decided to expand its sugar plantations in Cuba and Puerto Rico; thus, slavery became of major importance to the Spanish Caribbean. By this time, Great Britain had realized that the slave trade was no longer a profitable business, and consequently it was abolished in 1807. This decision was followed in 1833 by the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies. But it was a gradual emancipation, followed by a five-year period of apprenticeship, to learn how to be free. In this way former slaves continued to be attached to sugar plantations.

Because sugar cultivation had just begun to expand in Cuba, slavery was not abolished in the Spanish colonies until forty years after the British, and even then it was done by individual territories: Puerto Rico in 1873 and Cuba in 1880. Here, as in the British West Indies, a period of apprenticeship was established binding former slaves to plantation owners for three years.³

After their so-called apprenticeship, former slaves remained at the mercy of the landowners since they had no education, wealth, or skills except farm work. Education in the British West Indies had been confined to the white Creole elite. This was elementary schooling; higher education was pursued only in the metropolis. Schooling for girls was almost non-existent. "About one-third of their number could expect two or three years at the elementary school, and then life began."⁴ With emancipation, the British government allotted money to provide basic education for former slaves. Whether

3 Williams, pp. 280-327.

4 Kenneth Ramchand, The West Indian Novel and Its Background (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p.40.

it was implemented by religious groups or the colonial government, the money was wasted since it did not favor either group to educate the black population.⁵ Black girls were exempted from school; a better position for colored women in this post-emancipation period was achieved by becoming white men's mistresses.⁶

Although the limitations of mass education in Cuba and Puerto Rico were the same as the rest of the Caribbean, there was a more paternalistic attitude towards former slaves. Black people were not kept outside the general culture; they were participants in the language and the customs. Black women not only became confidantes of white young ladies, but many times were the bastard daughters of the houseowners. The relationships and confusions that ensued from these family ties became favored subjects among Romantic writers in the Spanish Caribbean.⁷

The children of Cuban and Puerto Rican planters, on the contrary, had access to private education in Cuba; most of these schools were run by Catholic orders. In the case of education for girls, a number of schools run by nuns were established in the nineteenth century. Higher education for women, when granted, was done by tutors at home.⁸ The Cuban

5 Blanca Acosta, Samuel Golberg and Ileana Sanz, "Introduction to Prose Fiction in the English-Speaking West Indies," Caribbean Stories (La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1977), p.xii.

6 Ramchand, p. 40.

7 Among these: Cirilo Villaverde's Cecilia Valdés, Gertrudis Gómez Avellaneda's Sab, Alejandro Tapia y Rivera's La Cuarterona.

8 Isabel Picó, "Apuntes preliminares para el estudio de la mujer puertorriqueña y su participación en las luchas sociales de principios del Siglo XX," La mujer de América Latina, Tomo II (Mexico: Sep/Setentas, 1975), p. 108.

María Luisa Dolz y Arango was an educator in the latter part of this century who received her whole preparation in private schools and with tutors. Later on, she also established her own private school for girls.⁹

Within this Caribbean with a common geographical and historical background of slavery and monoculture, there were some fundamental differences which accounted for the isolation of one island from another.

For nothing was created in the British West Indies, no civilization as in Spanish America, no great revolution as in Haiti or the American colonies, there were only plantations, prosperity, decline, neglect: the size of the islands called for nothing else.¹⁰ The history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told. Brutality is not the only difficulty. History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies.¹¹

This is a very pessimistic statement, but it was the empty feeling bequeathed by the British colonial power. In contrast, Cuba and Puerto Rico saw emancipation as a closer step to eventual independence. The attitudes of Spain and Great Britain towards their Caribbean colonies were responsible for the state the colonial people were in at the end of the nineteenth century.

9 María Luisa Dolz, La liberación de la mujer cubana por la educación (La Habana: Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad, 1955).

10 V.S. Naipaul, The Middle Passage (Middlesex:Penguin, 1962), p.27.

11 Naipaul, p.29.

From the beginning there was no intention on the part of the British to settle or populate their Caribbean possessions. As a result, nothing permanent was built: no schools, socio-cultural institutions, or public works. Their aim was to exploit, to make a profit and return to England.¹² Although Cuba and Puerto Rico were used as military garrisons for a long time, the Peninsulars came to settle in America. They brought with them their customs and many commodities from the old country, and set about to build on a permanent basis. A way of life and a cultural pattern thus developed which involved all members of this society, including peasants, freed slaves and slaves themselves.¹³

Sugar became the main crop in the British colonies while in the Spanish Caribbean coffee and tobacco held equal importance. This difference in the cultivation of main crops determined the racial composition of the population. Where sugar was king, the black population exceeded the white,¹⁴ and there was less integration as whites became more endogamous.

When slavery was abolished in the West Indies, the planters replaced slaves with cheap labor by indentured servants recruited from China and India. Trinidad was mostly settled by East Indians who brought with them an ancient culture scarcely altered by Western influence, and this gave yet a different composition to West Indian society.¹⁵ The Spanish Caribbean

12 Antonio Benítez Rojo, "¿Existe una novelística antillana de lengua inglesa?", Casa de las Américas, XVI, no. 91 (julio-agosto 1975), 187.

13 López, "The Beginning", p. 27.

14 Williams, p. 109.

15 Caribbean Stories, p. xxvi.

did not participate in this influence; only in the twentieth century was there a large Chinese migration to Cuba.

As a result of the Haitian Revolution and the Wars of Independence in Spanish America, many Peninsulars, Creoles and French migrants came to Cuba and Puerto Rico. Culturally it enriched these societies, but politically it retarded any attempt towards a separation from Spain.

The British in the West Indies established a Crown Colony Government supposedly to give participation to all segments in the post-emancipation society. But in reality the structure was designed to "obstruct the formation of a national consciousness to favor the powerful colonial interests."¹⁶ Spain's policy was quite different; it always held a tight rein on its Caribbean colonies. During liberal governments it granted certain reforms, but power was always centralized in the Spanish monarchy.

By the last third of the nineteenth century, Cuba and Puerto Rico were directing their efforts, whether through armed struggle or legislative action, towards independence. This struggle for eventual freedom was brought to an end by the military intervention of the United States in its war with Spain in 1898. Although there was now a new colonial power in the Caribbean that shared a common cultural background with the British, the islands continued to be isolated and followed different political and social courses.

In the first twenty years of its intervention in Puerto Rico, the United States made some important economic, political and educational changes. By abolishing the Spanish Autonomous Charter in 1897, male suffrage was restricted to all those men over twenty-one

16 Caribbean Stories, p. xiv.

who could read and write and who would pay an assigned income tax.¹⁷ It put into effect a series of measures that turned the economy from a family enterprise to a plantation system--the centrales. The effect of this change on the peasants and the family structure is the basis for the labor system that followed in agriculture. Large amounts of federal funds were spent to build roads, improve health services and provide educational facilities for the entire population.¹⁸ In 1903 a state college was established as a Normal school with a department of Agriculture--the University of Puerto Rico--to serve as a training ground for teachers for the new system of public education being implemented by the United States. The daughters of former landowners and of the new professionals regarded the University as an educational opportunity offering them more personal independence. One of the first demands made by student groups at the University in 1919 was the right to vote for women.¹⁹ There also developed at this time a class conflict regarding education. The Federación Libre de Trabajadores (FLT) and the Socialist Party were in favor of mass education, of technical and vocational training for workers and saw the university "as a center for the bourgeoisie and higher education as a luxury that should not receive priority."²⁰

17 A. G. Quintero, Conflictos de clase y política en Puerto Rico (Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1976), p. 37.

18 Diana Christopulos, "Puerto Rico in the Twentieth Century: A Historical Survey," Puerto Rico and the Puerto Ricans (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974), p. 129.

19 Isabel Picó, "Origins of the Puerto Rican University Student Movement under U. S. Domination (1903-1930)," Puerto Rico and the Puerto Ricans (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974) p. 176.

20 Picó, p. 176

Since the United States established a protectorate in Cuba, the measures implemented dealt mostly with economic aspects. These included: the Platt Amendment, reciprocity treaties, and capital interests in sugar production, transportation, banks, electricity and public works.²¹ In the period known as Danza de los Millones (1916-1920) when sugar was bringing great dividends, cheap labor was imported from Spain, Haiti, the British West Indies and China.²² The integration of the Chinese into Cuban society brought a new cultural element, absent in the rest of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean.

Under the influence of the United States, certain careers in Cuba were given importance and new jobs were created. Women took advantage of these opportunities and became teachers, nurses and secretaries. Middle-class women were affected by these changes, while those from the working class were excluded.²³

As a result of the economic depression of 1929, workers in the West Indies began to voice their protests; political parties that responded to workers' interests were formed; labor movements acquired a certain degree of power; strikes and riots abounded. The first opposition movements against Crown Colony Government came after World War I and were led by Marcus Garvey. Other leaders who would later be respon-

21 Salvador Bueno, Prólogo, Cuentos cubanos del siglo XX (La Habana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1975), p. 13.

22 Ambrosio Fornet, Introd., Antología del cuento cubano contemporáneo (Mexico: Ediciones Era, 1970), p. 23.

23 Los obreros hacen y escriben su historia (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1975), p. 342.

sible for the first labor organizations emerged during the period between the wars. In Jamaica Alexander Bustamante and Norman Manley led the masses to demand reforms and later on to organize for self-government. In Trinidad Captain Cipriani with his slogan of organize, agitate, educate and confederate was the most important figure during this period.²⁴

One of the causes for labor unrest not only in the West Indies but in the entire Caribbean, is still a high rate of unemployment. Despite the efforts made by the colonial powers and national governments, it has not been able to absorb this labor surplus. As a result, there has been a steady increase in emigration towards Great Britain, the United States and Canada. Most of these migrants are men from the working class, who choose to leave their families behind at first. West Indian women are then forced to take on new responsibilities and become more independent and self-sufficient.

Although certain privileges were given to Puerto Rican women belonging to the middle and upper classes, collective rights were not granted until men and women workers began to organize themselves in syndicates and political parties. In the latter part of the nineteenth century several union groups and mutual help associations had been formed. Most of these were organized by leaders embedded in the anarcho-syndicalist European ideology. They did not develop into political organizations or permanent unions until the 1890's.²⁵ During the first fifteen years of North American occupation, urban and rural workers were influenced by these ideas brought over by

24 Gordon K. Lewis, The Growth of the Modern West Indies (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969), p. 204.

25 Carlos Rama, Historia del movimiento obrero y social latinoamericano contemporáneo (Barcelona:Editorial Laia, 1976), p. 70.

Spanish exiles like Santiago Iglesias Pantín. The Free Federation of Workers (FLT) which had begun in 1899, had developed fully by 1915, and a political party that responded to the syndicate and sought gubernatorial power, was thus created-- the Puerto Rican Socialist Party. In its convention of 1919, several propositions were made concerning women workers: first, equal pay for men and women alike for an eight hour workday; second, prohibition of night work for all women; third, prohibition of work during pregnancy and breast feeding period; fourth, universal suffrage.²⁶ The first and fourth proposals were clearly aimed towards equal rights. But the other two were "protective" measures that eventually would be unfavorable to a woman's right to earn a living on her own. The fact that these propositions were made laws and that women suffrage was granted in 1929 demonstrates the Socialist Party's influence during these years.

The peak years of the Puerto Rican workers' movement were from 1916 when leadership was held by the tobacco workers, until 1933, when the tobacco industry hit its low and the Socialist Party formed a coalition with the Republican Party.²⁷ Women were primarily employed in the needle trades, done mostly at home under adverse conditions²⁸, and became activists in labor demands. As early as 1907 Luisa Capetillo

26 A. G. Quintero Rivera, Lucha obrera en Puerto Rico (Río Piedras: CEREP, 1972), pp. 93-94.

27 César Andreu Iglesias, "El movimiento obrero y la independencia de Puerto Rico," Libertad y crítica en el ensayo político puertorriqueño (Río Piedras: Ediciones Puerto, 1973), p. 302.

28 C. Manning, The Employment of Women in Puerto Rico, 1934.

was leading a tobacco workers' strike organized by the FLT.²⁹

For the 1932 elections, the Socialist Party leadership decided to unite with the chief opposition party, which represented the interests of North American enterprises and their dependent national allies. After the 1929 crisis it was impossible to make economic compromises, as became evident with the cane cutters strike in 1934. For the first time in Puerto Rican history, a strike was called not directly against the proprietors but against union leaders who were considered traitors to the working class.³⁰ By September of that year, several leaders of the Socialist Party and the FLT, and other rural labor leaders organized an assembly and founded the Puerto Rican Communist Party.³¹ Linked to the formation of this party was the creation of the General Workers Confederation (CGT) in 1940, which maintained close ties with United States workers through the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO).³² When the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) came to power, it made a series of concessions to the workers, making it possible for the labor movement to merge with this political party, thus creating a division in the CGT. After 1947, labor movements became an appendix of the government.

With the rise of the PPD and the decline of a general independent labor movement, migrations from Puerto Rico to the United States increased. Most of these people, unskilled laborers from the rural sections of Puerto Rico, worked in the

29 Norma Valle, Luisa Capetillo, San Juan, 1975.

30 Quintero Rivera, Lucha, p. 97.

31 Andreu Iglesias, p. 304.

32 George H. Fromm, César Andreu Iglesias: Aproximación a su vida y obra (Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1977), p. 20.

United States for very low wages in factories, restaurants, and farms.³³ This migration deeply affected the cultural patterns of most Puerto Ricans. Family structure underwent radical changes that made women take on new roles. Many times they were left alone in a strange environment by parents or husbands and were forced to seek jobs and take over the responsibilities hitherto reserved for men. Passivity was replaced by aggressiveness and competition. Still, these women were restricted to work in light industry which paid lower wages. A recent study made by the United States Civil Rights Commission reported that 28% of Puerto Rican families in the United States have women as heads of household; 60% of these families where the breadwinner is a woman remain at poverty level.³⁴

The same economic process that occurred in Puerto Rico took place in Cuba, but the changes began many years before. When the United States took over Cuba, there was already a national bourgeoisie and a proletarian awareness, but no organized labor movement like the FLT in Puerto Rico. In 1923 university reform, following similar movements in Latin America, began under the leadership of Julio Antonio Mella. Together with intellectuals and students, other leaders from various segments of society united in 1925 to found the Cuban Communist Party, which became the most militant political group to oppose the Machado dictatorship.³⁵

33 Cristopulos, p. 152.

34 Puertorriqueños en los Estados Unidos continentales: un futuro incierto (Washington, D. C.: GPO, 1976), p. 62.

35 Fornet, p. 25.

As a result of the 1929 crisis, a long series of strikes and workers' protests developed in which women employed in tobacco and textiles participated in great numbers. During Ramón Grau San Martín's provisional government several popular measures were granted: women's suffrage in 1934, university autonomy, and the approval of several protective laws for workers. When Batista came to power, he began his term in office with brutal repression, but he changed his tactics in 1937 by allowing the formation of the Cuban Federation of Labor (CTC) headed by a Communist, Lázaro Peña, and by making concessions to the trade union movement. Among these were: minimum wage levels, an eight-hour day, a month's paid annual holiday and guarantees against dismissal.³⁶ The 1940 Cuban Constitution guaranteed equal pay and work for men and women; made sex discrimination illegal and punishable; gave married women their rights as individual citizens and granted them maternity protection.³⁷

During Batista's new term (until 1944) the CTC had one of the largest memberships in Latin America. But after 1947 the Communist Party's strength declined as their members were persecuted and the party then chose to deal with the economic aims of the working class.³⁸

In the West Indies after World War II, England began to relax its strong armed policy granting various liberal reforms (universal suffrage in 1944) which later paved the way towards self-government. There was a gradual acquisition of

³⁶ Robin Blackburn, "Prologue to the Cuban Revolution," New Left Review, XXI (October 1963), 71.

³⁷ Los obreros, p. 344.

³⁸ Blackburn, p. 87.

power, and an attempt was made to unite these islands into a cohesive group. The West Indian Federation was created in 1958, but lasted only until 1962, making evident the many differences that separated the islands. Some reasons given for this failure were: geographical separation, the absence of a sense of regional unity, the political leaders' failure to rise to the occasion, and the fact that the Federation was a British-imposed import from the beginning.³⁹

Once the attempt to unify the islands was abandoned, individual independence was granted to Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago in 1962, Guyana and Barbados in 1966, and Grenada in 1974. But since their economies continue to depend primarily on foreign investment, their sovereignty is more a legal term than a reality.⁴⁰

Apart from encouraging emigration, another practice implemented to solve the serious economic problems faced by these countries has been massive programs of birth control. This has been a widely debated issue which affects women directly. With the development of a dynamic economic program based on foreign investment, the West Indies and Puerto Rico were able to improve their health programs and reduce mortality drastically. Even with thousands of people leaving the islands to find jobs in Europe and the United States, the birth rate has kept increasing as better medical facilities are provided. Even facing powerful opposition from the Church, as is the case in Puerto Rico, the government has supported private institutions that deal with population control.

39 Lewis, The Growth, pp. 371-72.

40 David Lowenthal, West Indian Societies (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 232

As special clinics were set up to distribute contraceptives and as facilities for sterilization were provided, birth control became a political issue.

Government sponsorship of birth control in Barbados, Trinidad, Jamaica, and the French Antilles cannot soon overcome West Indian pride in procreation, suspicious of racist motives, and local apathy and ignorance.⁴¹

The following anecdote by V. S. Naipaul demonstrates the prevalent West Indian male attitude towards birth control:

He said he had ten children in Grenada , in various parishes and by various women. He had gone to England to get away from them all, but then began to feel that he should go back and face his responsibilities.... I asked why, then, he had had so many. Didn't they have contraceptives in Grenada? He said with some indignation that he was a Roman Catholic; and for the rest of the journey never spoke to me.⁴²

Leftist political groups categorically condemn all government sponsored birth control programs as genocidal. By reducing the number of poor people, the rich would be able always to stay in control. The argument runs that a poor, hungry mass is a revolutionary potential in any Third World country. Although sounding a bit idealistic in view of existing world hunger, Fidel Castro attempts to shift from this rigid position and place the emphasis on the individuals involved and on the responsibility of the state towards its people.

41 Lowenthal, p. 232.

42 The Middle Passage, p. 18.

Pero la Revolución Cubana no está ciegamente contra el control de la natalidad. El tamaño de la familia es la decisión personal del marido y la mujer como parte de sus derechos humanos. Es deber del Estado el proporcionarles los medios adecuados para tener tantos o tan pocos niños como deseen. Es totalmente innecesaria la propaganda en una dirección o la otra.⁴³

In the various positions stated, the opinion of women has not been taken into account. Women are seen bound to their maternal role. Both leftist groups and the Church emphasize that woman's natural role is to give birth and that any deviation is a political maneuver on the part of some interested party. On the other hand, the government and population control groups emphasize the need to curb the birth-rate so that there will be a better distribution of the country's wealth, considering this the ultimate solution to poverty. They choose the birth control methods to be used and disregard the people directly involved.

Perhaps because this issue is so polemical, literature from these countries, mostly by men writers, has seldom dealt with birth control as a theme. Their male and female characters seem overburdened by big families, as in the case of Mr. Biswas in Naipaul's novel. But the preoccupation ends in frustration when he is not able to deal with the problem. Women characters seem to follow nature's course in procreation, leaving the men to worry about their welfare. A study of the literary tradition inherited by the Caribbean will prove help-

43 Quoted by Margaret Randall in "La penetración imperialista y sus consecuencias para la mujer latinoamericana," Santiago: Revista de la Universidad de Oriente, XV (julio-septiembre 1974), 232.

ful in the understanding of this and other attitudes.

One of the legacies of colonialism is the colonizer's literary tradition. In the same way that there must be exclusive trade between the colony and the colonial power, literary influence is also restricted. The West Indies were tied to the English literary tradition almost until the 1940's, when through emigration and more liberal commercial ties the literature of other countries was discovered. In the Spanish colonies Spain's literary tradition prevailed until the formation of separate nations in the nineteenth century. As a reaction, the former Spanish American colonies turned towards France, which became the literary school to follow. In the Spanish Caribbean, inheritors also of a Spanish literary tradition, the United States takeover opened the door to North American and European literary influences. The writings of Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, James Joyce, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus brought new possibilities to Puerto Rican and Cuban literature.

Desastrosa en otros aspectos, la influencia norteamericana tiene en la literatura un efecto saludable...el contacto con esa narrativa suponía una nueva toma de conciencia social en el sentido más amplio. Los narradores norteamericanos habían encontrado la síntesis entre lo social y lo estético, entre las exigencias del creador y las exigencias de las masas.⁴⁴

Yet, at the same time, the North Americans isolated Puerto Rico and Cuba from the rest of Latin America. For years the literary production of Mexicans, Argentinians, Peruvians and

44 Fornet, p.39.

other Spanish-speaking American countries passed unnoticed by their counterparts in the Caribbean. This seclusion was broken in 1959, when a cultural revolution accompanied Cuba's successful armed struggle. At this point, Puerto Rico began to integrate itself more fully into Latin America, and in this way its literary influences were broadened and its literature enriched.

One of the most important elements in Latin America and in Caribbean literature is language. These writers have had to revolutionize the language inherited from the colonizer to make it work for them, to make that language express their feelings. Aimé Césaire wrote an interesting play in which the question of language is its centerpoint. In Une tempête: d'après "La tempête" de Shakespeare-Adaptation pour un théâtre nègre Césaire makes Prospero the image of the colonizer, Ariel the assimilated colonial and Caliban the embodiment of the colonial who converts the language inherited from Prospero to his own needs for self-expression.⁴⁵ These Shakespearean characters are also used by the Cuban writer Roberto Fernández Retamar to contrast Caliban with José Enrique Rodo's symbol of Ariel.⁴⁶ V. S. Naipaul sees language and culture as inseparable, both in constant development. "There is no right or wrong, no purity from which there is decline. Usage sanctions everything."⁴⁷ Realizing the importance of language and culture, Caribbean writers

45 (Paris: Edition Du Seuil, 1969).

46 Caliban. Apuntes sobre la cultura en nuestra América (Mexico: Editorial Diógenes, 1971).

47 "East Indian," The Overcrowded Barracoon (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), p. 38.

set about "to give a tongue to the inarticulate, to speak to the world for a people who would, except for them, be silent and unknown."⁴⁸

It has been stated that the novel is the product of a country that has achieved a certain degree of stability and awareness of itself as a nation. In the case of the Caribbean this statement holds true. In Cuba and Puerto Rico it is not until these two Spanish colonies acquire a degree of autonomy that the novel begins to flourish. From 1860 to the end of the nineteenth century, Cuba and Puerto Rico go through their process of national awareness. When the United States takes over these two islands, there is already a sense of nationhood and a literature to express these feelings. Embedded in the Naturalist movement brought to Puerto Rico by the sons of the criollos who went to study to Spain or France, the novel begins to flourish in the works of Manuel Zeno Gandía. "Crónicas de un mundo enfermo" was the subtitle for all his novels; his aim was to criticize strongly the colonial system in Puerto Rico under Spain, and later on applied also to the United States. Since Zeno Gandía wrote to depict social corruption, characterization was not of prime importance. His female characters are victims of their environment; there is no way for them to escape or save themselves. Sometimes he made these characters symbols of Puerto Rico as in the case of Piedad, in his fourth novel Redentores (1925).⁴⁹ His women are not just static characters; they are weak and strong, but unable to change the

48 Guy Davenport, Rev. of Islands Voices, Stories from the West Indies, Review '70, 1971, p. 50.

49 José Juan Beauchamp Soto, "Concepto e imagen del puertorriqueño y de la vida puertorriqueña en la novela," Diss., Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1969, p. 110.

forces that suffocate them, as Silvina best illustrates in La Charca (1894). Another Puerto Rican writer concerned about the social problems affecting his people was Matías González García, who had a female protagonist in his 1903 novel Carmela.⁵⁰ It was written in the tradition of the regional novel, so the interest lay in the people's customs and not necessarily in their characterization.

In Cuba not only does the novel appear very early (1839), but one of its first exponents is a woman, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. She belongs to the Romantic movement in Spanish America, where the novel was one of the genres favored by most writers. Sab was published in 1841; here she created the character of Carlota, who, as a romantic heroine, was loved by two men, and in making her choice, causes Sab's death. A year after this publication another book by Avellaneda appeared, but this time the protagonists were women, Dos mujeres. Again in the Romantic tradition, Luisa and Catalina share a love for the same man. The women are portrayed as stereotypes: one is strong and evil, the other weak, full of goodness. Luisa is the gentle, submissive and self-sacrificing wife; Catalina is the beautiful lover, dynamic and mundane who will move heaven and earth to achieve her purpose.⁵¹

Within the regionalist movement of Romanticism, Cirilo Villaverde published his first edition of Cecilia Valdés in

50 Francisco Manrique Cabrera, Historia de la literatura puertorriqueña (Río Piedras: Editorial Cultural, 1967), p. 202.

51 Isabel Hernández de Norman, La novela romántica en las Antillas (New York: Ateneo Puertorriqueño de Nueva York, 1969), p. 146.

1839. The second part of this novel and its revised edition were not published until 1882. The emphasis of the novel is not on the protagonist but on the passionate feelings of all the characters involved, and in the portrayal of Cuban society at this time.

This realistic attention to detail is combined with thematic concerns that were very much a part of romanticism in Spanish América. We would include among these the unknowing involvement in incestuous love as a major thematic and structural device, the important role that chance or fate plays in the unfolding of individual destinies, and the emphasis on the national and particular as opposed to the universal and general.⁵²

Even though Miguel de Carrión is already a twentieth century novelist, it is important to mention him now, since his works dealt primarily with the characterization of women. One of his best feminine portrayals was Victoria in his novel Las honradas of 1918. It is written in the first person, from Victoria's point of view. Her psychological problems stem from her apparent frigidity in her marriage. She gets involved with another man, becomes pregnant, and has an abortion from which she almost dies. Victoria then goes back to her husband as a mature woman, prepared to deal with herself. Both in the portrayal of a feminine character and in the moral theme presented, this novel attempted to penetrate the hypocrisy of Cuban society of this time. But Miguel de Carrión did not create a new trend; his was a single voice, unheard for many years to come.

52 Raymond D. Souza, Major Cuban Novelist: Innovation and Tradition (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1976). p. 7.

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Spanish America had developed its own cultural tradition separated from its former colonizer. Because of the Caribbean's political separation, this literary movement did not reach Cuba or Puerto Rico until 1910.

Modernism...affirmed that in order to create a national literature it was not enough just to write about national subjects. After the Modernists' revulsion against Latin American subject-matter, writers returned to the same subjects, but with a new awareness that they must take stylistic considerations into account. Cuban writers such as Nicolás Guillén, Alejo Carpentier, the Martinican Aimé Césaire and the Puerto Rican Luis Palés Matos, are internationally known and accepted.⁵³

Poetry was the preferred genre in Modernism, but in the Caribbean, the short narrative also captured the writers' enthusiasm. In Puerto Rico Modernist writers gathered round the Revista de las Antillas, which published some of the best poems of this time. Although prose was also published, there were no short story writers compared to poets like Luis Lloréns Torres, Virgilio Dávila, Evaristo Rivera Chevrement or Luis Palés Matos.

In Cuba, the short narrative had in Jesús Castellanos an excellent forerunner. In 1906 his collection of short stories De tierra adentro was published. Ambrosio Fornet points out that

⁵³ Gabriel Coulhard, Introd., Caribbean Literature: An Anthology (London: University of London Press, 1971), p. 9.

Castellanos reivindica el derecho del narrador a utilizar la realidad para crear un mundo imaginario que se justifique a sí mismo.⁵⁴

Within Modernism, the short narrative was developed beginning with Alfonso Hernández Catá. His short story "Los chinos" (1923) is a hallucinatory narrative based on the social conflicts of the time, which involved the employment of Caribbean, Spanish and Asian laborers in the sugar cane expansion after World War I.⁵⁵

The awakening of a national consciousness in the West Indies took place much later than in the Spanish Caribbean. It is not until the second decade of the twentieth century that a desire to develop a national literature is expressed in the narrative form.

A novel is a special kind of social document and in reading and discussing West Indian novels, we should bear in mind the social and historical background to writing in this area.⁵⁶

Among the precursors of the novel, there is Thomas Henry McDermont (pseudonym Tom Redcam) who published his first narrative in 1903 Becka's Buckra Baby, Herbert G. de Lisser, also from Jamaica is the first West Indian to publish a novel whose protagonist is a black woman--Jane's Career (1913). The stereotype created here, and which, with certain variations, will continue to appear in West Indian

54 Fornet, p. 15.

55 Fornet, p. 20.

56 L.E. Brathwaite, "The New West Indian Novelists: Part One," Bim, VIII, no. 31 (July-December 1960), 203.

prose fiction, is the highly sexed and sensuous woman.⁵⁷ Perhaps the first West Indian black writer who attempted to write and publish in his country was Claude McKay. He failed partly because Jamaican society at this time was not willing to accept a black writer who turned towards the poor for his material, and also because there wasn't a reading public that would encourage the development of a national literature. In 1912 McKay was thus forced to emigrate to the United States, where he published his works and became an active participant of the Harlem Renaissance. Among his novels were Home to Harlem (1928), Banjo (1929), and Banana Bottom (1933).

In the 1930's political and literary awareness seemed to merge and manifest itself in various periodicals. Although there was already a sense of nationality in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, the general climate during the first twenty years of this century was similar to the West Indies. People seemed to be in a dormant stage, accepting all foreign influence and offering no resistance to the colonizer's schemes. There was a reluctance to show any opposition and to impose one's national character. But the economic depression of the thirties shook the masses into action, and in this process of mere survival into which people were plunged, they sought answers to questions such as: who they were, what their role was in this society, what changes could be implemented, where did power lie. Since literature is the expression of a given reality, it is at the moment of national awareness that a literary movement begins to develop full force.

57 Ramchand, p. 41.

Fue solo después que las revueltas de la década del treinta condujeron a la democratización del sistema político en las Antillas, que la sociedad en general comenzó a volverse hacia adentro y a buscar en sí misma la base de su sistema político, social y cultural... (los artistas y escritores) habían permanecido silenciosos, o casi en silencio, y de pronto descubrimos una cultura antillana floreciente y ardiente que parece estar ligada al cambio inesperado que se desarrollaba en la concepción que tenía el antillano de sí mismo.⁵⁸

These literary magazines in the Caribbean protested against the existing political and social situation. The writers grouped around these periodicals were committed not only to encourage literary creativity, but also to defend their national culture and change the political situation in their countries. Even though there was a search for roots, there was also a desire to communicate with other countries and to break the cultural vacuum the colonial power had created. They had to look beyond England and the United States; there was Europe, Africa and Latin America waiting to be discovered. The creation of these magazines signaled the beginning of the decolonization process in the Caribbean.

In her essay "El cuento en Cuba y Puerto Rico: Estudio de dos antologías," Concha Meléndez makes some precise comments on the short narrative in these two countries. The short story did not flourish until the end of the nineteenth century, and even at this time the authors did not deal with

⁵⁸ Elsa Goveia, "El marco social," Casa de las Américas, XVI, no. 91 (julio-agosto 1975), 27.

characterization or structural matters; the emphasis was on sketches and folktales. The short narrative began to develop around two tendencies: regionalism (criollismo) and universalism.⁵⁹ Meléndez points out that Cuba produced a great Modernist prose writer, Alfonso Hernández Catá, and also cultivated the fantasy and Afro-Antillean themes, which were absent in Puerto Rican narrative. In Cuba, there were also more women writers than in Puerto Rico, although very few of them were of the stature of Lydia Cabrera.⁶⁰

In 1929 a group of intellectuals, closely associated with the Department of Spanish Studies of the Universidad de Puerto Rico, began to publish Indice, a literary and political magazine committed to the defense of the nation's cultural tradition. Its creation was closely related to the appearance of the Revista de Avance centered around the Cuban Minorista Group.⁶¹ Through this magazine an attempt was made to open communication with the rest of Spanish America. The Peruvian Juan Carlos Mariátegui, the Cuban Juan Marinello and the Argentinian Manuel Ugarte were some of its collaborators.⁶² Puerto Rican writers became part of a general Latin American and Caribbean search for permanent and national values, constantly questioning who and what they were, involving themselves in a metaphysical self-analysis.⁶³ While in South

59 Obras Completas de Concha Meléndez, Vol. IV (San Juan: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1972), p. 510.

60 Meléndez, pp. 521-22

61 Iris M. Zavala and Rafael Rodríguez, Introducción, Libertad y crítica en el ensayo político puertorriqueño (Río Piedras: Ediciones Puerto, 1973), p. 30.

62 Zavala, p. 29.

63 Zavala, p. 30

America this concern was expressed through the novela de la tierra, in Puerto Rico and Cuba it showed itself in the idealization of the jíbaro and guajiro and in the interest in Afro-Antillian culture expressed mostly in the poetry of Nicolás Guillén and Luis Palés Matos. Perhaps the most important contribution of Indice was its defense of the Spanish language. In 1934 two important books dealing with the search for Puerto Rican identity were published: Insularismo by Antonio S. Pedreira and Prontuario histórico de Puerto Rico by Tomás Blanco.

In the forties some of the intellectuals responsible for Indice joined together with former students and other writers and created Asomante. Edited by two women writers, Nilita Vientós Gastón and Monelisa Pérez-Merchand, this literary publication did more to encourage young writers than any other group or institution before. Through its willingness to publish the works of unknown writers, Asomante was responsible for the development of the short narrative during its best years, 1945 until the late fifties. Although the magazine continued to be published until 1970, from 1959 on other groups began to spring up and widen the literary circle, until then enclosed in Asomante. René Marqués, considered by most critics to be the key figure in the narrative of the fifties, summarizes the themes and techniques of this generation of writers:

El fenómeno Nacionalista puertorriqueño, la industrialización y sus consecuencias morales, psicológicas y sociales, la participación del puertorriqueño en la Guerra de Corea, el Tiempo como problema filosófico y la soledad existencial del Hombre, son algunos aspectos de la temática utilizada. De modo simultáneo, el escritor se aparta de la vida rural para adentrarse

decididamente en los problemas del habitante urbano.⁶⁴

Marqués finds it very significant that in the narrative of this decade women become protagonists. He feels that these writers create the best tragic female figures with a deep psychological insight. Until this time plots were developed around women, but ultimately the female was not the center force on which the drama was based. Marqués believes that the change in family structure brought about by the accelerated economic development promoted by the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) in the forties was responsible for the importance gained by women in literature.⁶⁵ Another change in the 1950 narrative was the relatively little importance now given to landscape. Man and his political, social, psychological and metaphysical problems take precedence over other matters. Another reason for this attitude is the urban setting used by most writers. By abandoning the rural environs, local color is put aside and action is internalized.⁶⁶ There seems to be a pessimistic attitude towards life in this narrative, where many characters are driven to commit suicide. The reason for this, Marqués finds, is the Puerto Rican's inability to break the colonial ties in which his country and his mind are immersed.⁶⁷ European and North American literary influence is very noticeable in the techniques used by these writers. The

64 "El cuento puertorriqueño en la promoción del cuarenta," Cuentos puertorriqueños de hoy (Río Piedras: Editorial Cultural, 1968), p. 20.

65 Marqués, p. 21.

66 Marqués, pp. 22-23.

67 Marqués, Cuentos, p. 25.

apparent simple expression containing an enormous amount of emotion and poetic suggestion in which every pause is important derives from Hemingway and Camus. The violation of grammatical rules, the expression of emotion through a flood of words, and the stream-of-consciousness technique was taken from Virginia Woolf, Joyce and Faulkner, the last always being the closest to Latin American writers.⁶⁸

Ambrosio Fornet describes the general literary atmosphere in Cuba during this same time:

Descubierta por Colón en el siglo XV, por los ingleses en el siglo XVIII, por Humboldt y la intelectualidad criolla en el XIX, faltaba que Cuba se descubriera a sí misma en el siglo XX y eso fué lo que sucedió en esta década. Lo que política, social y culturalmente trajo el período de 1923 al 32 fue el espíritu de la época y con él la imperiosa necesidad de un cambio.⁶⁹

The formation of the Minorista Group was linked with the founding of the Cuban Communist Party since many of its members were also involved in this political event. With the creation of the Revista de Avance there was an attempt by some minoristas to make this magazine exclusively literary. It was soon realized that culture and politics could not be separated, especially when some minoristas were incarcerated for their political beliefs.⁷⁰ This group, composed by such

68 Marqués, pp. 26-28.

69 Fornet, p. 27

70 Fornet, pp. 26-27.

figures as Juan Marinello, Rubén Martínez Villena and Alejo Carpentier, became the literary offensive stand against the Machado dictatorship. There was an interest among its members to discover "popular" culture, Afro-Cubanism, guided by Marxist aesthetics.⁷¹

The short narrative continued to develop with Luis Felipe Rodríguez' stories La pascua de la tierra natal (1928), and his emphasis on Cuban folklore themes established the pattern for the cuento guajiro which would be imitated by every apprentice writer for the next fifteen years.⁷² Enrique Serpa in Aletas de Tiburón (1928) introduced the other character that next to the guajiro would permeate the narrative--the fisherman. Carlos Montenegro in El renuevo y otros cuentos (1929) used country folklore but rescued it from Rodríguez' confining sketches. In 1930, Arístides Fernández wrote a series of short fantasy narratives, thus moving away from regional themes and preparing the ground for the later development of magic realism.⁷³

The short narrative reached its mature stage in the decade of the forties. Country folklore (criollismo) continued to predominate, but writers had begun to look elsewhere for literary themes: Afro-Cubanism in Lydia Cabrera and Lino Novás Calvo's works; the past in Carpentier's Viaje a la semilla (1944); the absurd in Virgilio Piñera; criollismo and fantasy together in Onelio Jorge Cardoso. Just as Asomante

71 Roberta Salper, "Literature and Revolution in Cuba", Monthly Review, XXII, no. 5 (October, 1970), 20.

72 Fornet, pp. 34-35.

73 Salvador Bueno, Prólogo, Cuentos cubanos del Siglo XX (La Habana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1975), p. 25.

in Puerto Rico was a main stimulant to young writers, the national Hernández Catá prize, established with private funds in 1942, encouraged writers like Enrique Labrador Ruiz and Feliz Pita Rodríguez to continue their work.⁷⁴

There had been a hope for renewal after Machado's forced flight from Cuba, but it all ended in frustration when political figures continued Machado's policies with various degrees of intensification. The disappointment led a group of writers to find "a literary refuge in subjectivity and private sensibilities."⁷⁵ Their magazine Orígenes (1944) produced perhaps some of the best poetry and poetic prose of this country. Fornet points out that this movement did not produce fiction writers; everything Orígenes touched became poetry;⁷⁶ their leader, José Lezama Lima, embodies this statement. Some characteristics of their writings were: "diminishing interest in Afro-Cuban culture, nostalgia for a lost, harmonious past coupled with a baroque release of imagination and attention to the grotesque and absurd."⁷⁷ While corruption and repression became the order of the day in Cuba, literature in Orígenes became more hermetical, not only isolating itself from the country's reality, but also from any different literary trend in Cuba and the rest of Latin America. By 1955, the ambiance was ready for a political and literary transformation.

74 Fornet, pp. 37-39.

75 Salper, p. 21.

76 Fornet, p. 40.

77 Salper, p. 21.

With the growing awareness in the political aspects of the thirties, there also came the development of a West Indian literature. In 1929 the magazine Trinidad was first published by Alfred H. Mendes and C.L.R. James. In the works of these writers, social realism was introduced in West Indian narrative.⁷⁸ Although only two issues were published, it led the way to the creation of another literary magazine, The Beacon, edited by Albert Gomes, lasting from 1931 to 1933. The formation of literary and, many times political circles, offered unknown writers the opportunity to publish. Trinidad opened the way with C.L.R. James, George Padmore and Alfred Mendes. Barbados followed with the magazine Bim, started in 1942 by Frank Collymore as an organ of the Young Men's Progressive Club.⁷⁹ In Jamaica the founding of the literary magazine Focus, in 1943, was directly linked to the nationalist movement there. Edna Manley, sculptress and wife of labor leader Norman Manley, together with Philip Sherlock, Roger Mais and V.S. Reid, started this publication in the middle of a general political unrest. The importance of this literary awareness was adequately expressed by Edna Manley:

Great and irrevocable changes have swept this land of ours in the last few years, and out of these changes a new art is springing. Historically, art gives a picture of contemporary life: philosophically, it contains within it the germs of the future. This collection of short stories, essays and plays and poems fills both these roles; in them is the picture of our life

78 Ramchand, p. 65.

79 Louis James, Introd., The Islands in-Between (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 26.

today, the way we think, the acts we do;
 but underlying the picture of the present
 is the trend of the future, where new val-
 ues will predominate, and a new approach to
 things will be born.⁸⁰

Another very important factor for the development and European recognition of this literature was the BBC program from London, Caribbean Voices, edited by Una Marson and Henry Swanzy from 1942 to 1959. It broadcast the work of over two hundred West Indian writers.⁸¹

Notwithstanding all these efforts, West Indian writers could only find a reading public in London. This was especially true for novelists, since there were no publishing houses in the Caribbean. Literary periodicals reached very small groups and were limited to the publication of poems, essays and short stories. Recognizing their artistic needs, the writers's self-exile began. England became the colonialist that had thwarted their development as individuals, but which now offered the only opportunity for them to create and be recognized as artists.

The organizing of women to demand their rights as citizens and thus come to the fore in literature as a theme and as writers themselves, has followed a similar pattern in Europe, North America, Latin America and the Caribbean. Women's participation in public life has mostly been associated with groups protesting social or political oppression: in the United States Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Lucretia Mott were involved in the antislavery movement, while

80 Ramchand, pp. 71-72.

81 James, p. 26.

in Cuba, Ana Betancourt, who as early as 1869 demanded civil rights for women, was active in her country's struggle for independence.⁸²

Women's movements demanding equal rights began at a time when their country had achieved a developed stage of industrialization and women had become part of public life either as low-paid workers or as part of the rising middle-class. As factory workers, poor women were cast together, thus allowing the opportunity to develop a sense of collectivity that proved to be the beginning of labor unions. In the United States, as early as 1857, female textile workers in New York City realized that they would only be heard if they organized, while in Puerto Rico in the 1890's, the FLT organized women in tobacco factories and became one of the first integrated unions in which both men and women held leadership.⁸³

Middle-class women who had basic education and were to some degree related to the world of trade goods began to demand higher learning and a place in the "world of men". As a result women acquired access to universities, and a considerable number of them became teachers, nurses or social workers. Afterwards they demanded the right to vote as a step towards political equality. The suffrage movement was led by middle-class women who had the education and time to devote their energy to this enterprise. Among these were Emmeline Pankhurst's Women's Social and Political Union in England, Elizabeth Cady Stanton's National American Women Suffrage Association in the United

82 Nydia Sarabia, Ana Betancourt Agramonte (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1970).

83 Isabel Picó, "Apuntes preliminares para el estudio de la mujer puertorriqueña y su participación en las luchas sociales de principios del siglo XX," La mujer en América Latina, Tomo II (Mexico: Sep/Setentas, 1975), pp. 104-105.

States, in Cuba the Federación de Asociaciones Femeninas, which held a national meeting in 1923 (Primer Congreso Nacional de Mujeres),⁸⁴ and in Puerto Rico the Liga Femínea Puertorriqueña (1917) and the Asociación Puertorriqueña de Mujeres Sufragistas (1925).⁸⁵

Once suffrage was granted, all these organizations dissolved, since their sole purpose had been achieved. But working women who had hardly participated in this movement and who had not benefited from it (since suffrage was based on literacy), continued their demands for better wages and labor conditions, equal pay for equal time, maternity leave, and universal suffrage. In Latin America and the Caribbean during the forties, which saw the rise of populist governments, working women achieved their greatest integration into the labor market and won numerous benefits. Under Juan Domingo Perón's government, Argentinean women were granted suffrage, and they were organized under the Peronist Feminist Party.⁸⁶ Eva Perón, coming from the lower class and rising to become the leader of the working class--los descamisados--was a fit symbol of this movement. In Cuba, it was after the Machado dictatorship that women achieved suffrage and equal working conditions, at least in the written law. In Puerto Rico, Luis Muñoz Marín's Partido Popular Democrático (PPD) set the basis for women's inte-

84 Mirta Aguirre, Influencia de la mujer en Iberoamérica, ensayo (La Habana: Imprenta P. Fernández, 1947), pp. 89-92.

85 Carmen Rivera de Alvarado, "La contribución de la mujer al desarrollo de la nacionalidad puertorriqueña," La Mujer en la lucha de hoy (Río Piedras: Editorial Kikiriki, 1972), p.44.

86 Nancy Caro Hollander, "Women: The Forgotten Half of Argentine History," Female and Male in Latin America (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1973), pp. 141-158.

gration into the labor force and for their acquisition of independence as a separate but powerful sector of society. This was achieved through compulsory education, all school facilities supplied by the government, family planning programs, and the massive employment of women in newly established light industries.⁸⁷

In the West Indies, groups of women from the leisure class organized during this time more as social clubs than political movements in the Caribbean Women's Association and the Jamaican Federation for Women. With the granting of universal suffrage in 1944, these women engaged themselves in encouraging women to vote and to reinforce the existing family structure in the English-speaking Caribbean. The charity work and exclusive luncheons organized by these women continually alienated working women from identifying with any so-called women's groups. After independence, the new governments of the West Indies attempted to incorporate women into the work force, but this has been somewhat limited because of existing critical unemployment.

In the seventies, influenced by the North American women's movement and by the close relations of the West Indies to Cuba, several conferences on women's issues were held. Church groups, such as the Christian Action for Development of the Caribbean (CADEC), have been responsible for drawing women into participating in public meetings and in inviting special guests, like Presbyterian minister Miriam Ortiz from Cuba, to exchange views with Caribbean women.⁸⁸ These groups

87 Norma Valle, "La mística de la femineidad se revuelve contra el ELA," Claridad (En Rojo), 8-14 de julio 1977, pp.8-9.

88 Caribbean Women in the Struggle, September 1975.

have also begun to pressure the government to pass laws that would benefit all women, especially workers and poor housewives. Among these reforms are: abrogation of the term illegitimate child, enforced child-support in cases of separation, legal abortion, the right of a wife to be sterilized without the husband's consent.⁸⁹ Perhaps because the movement in favor of women's rights is incipient, literature has not recorded any of these preoccupations, and West Indian women writers have not dealt with these themes at all.

Besides the rights and advantages granted by the PPD in the forties and fifties, women in Puerto Rico have been directly influenced by the women's movement in the United States. But the influence has been limited to colleges and a certain sector of the middle class. In the same way that the participation of women in anti-war demonstrations and in the demand for civil rights in the United States resulted in an invigorating women's movement, the participation in student organizations and similar protests led Puerto Rican women to demand equal participation in these university groups. However, because there was a very strong attachment to leftist groups, women organized themselves within these parties: The Frente Femenino of the Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño (PIP) and the Federación de Mujeres Puertorriqueñas of the Partido Socialista Puertorriqueño (PSP), the latter very close to the Cuban feminine organization. Both groups, like the political parties they respond to, have attempted to reach working women through liberal and leftist trade unions.

89 Marlene Cuthbert, et al, Caribbean Women in Communication for Development (Barbados: Cedar Press, 1975), pp. 6-7.

Middle-class women considered themselves liberated in the North American bourgeois sense because they are able to study, work, earn a good salary, own property, go out on their own, and be independent of an extended family structure. Although somewhat limited, René Marqués' portrayal of the middle-class woman is accurate to the extent of presenting the aspirations and style of life of most of these women who respond to the mass media's concept of femininity. But what Marqués can not perceive is that behind all this "liberalism" her world still revolves around man and home. On the contrary, it is in Rosario Ferré's stories that an inside view is presented which is a truer reflection of a woman's world in this environment.

As had happened with the Russian and Chinese revolutions, Cuba after 1959 established as a priority the liberation of women by incorporating them into the labor force and by attacking the social structure which kept them bound to an obsolete system. In 1960 the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC) was created by grouping together women who had belonged to groups such as Unidad Femenina, Congreso de Mujeres Cubanas and the Brigadas Femeninas Revolucionarias.⁹⁰ The main purpose of the FMC was to prepare women in all aspects so that they could be incorporated into the active life of the new society. In 1974 a second purpose was added: to eliminate every trace of limitations and prejudices that still remained so that women could achieve complete equality in every area of national life.⁹¹

90 Susan Kaufman Purcell, "Modernizing Women for a Modern Society; The Cuban Case," Female and Male in Latin America (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1973), p. 262.

91 Memoria: II Congreso Nacional de la Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (La Habana: Ediciones Orbe, 1975), p. 8.

Some of the tasks assigned to the FMC were the teaching of basic skills that would prepare and encourage women to enter the labor force, educating rural mothers in the fundamentals of health and sanitation, urging them to send their children to the new schools, persuading women to participate in the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, publishing the magazine Mujeres, where all of these activities were explained and encouraged, and helping the "Ministry of Education in re-writing textbooks, eliminating images of women in traditional roles, and replacing them with images of women in the new Cuba."⁹² These activities, clearly geared towards the breakdown of the female role of passivity and home life, were carried out by providing women with day-care centers, collective dining facilities, medical and educational accessibility, provision of birth control methods, and free abortions. Considering the strong male-based society that existed in Cuba before the Revolution, (urban women treated as sexual objects, while the rural woman was worth less than a head of cattle, and where the only two jobs available for uneducated women were as domestics or prostitutes) the FMC has accomplished an incredible task. It was possible primarily because the FMC received the full endorsement of the government and thus was able to launch a full-scale campaign.

On November 1974 the FMC held its second convention to evaluate the work done in its fourteen years of existence. Some areas to which the FMC considers it must give special attention are: the repeal of special protective laws that do not allow a woman to perform certain jobs or work certain hours, the employment of women in areas traditionally held by men,

92 Purcell, p. 263.

the ending of the assignment of domestic tasks to only one sex, the participation of men in home and rearing duties.⁹³

To enforce the last two points, a new family code was put into effect in 1975 granting equality to men and women in marriage, abolishing any distinction between children born in and out of wedlock, and establishing an obligation for both partners to share equally the rearing and education of children and all domestic duties.⁹⁴

Some North American women who have been greatly impressed by the advancement of women in Revolutionary Cuba, can not help pointing out certain contradictions such as day-care and elementary teaching reserved solely to women.⁹⁵ Another important observation deals with the image of women presented through mass media.

Aún en muchas ocasiones en los medios de difusión masiva, se presentan programas, canciones y diferentes tipos de espectáculos en los que se muestra la imagen de mujer que heredamos del pasado capitalista: objeto sexual, decorativo, pasivo, limitada a las labores del hogar, cuya máxima aspiración era el matrimonio.⁹⁶

This is further reinforced by the Carnival Queen Contest still based on the traditional concept of beauty. The FMC is

93 Memoria, pp. 38-76

94 Sobre el pleno ejercicio de la igualdad de la mujer (La Habana: Departamento de Orientación Revolucionaria, 1976), p. 11.

95 Susan Kaufman Purcell in "Modernizing Women," and Elizabeth Sutherland in The Youngest Revolution: A Personal Report on Cuba (New York: Dial Press, 1969).

96 Sobre el pleno, p. 48.

aware of this discrepancy portrayed and is pressuring the government to take steps to eliminate this practice.⁹⁷

In literature, a novel greatly praised in Cuba recently was Manuel Cofiño's La última mujer y el próximo combate (1975) which continues to portray women as emotional beings who can follow orders but very seldom lead. The image of the Cuban woman the protagonist loves is a young, white, blonde, sweet girl who although a good worker, considers herself inferior to this forceful and determined man. On the other hand, in the works of Dora Alonso, women acquire depth because they are generally presented as total human beings and not stereotypes.

97 Sobre el pleno, p. 49.

CHAPTER TWO: PUERTO RICO

Creo que en ningún otro país de lo que Martí llamó Nuestra América se plantea más agónicamente el problema de la enajenación colectiva y personal que en Puerto Rico. Para el intelectual que no está dispuesto a prestarse al juego colonial la enajenación cobra un carácter singularmente angustioso: su voz es ahogada por los medios de comunicación controlados por el régimen....El sentimiento, en ocasiones, no puede ser otro sino el de la impotencia.

"El papel del intelectual en
el Puerto Rico de hoy,"
Manuel Maldonado-Denis

From 1947 to 1960 Puerto Rico underwent an economic revolution that affected its social structure. Through Operation Bootstrap (Fomento) Puerto Rico changed from a basically agricultural economy to a highly industrialized country. The family structure in the rural area suffered a transformation when its members had to migrate to urban areas to find work. The middle-class segment increased as bureaucratic governmental posts and intermediary positions between workers and proprietors in private industry were created.¹ With new industries, the mobilization to the cities and the rising of slum areas, an army of urban proletariat, and later on lumpen, came into being. Most of the industries established during these years were small with light machinery which employed a great number of workers. Women were primarily employed in clothing factories, and there seemed to be more jobs for them at this particular time. In the government women also filled clerical and secretarial positions to such an extent that the government today is the second largest employer of women workers.² In part as a result of this, women have come to the foreground in literature. Before this economic impact a woman's position in the rural areas was severely limited. Her world was literally home and family. She married very young and began to bear children almost immediately. Her only purpose in life was to raise her children and serve her husband. There was nothing else to look forward to.

1 Manuel Maldonado-Denis, Puerto Rico y Estados Unidos: emigración y colonialismo (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1976), p. 50.

2 Isabel Picó de Hernández, Estudio sobre el empleo de la mujer en Puerto Rico (Conferencia sobre la mujer y el desarrollo, Mexico, 1975), p. 21.

Monsona Quintana is a countrywoman of my land who has given birth seventeen times; her belly is so stretched that her husband can no longer tell when she is pregnant. Childbearing has devoured the youth of this countrygirl who once had the color of ca-mándula seeds and breasts of a sleepy turtledove.³

It was inconceivable for a peasant woman to take a paying job outside of her house even if there was great financial need in the family. For this reason, the first jobs women engaged in were embroidery and strawwork done at home.

When rural families were forced to move to the city, this secluded life-style for women was impossible to maintain. In slum areas, privacy was a luxury they could very seldom afford. Since the jobs in the city required certain skills, it was easier for women to be hired in clothing factories or maintenance work. The resentment developed by men when many women became the breadwinners surely helped to account for the high percentage of broken families in these areas. In Oscar Lewis' study of a Puerto Rican family, second-generation women living in the slums are presented as very independent, aggressive heads of family, even if they have a husband.⁴ Their jobs range from prostitutes to domestics to factory workers. Again, jobs are acquired out of necessity, for if they have a husband who will provide for them, women will immediately quit their jobs. Although their acts may differ greatly, the values these men and women hold are very similar to the rural family pattern. Women still dream of marrying a man who will support them and

3 Emilio S. Belaval, La nueva vida/ The New Life. (New York: Renaissance Editions, 1966), unnumbered pages.

4 Oscar Lewis, La vida (Mexico: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, 1969).

treat them kindly. Men dream of marrying a woman who will be faithful and serve them in every way. Pedro Juan Soto's characters are participants of this experience in his collection of short stories, Spiks, and in his novels.

The middle-class seems to be the most liberal in its imitation of the North American pattern. To accumulate material gains, both husband and wife must work outside. To do this, the number of children must be limited and day-care centers or grandparents' care provided. Many women take advantage of their free time and participate in outside activities, but housework and child care is still assigned to them exclusively. Here again, although in a more subtle manner, there is great resentment by men toward the role the women play. They still desire women to confine themselves to the house and leave the outside world to them. There is great jealousy and hypocrisy in these relationships, many of them ending in divorce. Men work harder not only to maintain their class standing, but so that one day their women can occupy their "true" position once more as submissive wives and mothers at home. Perhaps of all Puerto Rican writers, René Marqués in his short stories expresses this position best.

After Manuel Zeno Gandía, the writer who continued the development of the novel was Enrique Laguerre. As a prolific novelist, his themes have ranged from nineteenth-century historical events, La resaca (1949), to the urban middle-class man and his modern dilemma, El laberinto (1959). In the fifties many short story writers also experimented with the long narrative. José Luis González as early as 1950, wrote a short novel, Paisa, extending the dilemma of a Puerto Rican to a new setting--New York City. César Andreu Iglesias, a well-known journalist, published in 1956 Los derrotados, whose protagonist is

a militant of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party. Various women stereotypes are presented here: the submissive, apolitical wife, the "liberal" middle-class woman, and the ideal female who is politically active, loves freely and never tries to usurp man's role.⁵

René Marqués, already successful in the theatre and in the short narrative, wrote in 1958 La víspera del hombre, winning the year's novel competition sponsored by the Ateneo Puertorriqueño. Pedro Juan Soto after publishing Spiks turned completely to the novel and only recently published a second collection of short stories. Another writer who became known for his short stories and has dedicated himself ever since to the novel is Emilio Díaz Valcárcel. Critics agree that his Figuraciones en el mes de marzo (1972) was the most experimental attempt in the Puerto Rican novel at that particular time. Through letters and a collage of bills and advertisements, the author presents the protagonist's dilemma as a Puerto Rican living in Spain but identifying himself constantly with his island. His wife, Yolanda, is a flat character who requires no comment. Perhaps the best long narrative written by a Puerto Rican in the last ten years and published in 1976 is Luis Rafael Sánchez's La guaracha del Macho Camacho. The author goes beyond Guillermo Cabrera Infante's Tres Tristes Tigres in exploring the possibilities of the language of the people. His play on words, sounds, phrases and innuendos is

5 Sandra takes on the role of the martyr who will stand any humiliation to save her marriage, protect her children and keep up appearances. Ada could very well be a character in Marqués' stories dealing with the middle-class family. Delia, the ideal woman companion, is the character best developed by the author and could be a beginning to liberate women from literary stereotypes.

inexhaustible. He creates through this bubbling language deep and serious characterizations, including two women--one from the middle class and another from the slums.

Tomás Blanco and Emilio S. Belaval are considered the precursors of the short story in Puerto Rico. They wrote regionalist narratives, concerning themselves with the jíbaro and his clashes with the current society, as Belaval's collection of narratives Cuentos para fomentar el turismo (1946) eloquently showed. Abelardo Díaz Alfaro became the link between the decade of the forties and fifties. His themes dealt exclusively with folklore, the jíbaro and his tradition, but raising it to a symbolic level as in "Josco" from his collection of stories Terrazo (1948).⁶

In the literature written in the fifties and sixties there was an aura of pessimism encompassing characters, setting and theme. This was a marked contrast with the economic development Puerto Rico was experiencing. René Marqués believes the causes to be first, the destruction of agriculture and peasant lifestyle; second, mass migration from the country to the city and from the island to the United States; third, the Korean War; fourth, the ideological persecution of leftist parties and at the University of Puerto Rico.⁷ It was during this time that the jíbaro as theme was abandoned, since he had become an unreality within Puerto Rico's changing economy, in contrast to Cuba where the guajiro has continued to be a common theme until recently.

6 René Marqués, "El cuento puertorriqueño en la promoción del cuarenta," Cuentos puertorriqueños de hoy (Río Piedras: Editorial Cultural, 1968), p. 43.

7 René Marqués, "Pesimismo literario y optimismo político: su coexistencia en el Puerto Rico actual," Ensayos (Río Piedras: Editorial Antillana, 1967), pp. 53-55.

María Teresa Babín commented as early as 1957 on the absence of women writers in prose fiction, making this generalization extend to Cuba.⁸ Although women in the hispanic Caribbean have always excelled in poetry, their participation in the narrative form has been limited in quantity and quality. It is only in the last few years, that serious attempts in this form have been launched by women. Amy Koosky by Mari-gloria Palma and Leche de la virgen azul by Anagilda Garrastegui center their novels around a female protagonist who is at war with society and who does not know how to deal with loneliness. Such characters, product of a 1970 Western society, have basic common elements with Jean Rhys' protagonists in the European society of the twenties and thirties. These women are socially or emotionally defeated, either due to an excessive dependence on men as an economic resource, or to a moral breakdown when they have to go against tradition, or because of the chaotic society they are trapped in.⁹ Perhaps the woman writer who has been able to use her experience as Puerto Rican, woman and human being as theme, but at the same time put herself at enough distance to grasp the essence of that experience is Rosario Ferré.

8 "El cuento puertorriqueño de hoy," Jornadas literarias (Barcelona: Ediciones Rumbos, 1967), p. 248.

9 Asela Rodríguez-Seda, "La visión de la mujer en la sociedad contemporánea: Amy Koosky y Leche de la virgen azul," Revista/Review Interamericana, V, no. 2 (Summer 1975), 275.

El feminismo puertorriqueño había ya obtenido la igualdad política, pero no había logrado--ni en verdad lo había pedido o intentado--destruir la estructura social y cultural establecida. Fue con el vendaval democratizador iniciado desde 1940, que la sociedad puertorriqueña dio un rápido viraje hacia el matriarcado estilo anglosajón. ...Lo anterior puede explicar por qué la mujer ocupa frecuentemente en la literatura actual destacado lugar protagónico. Quizá también explique por qué no siempre aparece ella bajo luz benévola o halagüeña.

Ensayos, René Marqués

Until 1948 René Marqués was known as a promising playwright who was incorporating European and North American innovations into the Puerto Rican theatre. It was in the fifties that Marqués began to write his best plays and decided to experiment with the narrative form, very soon becoming the successor to José Luis González, perhaps the best short story writer at this time.

Marqués was born in 1919 in a rural community of Arecibo. He studied agronomy at the College of Agriculture in Mayaguez planning to dedicate himself to land cultivation. Afterwards he worked with the Department of Agriculture for two years. In 1946 he decided to travel to Spain and study at the Universidad Central de Madrid where he imbued himself in classic and contemporary Spanish drama.¹ He returned to Puerto Rico and while holding a series of jobs in the business and educational field continued to write plays and short stories. In 1949 his short story "El miedo" won first prize in the Ateneo Puertorriqueño's literary contest.

In 1952 his most famous play, La carreta, was published in Asomante and performed in New York in 1953 and in Puerto Rico the following year. The play encompassed the whole migratory cycle of a peasant family: from the countryside to the city slums, then to the New York City ghetto, and for the survivors, the return to the homeland. Its realism, the incorporation of the jíbaro speech, and its use of symbols to denounce a political and social injustice have made this play a classic in Puerto Rican drama.

1 Cuentos puertorriqueños de hoy (Río Piedras: Editorial Cultural, 1968), p. 103.

By 1955 Marqués was a part of the trend toward short narrative forms in Puerto Rico. Otro día nuestro is a collection of the short stories already published in various periodicals, especially Asomante. Some of the themes presented in these stories were nationalism, existentialism and regionalism with an ironic approach. In 1957, Marqués was granted a Guggenheim Fellowship to write his first novel La víspera del hombre, which received first prize in the Ateneo literary contest of 1958. He uses a rural setting and a boy on the threshold of manhood as a protagonist. The author has a complete control of language and image creation, never betraying that this is his first assay in this genre. Technically the novel follows convention in its narrative elements and use of time and space; there are no attempts to innovate.

Los soles truncos, a play based on Marqués' short story "Purificación en la Calle del Cristo," opened at the first Festival of Puerto Rican Theatre sponsored by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture (ICP) in 1958. Emilio Díaz Valcárcel summarizes very well the tone that permeates both play and story:

En algunos cuentos de Marqués flota un tono melancólico, de nostálgica evocación de tiempos idos, una tácita comparación entre dos modos de vida; la nuestra, en la que le gusta resaltar lo característico español y la norteamericana, que sus personajes han llamado bárbara.²

1960 was a very important year in René Marqués' literary production. He published his second collection of short sto-

2 "Apuntes sobre el desarrollo histórico del cuento literario puertorriqueño y la generación del 40," Revista del Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, XII, no. 43 (abril-junio 1969), 16.

ries, En una ciudad llamada San Juan, which won high praise in Mexico and Puerto Rico. His style had definitely been refined to a complete mastery of the short narrative, and his character analysis had penetrated the labyrinths of the mind. Concha Meléndez has point out the importance of Marqués' mastery of drama in his narrative style.³ In this same year Marqués wrote an essay that even today remains controversial: "El puertorriqueño dócil". In 1962, it was published in Mexico and achieved notoriety in Latin America. Marqués states that Puerto Ricans are naturally docile, easy to conquer and take advantage of. Whatever violence characters portray in Puerto Rican literature is always turned inward and becomes self-destructive. As proof of this statement, he points to most of the prose fiction published in the fifties where a number of the protagonists commit suicide. He analyzes the events of the forties and fifties in his country to conclude that there is a hidden desire for suicide in all Puerto Ricans. The violence perpetrated by the Nationalist Party was suicidal, just as the desire to assimilate into U. S. politics and culture is a choice of slow death. The present form of government, Estado Libre Asociado, is the best expression of Puerto Ricans' docility.⁴ Reliance on a figurehead as the savior and solver of all problems reflects this same inability to act on their own. The acceptance of the English language in schools, business and government is, according to Marqués, another expression of passivity.

3 "Cuentos de René Marqués", Otro día nuestro (San Juan: Imprenta Venezuela, 1955), p. 17.

4 Ensayos (1953-1966) (Río Piedras: Editorial Antillana, 1967), pp. 157-58.

In this same essay, Marqués defends the pater familiae as Puerto Ricans' last cultural stronghold and assertion of themselves. This machismo (Marqués' term) he argues, is the fusion of the Spanish honor code and the Roman family structure. He blames the United States for trying to make this structure disappear and deprive man of his concept of virility.⁵ By "liberating" woman from the traditional rural concepts of family, North American culture has shattered the Puerto Rican's last hope to redeem himself. These ideas will be present in the later analysis of Marqués' short stories and his portrayal of women. His admiration for Tennessee Williams' female protagonists⁶ remains at the spectator's level, since he does not incorporate this sympathy into his own works.

Perhaps because Marqués is so aware of the problems besetting his people, his writings possess, as Luis de Arrigoitia points out, a pessimistic aura so strong that not even his attempts at creating ideal characters can remove it.⁷

Many of the women characters in René Marqués' plays are taken from the early short narratives, Los soles truncos, based on "Purificación en la Calle del Cristo", and Un niño azul para esa sombra, based on "El niño en el árbol". However, whether in drama or short narrative, René Marqués' portrayal of women follows the same pattern. His world of fiction attempts to capture the reality of Puerto Rican society of the fifties as the author can perceive it. He divides this society into three economic structures, "aristocracy" (the surviving Creole),

5 Ensayos, pp. 169-71.

6 René Marqués, "Williams, Tennessee--The Rose Tatoo," Asomante, I (enero-marzo 1952), 83.

7 Luis de Arrigoitia, Prólogo, Sobre este suelo: nueve cuentos y una leyenda (Río Piedras:Editorial Cultural, 1973) p. 12.

middle class (resultant of American intervention), poor (the perennially oppressed). Women seem to be the most affected by economic differences, and Marqués places on their shoulders the burden of their country's present political situation.

The wealthy class or "aristocracy" is composed of the criollos who owned most of the land in Puerto Rico until the North American invasion. Although they lost their wealth, they refused to relinquish their culture. Marqués feels a great admiration for this group who, during the first thirty years of this century, became cultural warriors who succeeded in thwarting the political and cultural schemes of the invaders. There is little concern in Marqués' view of this group for the economic realities in Puerto Rico during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This slowly dying class is best portrayed in the short story "Purificación en la Calle del Cristo", where the setting, the old historical city of San Juan, is used to enhance the decaying atmosphere.

The reigning social group of the fifties, the middle class, receives Marqués' worst scorn. This is the class, promoted by the North Americans, which has replaced and helped to extinguish the Spanish aristocracy. The center of this group is no longer the male breadwinner, but the emancipated woman who has rebelled against her role as the center of the family and usurped man's place in the outside world. "La hora del dragón", "La muerte", "El niño en el árbol", and "En la popa hay un cuerpo reclinado" depict how women have taken over a predominantly male society.

The poor in Marqués' world might accurately be labeled the wretched of the earth. They are the uneducated, those manipulated by the politicians and the church, and plagued by

illness, death and the eternal epidemic of poverty and ignorance. Whether they work very hard or spend their time getting on welfare, these poor can expect nothing more than frustration and despair. The 1951 play La Carreta is perhaps the best portrayal of this social group; the characters of Doña Gabriela and Juanita carry the double burden of being poor and women in Puerto Rico and the Spanish community in New York. "Isla en Manhattan" and "Dos vueltas de llave y un arcángel" are two short narratives which also encompass this theme.

Inés, Hortensia and Emilia, once part of the criollo elite in Puerto Rico, are the protagonists of "Purificación en la Calle del Cristo".⁸ Time becomes the most important element in this short story as two of the surviving old sisters recall their past and prepare to purify their surroundings and themselves by immolation.

In a series of flashbacks the story is told of how Hortensia, the most beautiful of the three, renounces marriage and secludes herself in the house of the fanlights. Trying to stop time in the outside world they abandoned at the turn of the century. Rather than integrate themselves into reality, the sisters end their lives and their imaginary world in a holocaust.

The three sisters are described in terms of beauty--all are aware that this is the most important aspect of young

⁸ René Marqués, "Purificación en la Calle del Cristo," En una ciudad llamada San Juan (Río Piedras: Editorial Cultural, 1970), pp. 29-41. Originally published in 1958. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

women in their social group. Inés is the eldest and the plainest. Her chances of marrying well, within her own social class, are dim, but she has apparently accepted this destiny in the absence of any alternative. Inés can express her rebellion only by making her other sisters, especially Hortensia, share in her unhappiness. Knowing how proud and racist she is, Inés tells her that her fiancé has a mulatto mistress and a son by her. If Inés can not conquer the Spanish officer, she will have no one enjoy life by his side.

On the other hand, Hortensia knows how beautiful she is and how she has all her family's attention. She has known no obstacle in her life--every whim was always granted. She had been educated and trained to marry a wealthy, handsome young man. When Hortensia learns about her fiancé's liaison she is hurt not only because she thought she was the most attractive and desired woman, but also because the man she was to marry had placed her on the same level as a poor mulatto woman.

--Gracias por decírmelo--y era la voz de Hortensia. Luego un silencio corto y agudo como un grito, y de nuevo la voz--No me casaré, desde luego. (p. 36)

Es mejor así. Porque jamás compartiría yo el amor de un hombre. ¡Jamás! (p. 37)

Emilia, the youngest sister, is presented as shy and quiet because she is overly-conscious of a foot handicap. She is beautiful, but imperfect because of her limp. Emilia escapes into poetry writing, fantasizing about a man she loves but never had.

No podía precisarlo, pero había algo obsceno en todo esto, algo que no era posible relacionar con el violeta pálido de los ojos de Emilia, ni con su pie lisiado, ni con su gesto de niño tímido y asustidizo. O quizá lo obs-

ceno era precisamente eso, que fuese Emilia quien escribiese versos así. Lo peor había sido el tú innombrado, pero siempre presente en las cuartillas amarillentas. (p. 35)

She is very dependent on Inés and is perhaps the most unrealistic of the three. She sees the world through tinted glasses and does not know, or wish to discover, the world of bright lights. She continually shuns the sun's rays that seep through the shutters and turns her back on death, illness, poverty, sadness.

These three women have been educated to fulfill their role in society as wives and mothers. They can see no other destiny in their lives; if they fail to marry, they will continue to live with their parents, care for the old and the young, and with time become conventional old maids. Hortensia by choice and Inés and Emilia by chance remain unmarried, living together in resentment and bitterness, but accepting their role, denying themselves a life outside of marriage or home. Their lives are designed in terms of beauty--only Hortensia is destined to fulfill the greatest role for a woman:

sería Hortensia quien habría de deslumbrar en los salones, aunque las tres aprendieron por igual los pequeños secretos de vivir graciosamente en un mundo apacible y equilibrado, donde no habría cabida para lo que no fuese bello, para las terribles vulgaridades de una humanidad, que no debía (no podría) llegar hasta las frágiles fraulein, protegidas no tanto por los espesos muros del colegio como por la labor complicada de los encajes, y los tapices, y la bruma melódica de los lieder, y la férrea caballería de los más jóvenes oficiales prusianos. (p. 30)

So Inés becomes the parents' nurse and later the bulwark against the sisters' collapsing universe.

de fingirse loca ante los acreedores, y vender las joyas más valiosas (y la plata), de cargar diariamente el agua del aljibe desde que suspendieron el servicio de acueducto, y aceptar la caridad de los vecinos, y rechazar las ofertas de compra por la casa en ruinas, e impedir que los turistas violaran el recinto en su búsqueda bárbara de miseria. (p. 37)

Meanwhile Emilia continues to write beautiful, delicate verses to a non-existent lover.

The three characters are portrayed with great love and admiration. They are not scorned or ridiculed by the author, but respected because they took a stand--just as Faulkner's Quentin Compson, who followed the moral code of a past society--and chose to die rather than relinquish their beliefs. These women respected and upheld the patrifocal structure of their society and never changed with time or questioned their own subordinate position.

The female protagonist in "La hora del dragón"⁹ has no name, yet she is identified by her social condition. The story revolves around a chance meeting with a stranger, lasting only a short time. The woman almost faints with the heat and the multitude of the afternoon rush hour while shopping in Old San Juan. She is helped by an attractive stranger, who although not of her social class, greatly interests her. He drives her around in his brother's taxi, and without the woman's really knowing how, she finds herself in bed with him. The evening-morning ends when the stranger drives her home and refuses to

9 René Marqués, "La hora del dragón", En una ciudad llamada San Juan (Río Piedras: Editorial Cultural, 1970), pp. 75-94. Originally published in 1960. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

accept a tip. In her wealthy but unfulfilled life, this incident arouses in her feelings of excitement which previously had only occurred in her imagination. For once she makes her fantasies real and lives by instinct rather than reason.

As Alba Rovira-Paoli points out, society defines and manipulates the concepts that rule this woman's outside reality.¹⁰ Just like the women in "Purificación en la Calle del Cristo," her life has been patterned to fulfill her role as wife and mother. But after complying with these duties for twenty-two years, she still feels empty; marriage has not satisfied her urge for life.:

--Y dedico esta Comunión hoy, Santísimo Sacramento, a la preservación de la felicidad de mi esposo y de mi hijo. Y también, a que de algún modo se llene este vacío tan grande que siento en mi alma.
(p.83)

Her life is a daily routine without meaning; social gatherings, church on Sundays, yearly trips to Europe, and weekly shopping. There is nothing to look forward to, for nothing seems to alter this routine. She is independent in that apparently she can do what she pleases, for her relationship with her husband has become a mere formality. There is no jealousy, no attachment. She is a good wife and mother.

This routine and security are altered by her affair with the man with a dragon tattoo on his chest. He represents the adventurous life she has been deprived of because of class and sex:

Y una aguja candente graba en Shanghai, dolo-

¹⁰ "Historia y neurosis: En una ciudad llamada San Juan," Diss. University of Virginia 1972, p.51.

rosamente, la magia de un dragón violeta. Y en Nápoles hay la tentación de una camisa de seda gris como jamás podrá concebirla la producción en serie de América. Y en Marruecos hay la oportunidad de compra del mejor reloj de oro suizo (robado, quizá). Y en Brazil se adquieren los topacios y las turmalinas a granel para luego venderse de contrabando en los puertos del Golfo. Y mujeres ¡oh, Dios!, mujeres con todos los olores y sabores del mundo. (pp. 90-91)

The moment she finds herself without a set mode of behavior, when she must feel and act according to her desires and not to reason or social standards, she becomes nervous, clumsy, and chooses to reject what has brought her a moment of vibrant happiness.

Y ella, sin sombra ya, diluida, rompiéndose en gritos que no llegaba a articular su garganta, echando a correr, definitivamente, hacia la puerta cerrada. (p. 94)

Esther Rodríguez Ramos has pointed out the significance of this adventure in this woman's life:

Como lo sugiere el título, el cuento relata la intervención súbita de lo maravilloso en la vaciedad espiritual de la protagonista. Se trata de una inesperada experiencia amorosa; casual, fugaz, pero tierna y vivificadora, que viene a rescatarla, aunque momentáneamente, de la mezquindad del mundo circundante.¹¹

In "La muerte",¹² the female character, Yolanda, plays

11 Esther Rodríguez Ramos, Los cuentos de René Marqués (Río Piedras, P. R.: Editorial Universitaria, 1976), pp. 70-71.

12 René Marqués, "La muerte", Inmersos en el silencio (Río Piedras, P. R.: Editorial Antillana, 1976), pp. 107-118. Originally published in 1955. All quotes will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

a supporting role to the existentialist protagonist. The story revolves around a man's quest for a significant existence in a world he can only view as monotonous and absurd in its eventful descent towards nothingness. His daily life is dull and empty, and his total view of life is filled with the fear of death. He views the people who surround him, especially the woman he lives with and his boss as objects which sometimes please him and other times become obstacles in his life.

Yolanda, although not officially his wife, is portrayed as a mixture of lover and wife. This second role is rejected by the protagonist, and his reaction is to turn away from her.

¡Si tan sólo Yolanda no se empeñara en actuar como esposa! Su vida en común tenía en ocasiones sabor a matrimonio que él detestaba. Sobre todo, cuando Yolanda se decidía a hacer de él un hombre útil. Ahora la cosa le sonaba risible. Pero la decisión de ella tenía el poder de agriar su existencia por varias semanas. (p. 110)

He wants a woman who gives him pleasure, and does not play games--a woman who is defined as a sex object. When he departs on his drinking escapades and Yolanda gets upset, the protagonist reconsiders his union with this woman who takes unto herself rights she has not been granted.

Yolanda odiaba sus excesos alcohólicos. El despertar del domingo era regularmente una sesión de moral y ética. Sus escapadas sabbatinas la sacaban de quicio. Era entonces cuando él se preguntaba si su unión con Yolanda no era en realidad la de un convencional matrimonio. (p. 110)

Because the emphasis here is on the protagonist and his circumstances, women are flat characters, almost caricatures. This Yolanda in Marqués' story is very similar to the Yolanda

of Emilio Díaz Valcárcel's novel Figuraciones en el mes de marzo.¹³ Both women are presented as incomplete or stereotyped characters who only assent or negate the male protagonist's desires and acts.

"El niño en el árbol"¹⁴ conveys the thoughts of a boy who has lost his grip on life and commits suicide to escape his tormented empty life. The cause of all his troubles is a woman, his mother, who the young boy feels is a stranger and perhaps an enemy to him, since she has slowly deprived him of all he once loved. The boy, Michelin, sees this woman as the reason his father left; she is also responsible for the killing of the quenepo tree which Michelin had made a symbol of manhood.

Sólo en el patio quedaba el quenepo que no daba frutos, pero que era alto y poderoso, como el hombre, y le protegía contra unos ojos traidores, verdes como la furia del mar. (p. 135)

Since the boy is incapable of making his mother disappear, he personifies her in the female cat he kills and in the North American statue he desecrates. But the boy does not have the power to leave his home and start somewhere else as his father did, and so he poisons himself on his birthday, while his mother calls him to blow out his candles.

Y un árbol que matan (como un niño en la

13 Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, Figuraciones en el mes de marzo (Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, 1972).

14 René Marqués, "El niño en el árbol", En una ciudad llamada San Juan (Río Piedras, P. R.: Editorial Cultural, 1970), pp. 133-137. Originally published in 1956. All quotes will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

rama) no puede soplar las velas de su propio bizcocho mientras los ojos sean verdes, y el hombre no vuelva nunca, y el quenepo haya muerto, y Dios esté allá tan lejos, sin oír la voz que clama, desde un árbol que ya no existe: ¡Sopla tú, Dios, las velitas! ¡Y perdona a Micheleiiiiin...! (p. 137)

In this story Marqués' woman is no longer a stereotype; she has become a castrating agent to any man, whether husband, lover or child. She is strong, domineering and overpowering, forcing the men in her life to flee or submit to her desires. She is selfish and frivolous; there is hardly any communication between mother and son. Alba Rovira has pointed out that the absence of a male figure contributes to the child's maladjustment and prevents him from acquiring maturity and developing his potentiality.¹⁵ Throughout Marqués' stories dealing with the middle class, the father figure represents the stronghold of cultural values and Puerto Rican institutions, while the foreign element is always associated with the mother figure. In this particular story the mother is a North American who embodies all the characteristics of the colonizer.

El primer símbolo subraya el cálculo, el sigilio y la maldad propios de esta mujer; el segundo tiene un sentido más amplio, más totalizador, que traslada la relación familiar al plano de la relación colectiva. Identificada con la estatua, la mujer se asocia al poder extranjero en la medida en que ambos sojuzgan y destruyen en sus planos respectivos.¹⁶

15 Rovira-Paoli, p. 47.

16 Rodríguez Ramos, p. 52.

Of all the stories discussed so far, "En la popa hay un cuerpo reclinado"¹⁷ contains the strongest indictment against women. The protagonist of this story is a man in name alone, for his life has been shaped by women's whims, and he is powerless in their hands. As a boy and young adolescent he was babied by his mother who induced in him a guilt feeling in anything related to sex. Later on she directs his education by pushing him to be a teacher--a "clean" profession--and suppress his writing impulses. His legal union with a woman could only be realized with someone from a "good" family meaning money and whiteness. The mulatas were only rehearsals to be enjoyed but never taken seriously. Once married, the protagonist devotes himself entirely to his wife, believing that happiness lies in this union. But his wife rejects this role by keeping him at a distance. When she becomes a mother, unwillingly, she fills the household with bitterness and reproaches. Realizing that the accumulation of objects would never satisfy his wife, he stops in time to reconsider his situation and kills the woman who symbolized the world he never forged nor wished to participate in. In turn he castrates himself, relinquishing the only element that remained of his manhood.

Asediado, sumido en la desesperación, el protagonista trata de liberarse por medio de la muerte. Sin embargo, su autocastración representa el triunfo definitivo de la mujer, que al recibir sobre su cuerpo exánime el miembro ensangrentado, logra

17 René Marqués, "En la popa hay un cuerpo reclinado", En una ciudad llamada San Juan (Río Piedras, P. R.: Editorial Cultural, 1970), pp. 95-107. Originally published in 1956. All quotes will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

póstumamente despojar al marido del símbolo de su virilidad.¹⁸

Marqués presents in this story the eternal circle in a man's life--the mother shapes his life, then he falls prey to his wife, who in turn shapes their son's life. Women are portrayed as materialistic, selfish, calculating, and as castrators of creativity and spirituality. The stronger these women are, the more destructive and vicious they become towards men. The mother in this story is still close to the stereotype of the abnegated woman who sacrifices everything for her son's welfare and whose only satisfaction is to see him secure and happy. For this sacrifice she will ask for her son's eternal gratitude.

The author's scorn is reserved for the character of the wife in this story. After playing the "game" of sex object in search of marriage, she begins to show her true self. She refuses to have children, for this would ruin her figure. ("--No, así no quiero. Los hijos deforman el cuerpo.") When she does become pregnant, she blames it on his selfishness and considers herself deceived. After giving birth, it is the man who takes care of the child when it awakes in the middle of the night. When the child is ill and only constant care can save him, the woman refuses to waste her time on an eternal vigil--and the child dies. There is no remorse on her part since she never desired the child in the first place. She continues to demand material possessions--furniture, television, new house--never considering his economic situation and continually refusing to have another child. Even the husband's sexual life is

18 Rodríguez Ramos, p. 70.

programmed by her caprices--she determines the time and the contraceptive method to be used:

y ella insiste en que lo eche afuera para conservar el cuerpo bonito y lucir el traje nuevo (no ése, sino el último; el de la falda bordada en rhinestones), si tan siquiera fuese para gozarlo (su cuerpo, digo), pero apenas me deja, con esa angustia de lo incompleto, y todo por no usar la esponja chica, como dijo la trabajadora social de Bienestar Público que es en verdad Malestar Privado o cuando no con aquello de no, me duele... (p. 102)

Marqués has drawn such a revolting picture of this woman that the reader must pity the protagonist and rejoice when he finally decides to murder her. She inspires only hate, and if this is what lies behind every educated and "emancipated" woman, there is plenty of reason to fear this monster.

The only female character in this story who is above reproach is Anita, the prostitute who surrenders her being for a few minutes of apparent pleasure in complete contrast to his wife:

Pero Anita, de la Calle Luna, es feliz cuando me goza, o aparenta que me goza, a pesar de que es mayor que aquellas muchachas de la vieja casa de balcón en ruinas...pero no pide absurdos, sólo lo que le doy, que es bastante en un sentido, mas no exige un traje nuevo para la fiesta de los Rotarios el mismo día que me ejecutan la hipoteca. (p. 101)

José Emilio Pacheco finds that these bourgeois people who lead empty, sterile and alienated lives can only find the spark of life in erotic meetings with simple, unpretentious people.¹⁹

¹⁹ "La negación alentadora," Mexico en la Cultura, abril 3, 1961, p. 4.

They choose men and women who belong to a different class; they resort to the poor who have not yet learned to rationalize and manipulate their feelings.

In the stories dealing with the poor, the author's values shift from the male protagonist, the last bulwark of Puerto Rican culture, to the female characters who in the middle class had represented the foreign and destructive element.

The main character in "Isla en Manhattan"²⁰ is a young woman, Juanita, who after undergoing political, social and moral pressure, finds herself in a strange city waiting for her eternal dream to be realized--marriage. After eleven years of blindly roaming between Puerto Rico and New York, she finds her old sweetheart, who wishes to marry her. Juanita momentarily thinks that she has finally achieved the security and peace she has always longed for. Yet, during the minutes she must wait for Nico to show up, she begins to evaluate her past and reconsider her future; perhaps she has to renounce too much of herself to become someone else--the woman Nico wants, submissive, dependent, Americanized and apolitical.

Frente a la maleabilidad del hombre, se yergue la entereza moral y el profundo sentido de puertorriqueñidad de Juanita, la ramera que prefiere permanecer fiel a sus principios antes que aceptar la propuesta matrimonial de Nico, el antiguo novio de los años universitarios, ahora moralmente prostituido, acobardado y docilizado por las exigencias

²⁰ René Marqués, "Isla en Manhattan," Inmersos en el silencio (Río Piedras: Editorial Antillana, 1976), pp. 73-87. Originally published in 1955. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

del sistema.²¹

It is a political incident which pushes Juanita to make a final decision and to assert her being as an independent entity who can struggle on her own. By deciding to sign the petition for a retrial for the Scottsboro Boys, she manifests her solidarity with the oppressed and her refusal to become part of an unjust society into which Nico is more than willing to be assimilated. Saying no to marriage meant forsaking security, but becoming a strong, independent and just human being.

El caracter de Juanita está muy bien trazado. Quizás hubiera sido bueno realzar la importancia de la boda para ella--como un regreso a la normalidad social--para que el lector se diera cuenta de la significación del sacrificio de Juanita.²²

Juanita grows from a naive, ignorant country girl to a responsible socially and politically conscious participant. But in the process she has had to shed the female role imposed by society. She leaves her town of Lares to study at the university and become a school teacher, following the traditional professions women are encouraged to study. It is at the university that she meets Nico and, by becoming involved with him, commits herself to a cause she barely understood at the beginning.

Fue por Nico que se metió en la huelga universitaria.
--La mujer, junto al hombre, ha de rebelarse y protestar contra lo injusto--

21 Rodríguez Ramos, pp. 53-54.

22 José Luis González, "Otro día nuestro: los cuentos de René Marqués," El Mundo, 29 de octubre de 1955, p. 20.

había dicho él. Cuando los expulsaron a ambos por huelguistas, ella entendió plenamente lo que Nico había querido explicarle. La calle de Río Piedras apareció ancha y franca con su real immediatez. (p.76)

After being expelled, and later on losing her job for her participation in an actor's strike, Juanita decides to try her fortune in New York. It is in this forlorn place that she loses her virginity to someone who was friendly and helpful but who later turned violent and raped her.

Y se vió de pronto en el cuartucho estrecho y maloliente. El canario dormía en su jaula. Y el hombre la desnudaba con manos torpes e impacientes. Quiso luchar, pero se sintió sin fuerzas. El pánico y el horror, más que el whiskey, la paralizaron. Horas después se encontró en un callejón sombrío, apollada en una pared de ladrillos, con el frío de la madrugada colándose en cuchilladas por las desgarraduras del traje. (p. 82)

This terrible scene is presented in a vague and fantastic manner which does not convey the shock and terror it would cause any woman undergoing a similar experience.

When, by chance, Juanita meets Nico again, the independence and self-development she had achieved is put aside, and she again fall into a feminine role. When the story begins, she is walking towards their rendezvous, which will culminate with a marriage license. She is now forced to choose between the security of marriage and the defense of values. Nico tries to convince her by first pointing out the danger of their situation. Then he reveals to her that they might be blacklisted by the police. When these arguments do not work, he resorts to violence ("--0 me das ese papel o te rompo la cara a tajos.")). He saves his last card for the mo-

ment when he knows he has almost lost the game ("--Si firmas 'eso', no me caso contigo.") By rejecting Nico's marriage offer, Juanita has voted for herself as a human being capable of deciding what is best for her and taking on the responsibility of her acts.

By using the selective point of view of a young adolescent and developing the story through interior monologue, Marqués has created in "Dos vueltas de llave y un arcángel"²³ his most complete female character in this selection of stories. It is also one of Marqués' best narratives, creating a perfect balance between structure and meaning.

No sobra nada en este cuento; cada detalle cumple una función específica. La división en partes, la estructura arquitectónica, el complejo tratamiento del tiempo, el empleo del mismo punto de vista y del monólogo interior, la repetición de los motivos y los símbolos que aclaran el tema dan a este relato su indisoluble unidad y una gran densidad interna.²⁴

It is the story of a girl who sees her life as a film in which she is the protagonist and, at the same time, the audience, drawing a line between what is real in her outside world and what is life in her mind. There is a dichotomy in

23 René Marqués, "Dos vueltas de llave y un arcángel," En una ciudad llamada San Juan (Rio Piedras, P. R.: Editorial Cultural, 1970), pp. 59-74. Originally published in 1955. all quotes will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

24 Arcadio Díaz Quiñones, "El arte del cuento en René Marqués," El cuento puertorriqueño en el siglo XX (Río Piedras: Editorial Universitaria, 1963), p. 100.

her life; events are distorted by the dream world she has unconsciously created to protect herself from spiritual destruction.

When the story opens, the protagonist is a prostitute of about fifteen years of age in the old city of San Juan. She has just tried to escape her present and recapture her past by leaving the city and returning to the small town where she grew up. But she is caught by her pimp and is punished for daring to change her human condition. While suffering the pain of the razor cuts on her back, the protagonist recalls her life a few years before, when she was a mere thirteen and an innocent and naive country girl.

In her home she is over-protected by a religious mother and a strict father, who never attempt to communicate with their daughter and who see her as just another growing girl trained to be a wife and mother and nothing more. In this family environment, she is raped by a trusted neighbor. She realizes this carnal conduct is a sin but not exactly why; if pain is the measure of her punishment, she is overwhelmed by it.

Y era dolor, dolor de verdad, aquí, aquí abajo, hondo, desgarrante, lleno de lágrimas, de gritos que se aplastaban en sollozos, porque había unos labios en su boca, y la voz estallaba dentro del pecho, sorda, sin salida, y el pecho hacía así, así, como si fuera a reventar de gritos, hasta que estalló la sangre, pero no en el pecho, y la tibieza empezó a manar provocando escor-zor, ardor, dolor también, pero no hondo, porque ahora todo el cuerpo era dolor: los músculos, las vísceras, los huesos, que se quedaban quietos. (p. 61)

Her parents reaction is that of pity in the mother and violence and rejection in the father.

Vio las lágrimas en los ojos de la madre:
 'Ay, bendito, ¿qué te han hecho?', frente
 a la estampa iluminada. Y vio la palabra
 sucia en la boca del padre; la palabra ma-
 la, puerca, embarrándole los labios secos
 al padre. (p. 62)

When she is thrown out of the house, she innocently believes that the man responsible for her "fall" will protect and provide for her. Once more she encounters rejection.

Y ahora quiero una casa, aunque sea chi-
 quita, como de muñecas, porque debo vivir
 y rezar mucho. Pondré una estampa de San
 Gabriel en la sala...
 --Eres boba o sinvergüenza.
 --No he rezado. Pero soy buena.
 --Soy casado. Y lo sabías. Vete. (p. 63)

In her search for someone to protect her, for she can never conceive herself as an independent being, the protagonist is sold to a beautiful blond man who resembles the image she knows of Saint Gabriel. This angelic man will initiate her in the trade, taking special care to handle her as fragile glass. As a girl starving for affection, she believes herself in heaven when the man begins to caress her:

Qué cosa maravillosa volar así, apoyada en
 el pecho amplio, dentro del cual el corazón
 hacía pun-pun, elevándose, elevándose sobre
 San Juan, subiendo a un cielo color de nava-
 ja nueva, flotando blandamente, remontándose
 más alto, tan alto. Tras-tras, dos vueltas
 de llave. San Pedro abriendo (¿cerrando?)
 el cielo. El cuerpo tendido ahora sobre una
 nube blanda. Agua verde del pozo con musgo
 verde acariciando, acariciando. San Gabriel
 Arcángel, cielo feliz, cielo. (p. 67)

Even when her archangel delivers her to strange men and demands money from her, any affection from him would again strengthen her trust in him. After a while she grows weary and attempts

to leave, only to be brought back and painfully punished. Yet the pain disappears and her doubts dissipate the minute he returns and gives her the love she hungers for.

Tras--tras, y se volvió lentamente. Allí estaba él, solo y borracho. Sin navaja en la mano, sin remordimiento. Trayendo el único cielo, el verdadero. Se estremeció al ver las alas color de espuma crecer de pronto tras la camiseta roja. Sintió como si un baño de bálsamo cayera sobre la espalda lacerada al ver el musgo humedecerse en los ojos, acariciando, acariciando. (p. 73)

In this short story Marqués has drawn a character of a girl/woman who is a victim of her circumstances. She is tossed from place to place, always dependent on someone's whim. Her inability to take hold of her situation invokes a feeling of pity for her. She is not to be blamed for the things that happen to her; she is a mere puppet of a society that has slowly turned its back on humanity. This girl has been raised in an enclosed world; she is another daughter who must be married as soon as possible. She is taught to pray but never to seek knowledge or to question or understand roles. Even when she sells her body, she is a victim of the greed of others who only see her as merchandise that will yield a certain profit.

Unlike the middle-class women portrayed in his other short narratives, Marqués presents here a woman who must be pitied because she is being crushed, although fulfilling the role of a woman in Puerto Rican society. Her situation can be compared to the middle-class man in Marqués' fiction who is the victim of strong people (mostly women), who constantly degrade his manliness by having his role reduced to that of a follower and a stud. Middle-class women and lumpen male characters are scorned and rejected in Marqués' fiction while his

admiration lies with poor women who have been abused because of their ignorance, and with middle-class men who have been usurped of their natural role. Marqués presents a grim view of these characters, for whenever they rebel against the situation they are imprisoned into, they end up accepting their role once again or committing suicide and silencing their rebellion. There is no possible redemption for these people who have been forced by modern society to relinquish their human essence.

Poseyéndola, castigándola entre una y otra sacudida, se desquitaba en aquel cuerpo muchas de sus frustraciones, muchos de los sufrimientos soportados. Y, a pesar de que Narcisa le mostraba luego los rasguños o las huellas de sus dedos en la blanca piel, quejándose de lo brutal que él podía ser con ella, no la tomaba en serio porque allá en el fondo de su mirada, en el tono mimoso con que lo reprochaba, percibía como un regusto del castigo tolerado; como una torpe resignación ante lo que le infligía su hombre, su amo y señor.

Usmaíl, Pedro Juan Soto

The almost two million Puerto Ricans living in the United States have not been forsaken in Puerto Rican literature: Pedro Juan Soto through his prose fiction works has expressed their anguish and struggle in this alien land. Although born in 1928 in Cataño (a fishing town separated from San Juan by a ten-minute boat ride) and attending school there, Soto's emigration to New York at the age of eighteen constituted a decisive factor in his life and literary production.

New York was not just a city where human beings felt isolated and brutalized, it was the exact opposite of a Puerto Rican's lifestyle on the island. Climate and language were not just temporary obstacles to an adaptation, but became the burden and restraint in the Puerto Rican's economic and social development. Perhaps Soto was fortunate to go to New York with a purpose that had a possibility of fulfillment, but his daily life was the same as any Puerto Rican who had gone there to work in a factory; there was the same cultural shock and racial and ethnic discrimination. Soto was thus able to live inside the environs, but still remain an outsider and become its spokesman.

While studying natural science, Soto confesses, he started reading too many books of literature which motivated him to begin writing "little things". He practiced his craft writing hundreds of articles, reports and interviews for a local newspaper for which he got no pay or very little to speak of.

After completing his B.A. in 1950, his second great

1 Cuentos puertorriqueños de hoy (Río Piedras: Editorial Cultural, 1968), p. 154.

experience came when he was drafted into the U. S. Armed Forces. Although the theme of a Puerto Rican's experience in the Korean War was never incorporated into his fiction, Soto played with the idea and wrote a novel he never published, Los perros anónimos. He was unsure of his control of language, and after showing the manuscript to René Marqués and receiving an unfavorable criticism he gave up the idea of revising it for publication.²

In 1953 Soto began graduate studies at Teachers' College in Columbia University. His major, English and American literature, gave him the necessary background to experiment with the stylistic technique of Hemingway, Faulkner, Joyce and Woolf. A year later, he submitted the short story "Garabatos" to the Ateneo's literary contest and won the first prize for 1953. After finishing his M.A., Soto decided to settle in Puerto Rico and continue his literary work there. He joined René Marqués and other important Puerto Rican writers, film makers, and painters who were then working with the government in the Division of Community Education.

These first years back on the island were very fruitful in terms of literary production. In 1954 he won second prize in the Ateneo's contest for his short story "Los inocentes". The following year he won first prize for drama in this same annual contest, with El huésped. In 1956 he published his first collection of short stories entitled Spiks, continuing what José Luis González had begun in Paisa but adding other dimensions to the portrayal of Puerto Ricans in New York slums. After three years he again ventured into

² A solas con Pedro Juan Soto (Río Piedras: Ediciones Puerto, 1973), pp. 27-28.

the long narrative, this time with great success: Usmaíl was second only to René Marqués' La víspera del hombre in that year's literary contest. This time Soto dealt with a black Puerto Rican from Vieques oppressed by his color, by the confinement he felt in his town and by the colonized mentality he developed which made him feel inferior and with the right to reject his own self. With his second novel, Ardiente suelo, fría estación published in 1961, Soto returned to the portrayal of the Puerto Rican in New York. But this time his protagonist is a young man reversing the migratory pattern: raised in New York, eighteen-year-old Eduardo decides to return to the island in search of his roots. He only finds rejection and ignorance to his plight. Labeled "spik" in New York, in Puerto Rico he becomes a "gringo".

For almost eight years Soto kept a literary silence which proved to be another period of evaluation of his narrative. During this time he began to teach at the Universidad de Puerto Rico and became more involved in Latin American literature. From 1964 to 1966 he was associate editor of the English-speaking monthly San Juan Review. His participation in this English language publication was criticized by many Puerto Rican writers. But Soto's decision to collaborate at all levels, to diffuse culture of which language is just one part, proved to be correct when years after the literary translations published in this magazine and which mostly had been done by him, were sought after and used in schools and colleges in Spanish communities of the United States.³ Through this periodical Soto associated himself with left-

3 A solas, pp. 90-91.

wing North Americans, who gave an international dimension to Puerto Rico's struggle for independence. In 1969 the prestigious Mexican publisher, Joaquín Mortiz, printed his third novel El francotirador. A new theme is explored: the Cuban intellectual exile in Puerto Rico who adopts an uncertain position towards the Cuban Revolution and his own role. Soto incorporated the experiments of Latin American writers with time and space and continued to develop his neo-realist approach and dialogue. This has been Soto's most notable experiment with the long narrative, although he published a fourth novel, Temporada de duendes, the following year.

Seymour Menton has called Soto's style neo-realist. There is a rejection of fantasy and regionalism; his protagonists are the forsaken in city slums; the present time predominates in the plot.⁴ One of the major conflicts explored by Soto through his character portrayals is the clash between the Puerto Rican culture and the Anglo-Saxon element in both New York and Puerto Rico.⁵

His latest publication is a collection of short stories, Un decir (1977), which takes place in the twenty-first century. Yet it is still the Puerto Rico of the seventies whose violence has erupted and manifested itself in various ways: brutal rape, police repression, discrimination, sex violence, rebellion and revolution. Soto's themes continue to be futility, despair, anguish and the interplay between illusion and despair.⁶

4 El cuento hispanoamericano (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1964), pp. 188-89.

5 Menton, p. 189.

6 David William Foster, A Dictionary of Contemporary Latin American Authors (Tempe, Arizona, Center for Latin American Studies, 1975), p. 98.

When Pedro Juan Soto began to publish his first works in the fifties, he expressed the purpose of his writing in this way:

Creo, sobre todas las cosas, en escribir.
Escribir sin miedo a nada ni a nadie.
Escribir mañana, tarde y noche, cada vez
que pueda. Escribir dentro de las acepta-
das normas literarias y escribir en contra
de las aceptadas normas⁷ literarias. Vivo
para eso, vivo por eso.

These words still hold true in his life and in his literary production.

Although all of Pedro Juan Soto's protagonists in his four novels are men, their lives are deeply affected by the women they are involved with. In his first novel Usmaíl, Soto divides his story in three chapters and gives each one the name of a woman: "Chefa", "Nana Luisa", and "Cisa". Usmaíl, the main character, grows and matures as he relates to and outgrows each woman. Chefa is the mother he never met, but who is responsible for his mocking name (instead of the biblical Ismael, Chefa names him after the vehicle which she naively believes will bring her news from her lover: U. S. Mail), and his mixed blood; she is hated for her passion and ignorance, two elements which Usmaíl swears to surmount. Nana Luisa becomes a symbol not only of mother earth, but of Puerto Rican values. Cisa serves as sex initiator, later on becoming the possessive, jealous stereotype.

The character of the mother in Soto's second novel, Ardiente suelo, fría estación, embodies the archetype of the

7 Cuentos, pp. 155-56.

Virgin Mary and Eve. She is pitied and admired by her children because she endures her husband's drunken sprees and mistreatment. But the moment she decides to get a job outside the home and grow more independent, she becomes the domineering wife--the bitch. Soto develops this woman on the same terms as René Marqués does his middle-class female characters.

Que de buenas a primeras se empleó en una factoría, comenzó a ganar un sueldo semanal, y le crecieron las agallas. Dejó de pedir, entonces. Exigió que se hiciera tal o cual cosa en la casa, porque ella también traía dinero. Y cuando llegó a ganar más que el viejo, lo borró de la mente como jefe de familia. Las borracheras también contribuyeron a eso, claro, pero ya ella había provocado muchas de esas mismas borracheras con sus alardes de sabelotodo y de mandamás.⁸

Thus, she becomes the castrator of a man's aspirations and reduces him to a dependent worm she can manipulate and step on.

In Temporada de duendes, the protagonist sees women only as sex objects to be deceived and seduced. In these acts lie his manhood and male strength. Matilde, the woman whom the protagonist chooses to keep and include in his movie projects, is portrayed as an educated person who is shy and sexually naive. After the protagonist seduces her, Matilde is on her way to becoming "liberated". Soto portrays this liberation as purely sexual--she has no guilt feelings in sleeping with any man she chooses and using her sex appeal to achieve her goals. She is also the first to jump on the

⁸ Pedro Juan Soto, Ardiente suelo, fría estación (Mexico: Universidad Veracruzana, 1961), pp. 66-67.

bandwagon of cultural assimilation. There is very little difference between the characterization of middle-class women in Soto and in Marqués' works.

El francotirador, written in the first person, presents a man's vision of the world, including the women he must conquer to prove his manhood. Women are immediately judged as sex objects--ugly or pretty, receptive or frigid in bed. Whether they are politically to the left or to the right, all women seem to yearn and wait for an aggressive man to carry them to bed. Their political positions or intellectual upbringing are secondary to their main desire--to be seduced. Tomás Saldivia, the protagonist, while listening to Sara's political talk, is planning his strategy to approach her. When he finally decides to implement his move, he is, of course, successful.

Tomo su mano, que beso. Llevo mis labios a su nuca y allí los detengo un rato mientras ambas manos forcejean con más empeño junto al costado interior del muslo que quiero alcanzar, que tengo que alcanzar. Puedo más, a pesar de todos sus esfuerzos, y cuando toco la carne tibia un suspiro y un movimiento negativo de su cabeza pasan a librar una pequeña lucha en ella, por ella y sólo con ella. Gana el suspiro. Probada la vulnerabilidad de esa fortaleza, retiro mis fuerzas para levantarle un sitio de abrazos, besitos cosquilleantes, y suspiros.⁹

Perhaps because the protagonists in his novels are always men, Pedro Juan Soto's women characters are either archetypes (Nana Luisa in Usmaíl), or stereotypes present in most

9 Pedro Juan Soto, El francotirador (Mexico: Joaquín Mortiz, 1969), p. 88.

Puerto Rican fiction. The images of women are extremely negative, or when affirmative, only partially developed. These female characters are castrating when they become active participants in society, or they are sex objects when they conform to their passive role. Yet in Soto's early works, the short stories collected in Spiks,¹⁰ women are developed more fully and very seldom fall into stereotypes. Women are also protagonists, and their world is not circumscribed to a relation solely with men. They are social beings who must survive in a cruel world that impoverishes men and women alike.

Victoria Ortíz in her introduction to the English translation of Spiks, points out how all of Soto's women characters fit the title of the first story in this collection, "La cautiva":

they are all captives, fighting, often blindly, to break out of the suffocating enclosures in which family and society hold them. Through these narratives we can watch the groping of women in their traditional roles of daughter, sister, wife, mother and mistress; in all of them Soto leaves us feeling how poorly the roles are suited to the women.¹¹

Amidst the bustle of an airport scene, the story "La cautiva" is presented from the point of view of the female protagonist Fernanda. She awaits with her mother the airplane

10 Pedro Juan Soto, Spiks (Río Piedras: Editorial Cultural, 1970). Originally published in 1956. All quotes will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

11 Introd., Spiks: Stories by Pedro Juan Soto (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), p. 15.

that will take her to New York. Through the dialogue the reasons for her departure are revealed--she is being sent off to her brother's house to keep her away from sexual temptation. Through interior monologue, Fernanda relives her seduction by her sister's husband and her eventual involvement with him.

Even though Fernanda is not portrayed in a standard role, the other two female characters in the story are presented as stereotypes. The mother follows the role of martyr--so self-sacrificing that she will do anything for her family, even hide the truth so that her daughter may be happy. She is weak, allows Fernanda to mistreat her, and relies on her older son to impose discipline and authority. Inés, Fernanda's sister, is the loving, submissive wife who manipulates her husband through the only means she knows--passivity and deception. She will tolerate his affairs and irresponsibility as long as he upholds the role of husband and father.

Fernanda is a young woman, seventeen years of age, who although over-protected by her mother from the outside world, is exposed to all temptations in her home. She is discovering her attractiveness as a woman who appeals visually to men--defining herself in her first learned role--as sex object. Fernanda observes and learns from Inés and her husband the magic of sex:

--Yo los oía de noche--dijo ella, persiguiendo otro taxi--. Aunque mi acohtaba temprano, me quedaba en vela pa oirlos...
 --¿Oirlos?
 --...pero en los últimos mese ella no quería y yo entonceh... (pp. 3-4)

This man then becomes the symbol for all men, and her goal

becomes her ability to make him see her as a woman like Inés.

Me tiraba la vista a la espalda como
un garfio para rasgarme el traje sobre
las caderas y los muslos. No era bobo
y yo tampoco. (p. 8)

Just as in Marqués' story "Dos vueltas de llave y un arcángel" a woman's feelings when she is deflowered are a mixture of pain and fear, Soto's Fernanda expresses herself in the same manner:

No, me va a doler...No me atrevo porque me duele y porque tu eres mi cuñado...No fue tanto el dolor pero hubiera querido gritar de dolor y placer. (p. 10)

Fernanda believes like most women that by giving your most precious object to a man--your virginity--you have trapped him to be with you forever. So Fernanda sees her sister Inés as her only obstacle towards the achievement of happiness, based on a man's love. If she were not there, he would immediately follow and marry her. Thus Fernanda turns her resentment towards other women and dismisses her mother's evaluation of this man.

--El es un sinvergüenza, Fernanda. Deja que Inés lo coja con otra.
--El no tuvo la culpa.
--Ponte a defenderlo ahora--cuchicheó la anciana, mirando de soslayo al hombre que pasaba silbando--. Si él fuera persona decente...El no rehpetó ni la casa donde toh estábanoh unidos, ni rehpetó mis canas, ni a Inés, ni a tí. La mujer en el hospital, dando a luz, y él en tu cuarto, Fernanda... (p. 3)

Inés becomes her target of jealousy and the woman to compete with; her mother is the barrier that holds the man from expressing his true feelings towards her.

Instead of awakening to the world outside the traditional home, Fernanda goes from the prison of ignorance and parental guidance to the captivity of blind love, confusing a man's desires with lasting happiness.

Perhaps because the protagonist of "Garabatos" is a man, Rosendo, the female character is portrayed in very negative terms. The story is divided in four parts, but Graciela only shares the point of view with Rosendo in the first part. Whatever affirmative traits of Graciela are presented in this section, they are negated or forgotten by the attention given to Rosendo in the rest of the story.

The time is the day before Christmas, and the family, Rosendo, Graciela, two children (and another on the way), are faced once more with the unhappiness of poverty. Christmas accentuates their penury when they are unable to provide something additional for this special occasion. Graciela feels completely defeated; she is pregnant, unable to work and bringing another mouth to an already hungry family. Rosendo is pressured by Graciela to get a job, but he is set on developing his art, which can only be done by dedicating all his time to painting. Still he is ready to provide a special gift for this day, although he wishes to keep it a secret. With the ten dollars he collects from an odd job, he buys a Christmas tree and some toys for the children. His gift for Graciela will be a drawing where he will express the love that existed when they first met, and which he will attempt to recapture on this special day. But when he returns home that night, he finds a sullen Graciela accusing him of being immoral and alerting him that she has destroyed those pornographic scribbles.

--Esoh muñecoh loh borré.
 El olvidó el cigarrillo.
 --¿Ahora te dio por pintal suciedadeh?
 El dejó caer la sonrisa en el abismo de
 su realidad.
 --Ya ni velgüenza tieneh...
 Su sangre se hizo agua fría.
 --...obligando a tus hijoh a fijalse en por-
 queríah, en indecenciah...Loh borré y si
 acabó y no quiero que vuelva a sucedel. (pp.
 20-21)

The strength of characterization in this story is clearly shown in the interpretation of Rosendo and Graciela by such a perceptive critic as Concha Meléndez, who can only see the woman as the frustrator of this man's aspirations:

El emigrante es un artista frustrado y el tema surge del contraste entre las aficiones artísticas del hombre, la incompreensión torpe de su mujer y el ambiente lleno para él de limitaciones invencibles.
 El error patético fue creer que en el alma de Graciela--quien solo conservaba de los días del noviazgo el nombre romántico--pudiera quedar un sólo recuerdo grato que no hubiera destruído ya la dura circunstancia del presente.¹²

In the first part of the story, when she has the opportunity to project a positive image, Rosendo, who is just waking up, sees a huge body with a menacing attitude and a thundering voice. The man is able to face this threat, by asserting his male role of husband:

--¡Me levanto cuando me salga di adentro
 y no cuando uhté mande! ¡Adiós! ¿Qué se
 cree uhté? (p. 14)

12 El arte del cuento en Puerto Rico (New York: Las Américas Publishing Co., 1961), p. 352.

Graciela submits to her "place":

A ella la dominó la masa inerte del hombre: la amenaza latente en los brazos quietos, la semejanza del cuerpo al de un lagartijo enorme. (p. 15)

She is portrayed in this section as a very religious woman surrounded by images of saints, blessed palm leaves and burning candles. When her husband defeats her in this shouting battle, she turns towards her saints for help. She thanks God for at least providing a shelter for her family. She cannot understand why Rosendo is always up in the clouds and does nothing to alleviate the family's terrible condition.

Dios Santo si yo no hago más que parir y parir como una perra y este hombre no se preocupa por buscar trabajo porque prefiere que el gobierno nos mantenga por correo mientras él se pasa por ahí mirando a los cuatro vientos como Juan Bobo y diciendo que quiere ser pintor. (p. 15)

Although she feels like crying every time she thinks about their hopeless situation, she tries to be strong and not show any weakness. But these pent-up feelings will be transformed into nagging towards her husband and spankings for her children.

The glimpse of Graciela provided in this first part is that of a woman overburdened by a life of poverty in which she sees no open door, and where her hands are tied to seek new ways. She has reached a cul-de-sac and she is only striking out at the people around her, for she knows she is a drowning person.

In the second part Graciela becomes the image of the nagging woman to Rosendo; she is referred to as the woman--

she is there, but he has nothing to say to her. She nags him for not doing something that will bring the needed money for the family. She badgers him for not thinking about his children even on this special day. The final blow is her criticism of his art; she has become not only a nagger but a destroyer of his most valuable possession.

Graciela decía que él estaba en la segunda infancia. Si él se ausentaba de la mujer quejumbrosa y de los niños llorosos, explorando en la Babia imprecisa de sus trazos a lápiz, la mujer rezongaba y se mofaba. (p. 18)

The only news to bring a smile to her face is his announcement that he was able to get some money. Graciela thanks her saints, for as a drowning person she will cling to anything that suggests the slightest hope of salvation.

This image of women as the ones chosen to carry the burden of reality, while the man is off on quixotic enterprises, is very common in Latin American literature. No matter how affirmative a female character is, as for example Ursula in Cien años de soledad, she is always the one who bursts the balloon of unreality, resulting in man's unhappiness and frustration.

Pipe, the protagonist of "Los inocentes", plays a role similar to Faulkner's Benjy in The Sound and the Fury by becoming the moral mirror of the family. The mother and Hortensia define themselves through Pipe--one by absorbing him, the other by rejecting him. Following the same stylistic pattern of his other stories, Soto presents a scene that expands for only a few moments and within that limitation of time creates profound characterizations.

Early on the morning of a given day Pipe, a retarded man of thirty physical years, but only two mentally, waits for his mother or sister to take him for a walk. Meanwhile he escapes into a world of pigeons, where he can feel free and undisturbed by the maddening crowd.

treparme frente al sol en aquella nube
con las palomas sin caballos sin mujeres
y no oler cuando queman los cacharros en
el solar sin gente que me haga burla

Desde la ventana, vistiendo el traje hecho y vendido para contener a un hombre que no era él, veía las palomas revolotear en el alero de enfrente. (p. 23)

His mother and sister argue once more on the correctness of the decision to confine Pipe to a state institution. Hortensia, the sister, has already made her decision, and this is the chosen day to take him there. The mother's arguments are just a display of last resistance to a solution she is unable to accept no matter how logical it may sound. After defeating her mother's position once more, Hortensia takes Pipe by the hand and leaves the apartment in the midst of her mother's cries and her own doubts.

La madre no respondió. Con las manos enlazadas enfrente, estuvo rígida hasta que el pecho y los hombros se convulsionaron y comenzó a salir el llanto hiposo y delicado. Hortensia tiró la puerta y bajó con Pipe a toda prisa. Y ante la inmensa claridad de un mediodía de junio, quiso huracanes y eclipses y nevadas. (p. 29)

The mother in this story is drawn from the stereotype of the suffering woman whose whole world is made of her children, and who will sacrifice herself perpetually to give a grain of happiness to her family. She is molded on the image

of the Virgin Mary, and the more she suffers the more she will think that this is her destiny in life and that her reward will be gained in heaven. The mother is first described as a cardboard woman with a fixed stare at Pipe. She moves to give Pipe some bread for his pigeons and to encourage him to pray to Papa Dios. Her walk is described as slow as if overburdened; she is old and lean. Hortensia emphasizes these physical traits in her arguments to confine Pipe. The mother is too old and weak to handle a thirty year old child. But the mother still dismisses these reasons.

Hortensia estudió en el espejo la figura magra y menuda.
 --Tú ehtáh vieja, mamá.
 Una mano descarnada se alzó en el espejo.
 --Todavía no ehtoy muerta. Todavía puedo velar por él. (p. 25)

When Hortensia points out how she has been attacked by Pipe, the mother simply replies: he did not mean it, he is just a baby. But her voice grows softer and meeker as Hortensia continues to build arguments on top of arguments and the mother is unable to present emotion as a match for her daughter's logic.

tú ehtáh cansá y por eso filmahte loh
 papeleh porque sabeh que'n ese sitio lo
 atienden máh bien y tu entonceh podráh
 sentalte a ver la gente pasar por la
 calle y cuando te dé la gana puedeh pararte y salir a pasiar como elloh. (p.27)

It is Hortensia who verbalizes the fiction and absurdity in the role the mother pretends to play eternally. It becomes a masochistic relationship with Pipe--she must have someone to suffer for in order to feel needed and thus assure her-

self that she will not be abandoned when she grows old. The mother must always have a baby; someone who will constantly depend on her and give her the sense of belonging she needs to feel secure.

Hortensia is presented as a woman in her late twenties, quite concerned with her physical appearance. Her first appearance in the story is facing the mirror, removing the clips from her hair. While she repeats to her mother once more her reasons for taking Pipe away, Hortensia tries to straighten her hair and puts on excessive make-up.

Hortensia tiró los lápices y el peine dentro del bolso y lo cerró. Se dió vuelta: blusa porosa, labios grasientos, cejas tiznadas, bucles apelmazados. (p. 26)

This woman appears to be a strong, independent person. She makes the decisions that concern the two members of her family and she is not persuaded by emotional outbursts or appeals to the ways of the traditional past. She is a hard worker in a factory and supports her family as well as she can with her limited means. Yet she is not rebelling against the roles imposed on women; on the contrary, she is seeking to become a stereotype--the housewife and mother. In Oscar Lewis' La Vida, women such as Fernanda and her daughter Soledad display similar attitudes. Both are very strong women who will get rid of a man if he dares to step on them. They will then look for a job to support themselves and their children, and will display an arrogance and security that only independent women can afford. But while they were being interviewed, Fernanda and Soledad confessed that what they most yearned in life was to find a nice man to take care of them and their children. Thus they could become good wives and mothers who

did not have to hassle on the streets.¹³

In one of the arguments Hortensia gives her mother, she points out the harshness and difficulty of making out in New York. She spends all her time sewing at the factory and marriage seems forever far away. Hortensia feels that Pipe is not only an obstacle to her mother's happiness--to enjoy a tranquil old age--but to her own, which consists in finding a man who will take care of her. Only then will she be able to rest and forget about factories. Like her mother, Hortensia feels guilty about confining Pipe, her own brother, to an asylum, but she feels she needs a chance in life, and she is willing to relinquish the traditions and customs of a distant island to gain a future in the new city. This ambiguity in the acceptance of new cultural patterns and the conscious renunciation of the set of values she knew are excellently expressed in Hortensia's image on the mirror--a fully made-up face about to be distorted by a display of emotions: "y veía en el espejo el histérico dibujo de carnaval que era su rostro".

Although not as negative as in "Garabatos", since the point of view here is multiple omniscience, women are portrayed as materialistic, egotistical and willing to renounce cultural ties that become obstacles to their acquisition of security based on material wealth. A man's aspirations and emotions are sacrificed in the name of progress and necessity.

"Ausencia" deals with a woman of thirty-two who has been abandoned by her husband and is unable to face this situa-

13 Oscar Lewis, La vida (Mexico: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, 1975).

tion. Altagracia's life becomes a quest for an escape where her husband's absence will be erased. She spends all her days lying down thinking about the past. At times she leaves her apartment and seeks communication with her mother and sister. Altagracia does not feel hunger or need to sleep--she lies awake, as in a trance, reliving her life with her husband Mario. She goes to a spiritualist to seek help in bringing tranquility to her life, but her anguish is increased when she learns that Mario's spirit is pursuing her and that he is the cause of her restlessness.

--Eh que's egoíhta--decía Altagracia--.
No quiere que nadie me quiera. Anoche
ehtuvo en el apartamento, caminando de
un lao a otro, y pol fín entró a mi cuar-
to y me dijo que no me quería vel con
ningún hombre. (p. 34)

Each day Altagracia withdraws from the real world and by the end of the story, she has relinquished reality and built a world of fantasy where Mario still lives with her and makes love to her every night.

Fue a echarse en la cama, bocarriba, di-
ciendo:
--Mario...
Aguardando por él, sacudiendo el cuerpo
y pasando las manos delgadas sobre los
senos que se secaban y los muslos flac-
cidos. Llamando:
--Mario...Mario... (p. 40)

The author's description of Altagracia in the opening paragraph of the story gives a view of this character's internal world.

Altagracia cerró la puerta de su aparta-
mento con tres llaves y chancleteó por
las escaleras hacia el tercer piso, a ca-
sa de su madre, vistiendo la bata sucia

y raída sobre el delgado cuerpo, llevando en el rostro su laxitud de mártir y su anemia, y el cabello esporádicamente canoso, suelto sobre las orejas. (p. 31)

Her voice is weak and listless, a contrast to her mother's dynamic one. She informs her mother that she was offered a job at a factory, but refused it; she feels too tired to work--"Ehtoy cansá". Her husband left three and a half years ago, and to this moment she has been unable to see herself as an independent human being. She prefers to think that her inertia stems from spiritual, uncontrollable forces, and not from her own weakness as a person. Altagracia has learned her role so well that she has no life without a man--only through Mario can she function in society. She can see herself only as wife and mother; the moment those roles are no longer available she crumbles.

To escape the cruelty of a world she thinks she can never change, Altagracia has chosen to become blind to the facts concerning her present situation. When her mother points out that she never goes out and enjoys herself, Altagracia answers that this is Mario's wish and the reason why his spirit follows her everywhere. Her mother reminds her that he abandoned her and reenlisted to escape from her. He never writes or sends you money, her mother says, but not even this argument will force Altagracia to accept the truth. She has created a Mario who adores her and is jealous of her so he will not even allow her to leave the apartment. They drink, and their sensuality overwhelms them and everything is pleasure and happiness.

Emilio Díaz Valcárcel has perceptively summarized the essence of this woman's behavior, who is not a separate case, but one example of how women sublimate their frustrations:

La Altagracia de "Ausencia", pobre mujer tan puertorriqueña y universal, tan desolada y aturdida en un mundo despiadado y ya sin promesas para ella, tan desesperanzada, opta, mediante un oscuro e inconsciente mecanismo mental, por huir de una realidad que no vale la pena vivir, hasta dar en desvarío--solo por momentos-- con la clase de mundo que ella quiere para sí: el amor, las fugaces y necesarias disputas maritales, los hijos, etc.¹⁴

The two other women in this story are stereotyped: Susana is the temptress-mistress, and the mother is the abnegated, sacrificed woman. Susana, Altagracia's sister, is the woman in her thirties who has only recently discovered the pleasures of life once the role of mother and wife are renounced. She seems to be making up for all the time lost in following the traditional role of the single woman who awaits the proper man to come by and conquer her. She works, earns a good salary, goes dancing whenever she wishes, drinks, and stays out until dawn. This is wrong in her mother's eyes, but she cannot stop her, for the environment foments this "liberation".

--...¿Y qué tú piensah hacel con esa muchacha? No piensa máh que en emborrachase y fiehtar. Siempre con un novio dihtinto...
 --Pué...Eh la moda--dijo la madre--.
 ¿Qué quiereh tú que yo haga si eh la moda? En Puerto Rico, en mih tiempo no se veían esah cosah...y hoy día todavía se cuidan lah mujereh allá. Pero aquí hahta loh periódicoh lo exhiben y lo dan pol bien. Eh la moda en Niu Yol... (p.32)

14 "Spiks : Cuentos de Pedro Juan Soto," El Mundo, 15 de diciembre de 1956, p. 22.

Although next to Altagracia the mother is presented as strong, independent and dynamic, in her family relations she assumes the role of martyred mother. She has worked very hard to provide the basic needs for her family. She still takes care of shopping and attends her house now that she has stopped working. She is tied to the reality that Altagracia rejects, yet is unable to bring her daughter to face her situation. Her arguments go unheard, and she is in the end defeated by Altagracia's invocation of the spirits. It does not matter how immersed the mother is in daily life, the realm of spirits still baffles her and she will not dare to enter that domain. With Susana the mother deals in the traditional manner, appealing to pity and emotion to change the strange ways of this "modern" woman.

Y Susana no se pierde una fiesta y bebe como un hombre y llega de madrugada a la casa, a escandalizar como un hombre endiablado. Después que tanto prometió cuando a mí me dió el ataque al corazón y le dije que no me matara a disgustos. (p. 35)

"Dios en Harlem" is the longest narrative in this collection of stories. The protagonist is Nena, a twenty-two year old prostitute who is six months pregnant. Just like Matilde in "Garabatos", Nena feels trapped: pregnant and poor in a cold, indifferent city is the pathetic condition these women must suffer. Perhaps Nena is in a better position since she must count on her own strength and judgement to make any decision and continue to survive. Yet, whether a woman gives up or continues to struggle, circumstances will defeat her in the end. Referring to all of Soto's characters in Spiks, Victoria Ortiz states:

In these inhumane surroundings, his protagonists struggle and love and fail and endure with will and violence and passion; they often end in madness, self-delusion, or despair, but not before striking out against whatever has oppressed them.¹⁵

Nena's measure of strength lies in her ability to challenge her pimp Microbio. He embodies in José Emilio González' words "la ríjosa virilidad de un irresponsable de los bajos fondos: el machismo parasitario".¹⁶ He will attempt to reduce her to her proper role of passive, submissive sex object whose life motivation must be serving her man. As Nena awkwardly and inexpertly surmounts each pattern piece, she becomes a human being. She first defies Microbio when she discovers she is pregnant and refuses to have an abortion, for she fears to damage her body.

--No me lo saqué porque' so no trabaja
tua lah veceh. Polque yo no quiero andar
por ahí como Argelia, con los ovarioh
y la matrih fuera de su sitio. (p. 57)

When she is six-months pregnant and can no longer get money as a prostitute, she seeks out Microbio and asks him to face up to his responsibilities by helping her out until she gives birth. The man can only answer this aggressiveness with verbal and physical violence. He threatens Nena with a knife if she continues to pester him with this child business of which he wants no part. And if this threat on Nena's life were not enough, Microbio humiliates her by mocking her naiveté (p.58). Against this force, she is impotent. Nena feels alone and

15 Victoria Ortiz, p. 17.

16 Reseña de Spiks, Asomante, XIII, No.4 (octubre-diciembre 1957), 90.

finds no compassion or support from the people around her (p. 58).

It is at this point that Nena questions her strength and assurance as an independent being. She always thought herself strong and able to manage on her own. Lying on a dirty cot in her shabby room, Nena remembers when she was seventeen and decided to discover the sensuous world all her friends were constantly speaking about. Instead of waiting for a man to initiate her, Nena reverses the traditional roles and traps a man to serve her purpose (pp. 61-62). She was never shy about what she wanted, whether it was pleasure or money. It is only now with her pregnancy that Nena feels she must rely on someone.

Although frustration is the pervading feeling in this part of the story, the second scene begins and ends on an optimistic tone when Microbio seems to be willing to abandon his role and become a human being. When Microbio makes love to her, Nena is convinced that she has found happiness and that everything will go well from here on. For to be loved and desired is a woman's motivation to continue living.

Quería que la vida siguiera siempre así,
que no fuera más que un largo acto sexual
con significado. Un solo hombre para po-
ner fin a su soledad. Un solo cuerpo.
Una sola voz. (p. 70)

But dreams are not timeless; they are made of glass and easily shattered. Nena wakes up to find that Microbio has gone, taking with him most of her savings. Yet her reaction is not passivity and compliance. She immediately goes out into the streets searching for him. Their encounter ends in a violent scene where Nena is struck over and over again, losing not only the battle but the child-hope of her dreams.

Pero ellos seguían salvos en la maldad.
 Sólo perdía un mundo: la esperanza. Por-
 que no le quedaba nada por hacer. Perdido
 el hijo, perdida ella. El mañana no exis-
 tía. No existiría más que el infierno de
 la soledad, la continuación de una aventu-
 ra comenzada cinco años atrás. (p. 77)

Left alone to face an empty life full of filth and misery where feelings are bought and love and hope only exist in a woman's imagination, Nena escapes, like Altagracia in "Ausencia", into a world where a person can still achieve a ray of happiness. In this dream world, God has seen her misery and has rewarded her by giving her a child who will redeem the wretched of the earth. Nena had rejected the stereotypes she had been taught to follow, but she had never found her true self because of her impending need to survive. She covered all the road she could within the limits of her education, upbringing, relationships and environment. All her strength had been exhausted in this pursuit. Now that she feels she has no one to turn to, she stops in the middle of a road that seems to have reached a dead end, and chooses to begin to live once more by adopting the archetypes of Eve and the Virgin Mary. Nena has sinned, suffered and repented like Eve, and now she has been granted the opportunity to redeem all humanity by giving birth to this child, just like the Virgin Mary.

Y palpándose el vientre susurraba:
 --Diosehtaquí Diosehtaquí diosehtaquí...
 No conocía el dolor, ni el odio, ni la
 agrura. Nacía. (p. 78)

Unlike René Marqués, Soto's women characters in Spiks cannot be separated into classes. The poor and the slums in New York are Soto's themes. His concern lies in how these

characters struggle, survive and are many times defeated in an environment that is alien and antagonistic. Soto's portrayal of female characters is very close to the women interviewed by Oscar Lewis for his anthropological study La vida. Whether young, middle age or old, these women are extremely concerned about sex. Their lives revolve around the men they go to bed with. These men control women because of their ability to provide the sensual pleasure women need. Soto's female characters might be concerned about food, shelter, religion and family, but their happiness or sadness is determined by how well their sexual needs are fulfilled. Soto breaks with the stereotype of the woman who consents to have sex only when she is forced; he portrays his women with the same sexual appetite as men. Altagracia and Nena escape into a world of fantasy when their lives are empty of men who once loved them. Hortensia and Fernanda can only see fulfillment in sharing a bed with a man. Thus, by breaking the sex taboo in the portrayal of women, Soto develops many of his characters outside the traditional female stereotypes in literature.

...yo quise dejar Puerto Rico porque me sentía acosada porque tuve muchos problemas; me señalaban por mis manifestaciones políticas, mi enfrentamiento a mi padre, mi divorcio, mi revista que fue calificada de pornográfica sin serlo naturalmente, mi afiliación al Partido Socialista al cual pertenecí durante cuatro años, en resumen, fui la auténtica oveja negra. Además, como Puerto Rico es muy pequeño no podía dar un paso; me sentía vigilada, perseguida, mi vida personal era para los puertorriqueños, bueno para algunos, un escándalo terrible.

Novedades, Mexico y su cultura,

Rosario Ferré

One of the youngest writers in Puerto Rico to have published a book of the quality of Papeles de Pandora is Rosario Ferré. Before 1970, she was unknown in literary circles and only mentioned in newspapers as the daughter of a prominent businessman and politician.

Born in Ponce, Puerto Rico's largest southern city, and belonging to a very wealthy family, Ferré's world consisted of private schools, clubhouses, exclusive social events and extensive European travel. As was the custom, she studied in the United States and was graduated from Manhattanville College with a major in American and English literature. The only purpose of these studies seemed to be an advantageous marriage. So, once more, Ferré disappeared into the world of husband and children.

By the late sixties, Ferré had decided to attend graduate school at the Universidad de Puerto Rico to study Latin American literature. There she came into close contact with visiting professors Angel Rama and Mario Vargas Llosa, and with young writers eager to experiment with language and form, to separate themselves from the "old masters" and to create their own group and periodical. It was very hard for Ferré to penetrate this circle, for she had always been identified as part of a social class and a political position rejected by most Puerto Rican writers.

Yet, very slowly but firmly, Ferré began to shed the skins that suffocated her creative vein. She denounced her family's political position, identifying herself with left-wing groups; she left behind the security of a marriage of many years; and she began to discover herself as a woman writer aware of her country's reality and attempting to reach out to the rest of that society she never knew existed.

In 1972 Rosario united with a very diverse group of writers to found one of the best literary magazines in Puerto Rico, Zona, Carga y Descarga. The periodical defined itself as a zone of confrontation and search. It was committed to literary renovation, independence, and social justice.¹ Not all collaborators were young writers starting to publish in the seventies; Francisco Manrique Cabrera, José Emilio González, Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, Arcadio Díaz Quiñones and Luis Rafael Sánchez were sought for articles, interviews and creative writing. The editorial board was composed of prose writers Rosario Ferré, Manuel Ramos Otero and the poets Olga Nolla, Luis César Rivera, Etnairis and Iván Silén. The magazine was able to establish close ties with well-known Latin American writers residing in Europe, such as Severo Sarduy and Julio Cortázar, and also receive contributions from French critic Jean-Michel Fossey. During its three years of existence, Zona filled the void left when many literary magazines of the sixties, Guajana, Ventana, Mester, collapsed.²

After Zona, Ferré left Puerto Rico for a temporary stay in Mexico, where she took with her some manuscripts, collected the stories published in periodicals, and went searching for a publisher. The result of that voyage was the publication of Papeles de Pandora in 1976, consisting of fourteen short stories and six poems. Her influences are many, but although

1 Juan Martínez Capó, "La escena literaria," El Mundo, 1ero de octubre de 1972, p. 28.

2 Some of these magazines are still published today, but they lack financial means and organization to publish regularly and to distribute the issues outside of university circles.

immersed in Cortázar's world of fantasy, she has learned from the master while creating her own real/unreal world. She denounces her own social class, but is able to keep a distance between her personal feelings and her creative subject, and to express this using techniques and language she completely controls. In one of the few analyses of this book, José Emilio González comments on Ferré's prodigious capacity to create images.³ It is the fusion of her mastery of language, her choice of technical devices in accordance with theme, her use of fantasy, horror, absurdity, magic and metamorphosis, her rejection of melodrama and political statements and her appeal to black humor, satire, parody and irony⁴ that makes Rosario Ferré one of Puerto Rico's most important writers today.

In the six short stories I have chosen to discuss from Rosario Ferré's Papeles de Pandora,⁵ the protagonists are women aware of their oppression because of their sex and social class. Not all of these characters rebel against the mold they have been sentenced to remain in forever; some escape into fantasy. But unlike Soto's Altagracia and Nena, Ferré's women never confront reality. They are closer to Gabriel García M'arquez' women who build such a true world in their fantasy, that their reality becomes a world of magic and enchantment. Perhaps be-

3 "Relatos de Pandora de Rosario Ferré," Claridad (Suplemento En Rojo), 30 de julio-5 de agosto 1977, p. 13.

4 Juan Martínez Capó, "Libros de Puerto Rico", El Mundo, 27 de febrero de 1977, p. 7-B.

5 Rosario Ferré, Papeles de Pandora (Mexico: Joaquín Mortiz, 1976). All the stories discussed will be taken from this collection and all quotes indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

cause Ferré chooses the very rich and the very poor, class awareness is constantly present in the lives of these women. Like Soto, and going a step further, Ferré has also broken with the sex taboo, and her use of language is a continuous bombardment of the hypocrisy of a society that oppresses women with its cult to virginity, while it glorifies man's virility as he deflowers any woman who comes his way.

orinándomeles encima para que se pudieran venir, para que sus papás pudieran por fin dormir tranquilos porque los hijos que ellos habían parido no les habían salido mariconcitos, no les habían salido santolitos con el culo astillado de porcelana.
(p. 35)

Juan Martínez Capó has pointed out that one of Ferré's basic themes in this collection of stories is the feminine role as woman-doll who struggles to be emancipated from the marriage-economy trap.⁶ With the exception of two characters, Ferré's protagonists belong to the upper-middle class, and their main concern is their oppression as women in the marriage bond. The other two protagonists belong to the poor class--one is a prostitute; the other is a maid--and their concern is as women degraded by the upper class because of their sex and economic condition.

Ferré develops the story "Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres" by alternating the point of view between the two protagonists, Isabel Luberza and Isabel la Negra, and shifting back and forth from first person to third person narrator. These two women are linked by their love for the same man--Ambrosio. One woman was his wife and the other his mistress; one belonged to a wealthy class and the other to the poor.

⁶ Juan Martínez Capó, "Rosario Ferré: Papeles de Pandora," El Mundo, 27 de febrero de 1977, p. 7-B.

Both were molded to correspond to two stereotypes--the submissive wife and the mistress-seductress. Isabel Luberza was taught to obey her husband, to be faithful to him, to submit to his desires and in turn, she would be protected and loved.

para poder pensar que he sido tu mujercita querida como debe ser, económica y limpia pero sobre todo su dechado de honestidad, tabernáculo tranquilo de tu pene rosado que yo siempre llevo adentro, un roto cosido y bien apretado con hilo cien para los demás. (p. 42)

It is part of her role to accept his wayward ways without resentment; discover other ways of attracting him once more. But a lady can not win him in bed, for she is not supposed to derive pleasure from such an animal act; she simply complies with her duty as wife.

Yo entonces me tendía en la cama y me dejaba hacer. Pero siempre mantenía los ojos muy abiertos por encima de tus hombros que se doblaban una y otra vez en el esfuerzo para no perderla de vista, para que no se fuera a creer que me le estaba entregando ni por equivocación. (pp. 39-40)

Isabel Luberza believes that by certain acts of gallantry in which her femininity and subtlety are manifested, she will persuade Ambrosio to forget his mistress'body. She reminds him of their name, their upbringing, and their sacred bond.

Colocaba sobre tu cama las sábanas todavía tibias de sol bebido, blancas y suaves bajo la palma de la mano como un muro de cal, esparciéndolas siempre al revés para luego doblarlas al derecho y desplegar así, para deleitarte cuando te acostabas, un derroche de rosas y mariposas matizadas, los hilos amorosos del rosa más tenue, de un rosa de azú-

car refinada que te acordará la alcurnia
de nuestros apellidos. (p. 40)

But she wages a losing battle against passion, spontaneity,
and perhaps even love.

Pero todo fue inútil. Margaritas arroja-
das a los cerdos. Perlas al estercolero.
(p. 40)

Isabel la Negra's earliest recollection of her life is
her self image as an object of desire and pleasure. She was
taught how to please a man in bed, and she was forced to per-
form this role over and over until she became a master of the
art.

cómo me tuviste encerrada durante tantos
años en aquel rancho de tablones con te-
cho de zinc, condenada a pasarme los días
sacándole los quesos a los niñitos ricos,
a los hijos de tus amigos que tú me traías
para que le hagas el favor Isabel, para
que le abras esas ganas enlatadas que trae
el pobre, coño Isabel, no seas así, tú eres
la única que sabes, tu eres la mejor que lo
haces, contigo nada más podemos. (p. 35)

So Isabel la Negra becomes the sex initiator for the rich,
young boys, and the paradise of delight for grown men. With
her everything is permitted; inhibitions do not exist. They
learn how to draw full pleasure from sex, one must be aggres-
sive, but also passive.

para enseñarles que las verdaderas mujeres
no son sacos que se dejan impalar contra
la cama, que el hombre más macho no es el
que enloquece a la mujer sino el que tiene
el valor de dejarse enloquecer, enseñándolos
a enloquecer conmigo, ocultos en mi prostí-
bulo, donde nadie sabrá que ellos también
se han dejado hacer, que ellos han sido ma-
silla entre mis manos, para que entonces

puedan, orondos como gallos, enloquecer
a las blanquitas... (p. 36)

With Ambrosio's economic aid, Isabel la Negra builds a famous brothel and the poor mistress becomes the wealthy matron. This character is very closely modelled on García Márquez' Pilar Ternera in Cien años de soledad. When old, both women continue to be sensuous and never lose that joie de vivre which always characterized them.

With Ambrosio's death and his bequeathment of money and property into equal parts to his wife and mistress, the two women begin to merge into one. The process had really begun when each acknowledged the existence and importance of the other, but they come together only when the man that tied them disappears. Isabel Lubenza, the fine, delicate, pink-skinned lady begins to dress in flashy clothes and red dancing slippers. Isabel la Negra, the coarse, ignorant black whore begins to dress in a moderate tone and to use subdued perfume.

Porque nosotras, Isabel Lubenza e Isabel
la Negra, en nuestra pasión por tí, Am-
brosio, desde el comienzo de los siglos,
nos habíamos estado acercando, nos había-
mos estado santificando la una a la otra
sin darnos cuenta, purificándonos de todo
aquello que nos definía, a una como pros-
tituta y a la otra como dama de sociedad.
(p. 27)

In this story Ferré has taken two common stereotypes in literature and drawn from them two sides of every person-- every woman is both Isabel Lubenza and Isabel la Negra. Women play at being ladies and at being whores, whichever role suits the man at a given moment. It is only the invisible but destructive confinement of social class which determines which part a woman will eventually play.

Rosario Ferré va acercando la virginidad y la prostitución, valiéndose de toda clase de reminiscencias bíblicas para subrayar la corrupción social y moral, al mismo tiempo que se comienza el análisis de una clase social y de la condición femenina.⁷

The theme of doll-woman serves as axis to the story "Amalia". Both the girl-protagonist and her doll are named Amalia. They are very white and delicate; the sun is their common enemy, so their world is confined to the dark chambers of the house. Outside lie danger and death. When the story begins, Amalia is a child of ten, over protected by her widowed mother because of her weakness and ailment. Amalia is watched by four servants to prevent her from escaping to the courtyard during the day and lying in the sun, for the heat is mortally dangerous to her body.

verle esa piel blancucina y transparente como un bulbo de cebolla encogiéndose y ensortijándose al menor contacto con el calor, ver el agua que le sale por todas partes como si fuera una vejiga y no una niña y la estuvieran esprimiendo. (p. 65)

Amalia is always dressed like a doll--a clean, white dress with white shoes and a white bow on her hair. Only when she goes to the sun is her whiteness soiled.

Her uncle, the military officer, brings Amalia a beautiful doll dressed as a bride, all in white whom she names Amalia and projects onto it all her traits for like her, it can not be exposed to the sun. After her mother's death, her

7 Arcadio Díaz Quiñones, Prólogo, Sin Nombre, V, no. 4 (abril-junio 1975), 7.

uncle takes charge of the household and brings with him his own servants--Gabriel, the black chauffeur, and three maids: María, Adela and Leonor who will become Amalia's companions. These women, poor and dark-skinned, are at the mercy of their employer. They not only clean and take care of Amalia, but must also entertain and serve as sex objects for the uncle and his friends. Amalia, although a child, observes these acts and after naming her newest three dolls after the maids, projects their lives in this fantasy world she has created. She assigns them roles, and if they try to escape, they are punished (p. 74).

A new doll is added when Amalia asks her uncle for a male companion for her doll. She transforms the blonde, military officer (her uncle's image) into a black chauffeur (like Gabriel). Amalia rejects her uncle not only verbally insulting him after listening to his propositions, but symbolically by transforming the doll he had given her into another man. She must be punished for this transgression, so Amalia is left in the courtyard with her doll to slowly die under a ball of fire (pp. 79-80).

The world of dolls and the world of human beings merge to create Amalia's illusion of reality. She is a girl who is also a doll with a fixed role she must either accept or be destroyed for rebelling against what is expected of her. Within this world of dolls and people, there is a further separation which, if breached, is also punished by death. Amalia, her mother and uncle belong to a social class in which skin color and wealth are determinant. Gabriel, María, Adela and Leonor are part of the dark-skinned poor who may be employed and granted favors, but never allowed to become part of another class. When Amalia substitutes the white officer for the black

chauffeur, she turns against her passive role of woman and the inflexible social class she belongs to, which she must never question or change.

Although Marina is the protagonist of "Marina y el león," the setting is the element underscored, since the author's purpose is apparently to denounce the rise of an economic empire. Marina fits into this scheme, but she remains unaware of the transformation from natural beauty to artificial ornament which is taking place around her. She sees everything as through a glass-stained window; everything has a dream-like sensation.

A través de aquella superficie dura y viscosa a la vez, Marina vio pasar el mundo aquella noche como si estuviera recubierto por una capa de barniz, abillantado en miles de pliegues que se estriaban en prismas al atravesarlos la luz. Es como si la estuviera soñando, se dijo. Mi vida toda es como la veo ahora, lejana y reluciente, exactamente como si la estuviera soñando. (p. 93)

Marina, just like Isabel Lubenza, is the wealthy young woman who is sold in marriage to someone from her own social class. Her world consists of a house full of servants, beautiful and delicate objects, social gatherings, beautiful wardrobes. She is completely surrounded by beauty; the ugliness of poverty is hidden outside the walls of her house. She is raised to be a doll, a beautiful ornament to be disposed of according to the owner's desires. Marina marries Juan Jacobo who opens a cement factory and becomes obsessed with expanding his business. Marina is merely a spectator; she does not participate in this economic activity, except as

a recipient of its profit which assures her a life of leisure.

Since she is a woman taught to depend on a man and to fear being alone and independent, Marina moves to her brother-in-law's house when her husband collapses and is confined to a sanatorium. She witnesses how Marco Antonio transforms his house into a cement labyrinth isolating the family from the people and country they are part of. Everything that is natural is replaced by exotic and artificial ornaments.

Entonces levantó tapias y murallas por todas partes, convirtió el antes sombreado jardín en un acordeón de cemento que reverberaba al sol, convirtió la casa en un complicado trompe-l'oeil, salas iluminadas por arañas de cristales pobladas de divanes para conversar, abrían en su centro bañeras rosadas en forma de concha, escaleras de caracol elevaban inútiles pasamanos de filigrana de plata hasta las azoteas vacías. (p. 99)

Yet, as long as natural elements remain, Marina can escape through the majesty of Marco Antonio's lion, her own beautiful macaw and the bougainvillea vines which cover her windows. Through them, Marina can forget the closure of the house and her own life molded by her brother-in-law.

Madelaine, Marco Antonio's wife, represents the indiscriminate assimilation of everything which money can buy--trips, houses, luxury, lovers and even a lion to purr when stroked and roar when hungry. Madelaine attempts to shake Marina out of her dream world by confronting her with the emptiness in the life she is leading since Juan Jacobo's confinement. Madelaine is even willing to share her husband so that Marina can enjoy some of life's pleasures.

date tú también tu viajecito con Marco Antonio, darling, yo te cedo el turno, a mí no me importa nada, te juro, hay que dar del ala para comer de la pechuga, como dicen, y yo sé que tú te mueres por ir con él. (p. 98)

Marina has withdrawn from reality and prefers to see life in the same way as when she dressed as a doll for one of the great balls she organized.

Se mandó hacer un precioso vestido de muñeca, con mitones de perlas y zapatillas de raso con grandes lazos blancos en las puntas. La metieron en una caja forrada de seda y envuelta en papel de celofán. (p. 93)

In the last scene of the story, Marina is surrounded by a completely natural setting--the lion, the macaw and the bougainvillea she is trimming. Without sounds or violent movements, Marina perceives how the lion devours the macaw, and then how Marco Antonio shoots the lion. She feels her brother-in-law's caresses but continues to trim the vines.

Mi vida toda es como la veo ahora, se dijo Marina una vez más al sentir las caricias de Marco Antonio mientras seguía podando la enredadera, lejana y reluciente como si estuviese recubierta por una capa de barniz, exactamente como si la estuviera soñando. (p. 102)

Their sex act becomes a duel between a world of artificiality and nature. Both are extremes; both defend their postures for egotistical purposes; both are destroyed for their inability to understand the world they live in.

se revolcaron hasta el amanecer entre las llamas crujientes de la trinitaria como entre serpentinas fulminantes del año nue-

vo chino, ella le enroscó al cuello las
lenguas de papel de seda púrpura de los
capullos para divertirlo, para demostrar-
le cómo era que se hacía el amor en el
mundo antes de que él lo convirtiera en
un paraíso de nieve de yeso, en un mar
que se podía pulir de orilla a orilla en
estepas de lapizlázuli, en una laguna de
aguas podridas, bordada de lentejuelas.
(p. 103)

In a Faulknerian style and thematic, Marina and Marco Antonio embrace within the destruction by fire of the dream castle both built--one in her mind, the other in reality.

Once more Ferré presents woman in this social class as fragile, porcelain figures, who seek protection from men and avoid being destroyed by escaping into a world of beauty. They look at reality through veils that distort the cruelty and ugliness they are unable to face and accept.

The double image of woman-doll blends into a woman actually becoming a doll in "La muñeca menor". The protagonist is a young woman who suffers from an infection on her leg which doctors are unable to diagnose. She withdraws from the outside world and in time becomes the old maid aunt who rears her nieces. She makes dolls the size of her nieces, and the older the girls become, the bigger the doll until the moment they fulfill their role as married women.

Las manos y la cara de estas muñecas,
sin embargo, se notaban menos trans-
parentes, tenían la consistencia de la
leche cortada. Esta diferencia encubría
otra más sutil: la muñeca de boda no es-
taba jamás rellena de guata, sino de miel.
(p. 13)

The youngest niece's turn to marry comes when she meets the son of her aunt's doctor. With this marriage the protagonist becomes the young niece. She abandons her maternal home

with her aunt's present (the life-size doll) and leads a life of boredom and passivity. As she discovers how money-minded and cruel her husband is, she continues to withdraw from reality becoming more and more one of her aunt's dolls. As the years go by, the husband becomes a millionaire and the niece becomes more doll-like. He notices that while he grows old, she continues to look the same as when they were married. He decides to look at her closely one night, and he then discovers a doll which opened her lids, but instead of eyes, which the young doctor had once removed to sell, there were live chágaras, the symbol of decay of a profit-making society (p. 15).

The story is an excellent example of literature of the fantastic with a strong influence of Julio Cortázar's short narratives. Ferré again presents women as dolls with no will and whose only usefulness is to look beautiful. Men are portrayed once more as greedy business persons who will disregard all moral to achieve their economic goals. Ferré implies that men are unable to love because their concern for money does not allow them to feel and give themselves to another human being. Their goal in life is to achieve power and to reduce all their surroundings, including the people near them, to objects which they will be able to control and use for their economic advancement.

Rosario Ferré has stated that she considers bourgeois women to be victims, for they never participate in the corruption of power. It is only when they marry that they then indirectly participate of this corruption through their husbands.

Ella maneja el poder por reflejo por medio del marido, pero yo alego que hasta el momento de casarse la mujer es parte del Tercer Mundo como quien

dice porque es como los niños, como los negros, como todos los seres oprimidos del mundo. Es un ser inocente. Por eso para mí, la novia es una imagen muy importante y regreso a ella constantemente en Papeles de Pandora.⁸

In "La bella durmiente" the woman-protagonist is not only virtuous before marriage, but also refuses to participate in the power struggle even after her matrimony by rebelling against the role she has been encased in.

María de los Angeles Fernández is the only child of a well-known, wealthy family. She is raised to be delicate, beautiful, educated, but she also develops a passion for ballet, approved as good exercise but never as a profession. Decent girls do not exhibit their bodies on stage; it does not matter what art form is used as an excuse. At the request of the Mother Superior where María de los Angeles studies and fully agreeing, Fabiano and Elizabeth forbid their daughter to dance again. María de los Angeles falls into a stupor, sleeping for more than ten days, until a young man whispers in her ear and she awakes once more to the world from which she attempted to escape. A marriage is arranged as a reward for her healing, and María de los Angeles consents when Felisberto promises to allow her to dance.

The wedding follows the traditional display of customs and lavishness. María de los Angeles believes that she has acquired the freedom she needed to express herself through body movement. But when she explains to her husband that she can not become pregnant because this would damage her figure

⁸ Elena Poniatowska, "Rosario Ferré, dice que es una feminista independiente," Mexico en la Cultura, Novedades, 13 de julio de 1977, p. 6.

and she could then never become a great ballerina, she is reproved for rejecting her natural role of mother. After Felisberto tries to persuade her by offering her expensive gifts and appealing to her responsibility as a wife and a potential mother, he decides to exert his power as a man--he rapes his wife and impregnates her. This scene recalls the protagonist's anguish in René Marqués' "En la popa hay un cuerpo reclinado". In Ferré's context, the victim is not the man, but the woman who must always submit to her husband's desires or be violently subdued.

María de los Angeles turns her back on all the groups that have oppressed her--family, society and church--and dedicates herself to dancing. However, there is a hidden guilt for having forsaken all that was meant to embody and rule her life, so she must punish herself. In the same way as the protagonist of Luis Bunuel's classic film "Belle de Jour", María de los Angeles must degrade herself by rejecting the aspects that were held sacred for a woman--she must imitate a whore to feel once more, to know she is alive. When she is killed by her husband, she has received the final punishment that María de los Angeles believes will at last make her free.

The roles women must play have been created by society, the Church and the family. Only a total rejection of all three will liberate women from the chains that turn them into doll-objects. Francisca Rodríguez in her review of this story discusses at length the theme of a woman's oppression in society; it is a domination with its own peculiarities according to each social class.⁹ Ferré argues best when she deals

9 "Papeles de Pandora", Claridad (En Rojo), 1-7 de julio de 1977, p. 7.

with the upper middle-class. Ms. Rodríguez uses four points presented in this story to illustrate how society imprisons women into fixed roles, and always has a reserve of sanctions if they ever rebel. First, an only child should never be a girl. It is a boy all men desire as their first born, for he will carry the family name and inherit the father's power and wealth.¹⁰

Nuestra desgracia está en haber tenido una hija y no un hijo, que hubiese sabido atender nuestro capital y nuestro nombre. Porque el que pierde su capital en esta sociedad pierde también el nombre.
(pp. 137-38)

Second, a woman is raised not to be a productive member of society, but a passive companion for someone. Third, with a daughter, parents will only fulfill their duty when she is married to someone who will give her the protection and security she has been accustomed to in her own house.¹¹ In this upper middle-class world, a woman's alternatives are either marriage or conventry, but if she is an only child, she must marry in order to protect the family's fortune. Fourth, marriage and maternity go together, and they are viewed as rough stones which every woman must climb over and accept as part of her life.¹²

María de los Angeles rebels against these roles, but like Ferre's other protagonists, she escapes into a world of fantasy, in this case her dancing. However, she is unable

10 Francisca Rodríguez, p. 7.

11 Francisca Rodríguez, p. 7.

12 Francisca Rodríguez, p. 7.

to protect that world from the stones that her family and society continue to hurl; in time her rebellion becomes self-destructive. Only in death will she be free of those invisible chains that suffocate her. María de los Angeles' last thoughts express her inner desires.

algo la arrastraba y se la llevaba lejos
ni protegida ni dulce ni honrada ni tran-
quila María de los Angeles tú tranquila
de cascarón de huevo el dinero se hace de
cascarón de huevo ni sometida ni conforme
ni (p. 169)

Of all the stories in Papeles de Pandora, "El collar de camándulas" best brings together the theme of woman's oppression not only as a bourgeois but also as a proletariat, expressed in a style developed through the discovery and mastery of the techniques used by William Faulkner and Gabriel García Márquez. Ferré presents the story of two women who dared to love freely, to upset all conventions, and who are punished by having the man they loved obliterated and by being obliged to continue to live within the patterns set forth by society. Although belonging to different social groups and having their adventures occur twenty years apart, both women are one protagonist of the same story. Just as the story of the Buendía family is repeated again and again, these two women emerge from fixed roles, rebel, and are punished by becoming two links of a perpetual repetition.

The story is told by Armantina, the maid, to one of the sons of the household, Arcadio, who is also her lover. It is the story of Arcadio's mother which twenty years after will be repeated in Armantina's life. The mother had led the passive role of wife and mother of two sons when a man with a guitar on his back and a necklace of camándula seeds

passed through the town and brought with him the mysteries of a life of wandering and freedom.

al principio era como si la guitarra rezongara un poco removiendo todavía vaga las alas sobre el lomo pero luego era como si devorara de golpe todas las hojas y todos los pájaros que pasaban veloces arriba como si el sonido le saliera sin parar por la punta de los dedos que va apretando rechinando por encima de la curva fría de la tapa de aluminio como por la curva de otro cielo (p. 107)

The mother would sit on the plaza with the poor and listen to him, not caring about people's comments that she was out of place, for she should be home with husband and children. She upset the mold and was punished for it--her husband made her sign the papers that transferred all her property to him, since she was incapable of executing her own state. When the man with the guitar disappears, leaving behind a camándula necklace and an unborn child, this woman went back to the role of wife and mother, accepting this destiny with a silent protest for she never uttered a word again.

After the mother's death, Armantina is the only person in this household capable of loving and giving herself without asking for reciprocity. She is dangerous to the other members of the household because she cannot be encased in a mold which would allow them to control her. She is free and passionate, just like Arcadio's mother dreamed of being once, but who was only able to taste some moments of that happiness before being enslaved once more.

By becoming Arcadio's companion, Armantina has transgressed social barriers and must be punished. Society blames her for Arcadio's attitude--his concern for the poor and rejection for his own class. She is the woman temptress and

deceitful whore responsible for the way Arcadio has turned against his family. Armantina bears the insults and mistreatment of the family once Arcadio has left aware of her position as a mere servant in the household. Her strength lies on her love for Arcadio which, she is certain, overcomes social class barriers. In the same way that the protagonist of Soto's "Dios en Harlem" wages a losing battle against brute force, Armantina is beaten by the members of this family until she vomits Arcadio's address and in the beating loses her child. Armantina never speaks again. She has assumed the mother's mode of withdrawing; communication has ceased. She will perform her role, as a doll would; there are no feelings, only automatic, trained response (p. 115).

When the mother's free spirit was broken, she withdrew and conformed while the family assured itself another victory over rebellion. But Armantina aims to redeem herself and all women whose free spirit is silenced by tradition. Pretending that the past is forgotten, she gives each member of the family a piece of the mother's favorite dessert but with an extra ingredient--poison. Armantina has destroyed her oppressors and has liberated herself from the institutions that held her down by exploiting her as a woman and as a proletariat. In the end Armantina and the mother become the same woman whose spirit was perhaps silenced but never crushed.

me levanto por fin de la esquina donde
he estado sentada tanto tiempo y me voy
caminando por el medio de la calle ha-
ciendo mío el camino que se abre al fren-
te porque ahora estoy segura que no vas
a regresar ahora puedo irme tranquila can-
tando caminando gastando el camino del otro
mundo que se pierde allá lejos el collar
que tú me regalaste la estrella de matos y

camándulas abiertas por fin sobre mi
pecho (p. 117)

Although Rosario Ferré tends to focus on the oppression bourgeois women suffer, the stereotypes continue to be the same for all women, and their rebellion and chastisement follow a similar pattern. These women are educated to please and to be attractive to men, since their sole goal in life is marriage. After this stage, women take on the stereotype of the passive, submissive wife, who is not allowed to partake of her husband's outside business world. She must remain a recipient, never an active agent in the family's economy. Preserving the role of wife, she must also become the sacrificed mother whose meaning of existence depends on her children's upbringing. If she is unable to assume the wife/mother role, she must then conform to be the old-maid aunt dedicated entirely to her family.

A lo largo del libro Papeles de Pandora las mujeres activan una insubordinación manifiesta en los retos a las humillaciones permanentes, los machismos insólitos y las hipocrecías de casta y clase. La venganza culmina, pues, unos procesos interiores resueltos por la tenacidad individual y el deseo ferviente de ser, llana y sencillamente, una persona.¹³

All of Ferré's women rebel against their roles. Isabel Luberza and María de los Angeles assume another stereotype--the seductress-lover; they humiliate their families by becoming what every "decent" wife and mother must reject, and in turn degrade themselves as a form of punishment for their non-conformity. Amalia and Marina deceive themselves

13 Luis Rafael Sánchez, "Claves iniciales de Papeles de Pandora", Claridad (En Rojo), 21 al 27 de abril 1978, p.11.

by dreaming their lives. The young niece in "La muñeca menor" and the mother in "El collar de camándulas" face their oppressive situation, and even if only for a while, follow their spirit and escape into an affair with a wanderer or into a corporal disappearance from reality. Only Armantina, a poor woman, turns against her oppressors to assert her existence as a human being.

Puerto Rico: Marqués, Soto, Ferré

René Marqués and Pedro Juan Soto characterize women according to social class in contemporary Puerto Rican society. Although they set out from types, each writer creates his own reality for his female characters. Both accept the traditional roles for women as wife and mother. But because of factors beyond their control, they cannot fulfill these roles. As a result, they become frustrated and either turn into aggressive, destructive agents or else escape into a fantasy world.

Marqués' middle-class women are materialistic, overly concerned with the acquisition of useless objects, and eager to replace men as breadwinners and heads of household. They destroy men's illusions and reduce their virility to a mere satisfaction of women's whims. On the other hand, poor women are presented as exploited human beings, who are deceived and used in a world that values people as other objects in the exchange market. These women yearn to be wives and mothers, but are prevented from assuming these roles because of economic conditions.

Soto's middle-class women follow Marqués' pattern, but his poor female characters are presented in other dimensions. They are extremely concerned about their sexual desires, and most of their frustration comes from the inability to satisfy this need, and not from a dream-like platonic love. Just as they worry about food and shelter, sex is always on their minds, and even their world of fantasy is permeated with the joy of having a man to make love to.

It is too early at this point to formulate a theory concerning the differences, if they exist, in the way men and women write. Nevertheless, it can be asserted that women writers portray women differently from men writers. Rosario

Ferré also departs from the female stereotype, but sets out to create characters who rebel against their role in an attempt to destroy the stereotype and emerge as human beings. Ferré ascribes to male characters many of the traits Marqués and Soto reserve for women. Her men are selfish, materialistic, unscrupulous, and only concerned with the acquisition of wealth that will enable them to control everything around them, including women. In contrast to this, Ferré's women are victims of an education that has trained them to be lovable wives and adorable mothers with nothing else to look forward to. They are bought in marriage and used as ornaments in their gilded cage. Whenever they rebel against this enslavement, they are treated as outcasts and obligated in time to come back and fulfill their only duty in life. These women thus escape into a world of fantasy where they will be hidden from social pressure.

Although Ferré mostly portrays bourgeois women, her characterization of working women is drawn from similar patterns. As poor, economically dependent women, they are exploited because of their class and sex. Whenever they attempt to rebel, they are punished not only by their direct oppressors, but also by the law, always at the service of the rich.

Ferré's women are class-conscious, and their rebellion comes when they attain sex-consciousness. They are portrayed as the bearers of true feelings in a world that turns at the sound of silver coins. On the contrary, Marqués and Soto's women are either strong or weak, unaware of their oppression, taking turns in being destructive agents or passive victims in a rapidly changing society.

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CHAPTER THREE: CUBA

--al dar a nuestro pueblo una nueva confianza en su destino colectivo, la Revolución ha dado al escritor una nueva dignidad; escribir no es ya un acto gratuito y solitario; es una forma de enriquecer la conciencia de un pueblo empeñado en cambiar la vida--una forma de transformar la realidad--y de contribuir también al desarrollo de una cultura más auténtica, universal y dinámica.

Antología del cuento
cubano contemporáneo,
Ambrosio Fornet

The political corruption and open repression which characterized the fifties did not destroy, although it minimized, labor organization in Cuba. The reduction of salaries and increase in unemployment aggravated the economic and social situation of the working class, especially of women, whose work had always been seen as supplementary. At this time fifteen percent of women in the working age group (15 to 54 years) were employed; they were concentrated in the textile and tobacco industries, in the business sector as salesgirls and as domestics in private homes. All of these jobs drew the lowest salaries. On the professional level, women dominated the field of education.¹ In the countryside the picture was even grimmer since a great percentage of women were illiterate and school attendance in the female sector was the lowest in all Cuba.² There were very few jobs for women in the rural areas, and sexual roles were fervently adhered to. While in the city birth control methods were available to middle-class women,³ country women remained immersed in ignorance, marrying very young and raising numerous children. The only alternative became home abortion.

This political and social situation in Cuba brought a literary pessimism similar to the one manifested in Puerto Rico during these same years, but much stronger because of Batista's brutal dictatorship. Through the creation of existentialist characters, short-story writers expressed their

1 María A. Martínez Guayanes, "La situación de la mujer en Cuba en 1953", Santiago: Revista de la Universidad de Oriente, XV (julio-septiembre 1974), 208-09.

2 Martínez Guayanes, p. 223.

3 Martínez Guayanes, p. 204.

anguish, anxiety, and frustration with their lives. Vanguard writers were influenced by Franz Kafka, Eugene Ionesco and Samuel Beckett, the existentialists and Jean Genet. The strongest influences in form came from the United States: in drama Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams; in prose fiction Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Truman Capote and J. D. Salinger; and from the Beat Generation Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac.⁴

Two important periodicals appeared during these years: Nuestro Tiempo and Ciclón. Both were trying to put new life into writing, which had become so esoteric it had ceased to communicate and had perpetuated itself through Orígenes. These new writers turned to existentialism, fantasy and magic realism in their narratives.

The most important novels during these years were written by well-known writers: Alejo Carpentier's Los pasos perdidos (1953) and El acoso (1958), Enrique Serpa's La trampa (1956). The "environment" at this time greatly contributed to the dearth of narrative.

With the Cuban Revolution this literary void disappeared. Writers who before had barely experimented with technique and theme and who were seldom able to publish, began to form literary groups and to create periodicals filled with a quantity and quality of literature unknown many years before. While novelists remained close to the Latin American literary mainstream, short story writers continued with existentialism and fantasy narratives. Of the many novels published in the sixties, at least six were considered part of the new Latin American novelistic trend. The established Cuban writers

4 José Antonio Portuondo, "Corrientes literarias en Cuba", Cuadernos Americanos, CLIII (julio-agosto 1967), 209.

were represented by Alejo Carpentier with El siglo de las luces (1962) and José Lezama Lima with Paradiso (1966). The new writers, emphasizing the power and dimensions of language and fantasy, were represented by Severo Sarduy with Gestos (1963) and De donde son los cantantes (1967), Guillermo Cabrera Infante with Tres Tristes Tigres (1967) and Reynaldo Arenas with El mundo alucinante (1969).

One of the most important literary periodicals founded at the start of the Revolutionary government was Lunes de Revolución. Some of the best short stories written in Cuba were published here for the first time.⁵ The editors kept abreast of new literary trends in Europe, the United States and Latin America. It tried to make up for the years of cultural enclosure that Cuba had suffered under U. S. domination. The editors not only published works by foreign writers, but gave historical perspective to their works following one of the Revolution's aims: to educate the masses at all levels. The magazine's success can readily be measured by the quality of the works it published.

In the short story also, established Cuban writers such as Ornelio Jorge Cardoso, Félix Pita Rodríguez and Dora Alonso continued to publish during the sixties. New short story writers were represented by the three main figures of Lunes de Revolución, whose stories were later collected and published in book form: Así en la paz como en la guerra (1960) by Guillermo Cabrera Infante, El regreso (1962) by Calvert Casey, and La vuelta en redondo (1962) by Humberto Arenal. Besides the previously mentioned influences, these writers

5 Seymour Menton, Prose Fiction of the Cuban Revolution (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1975), p. 128.

also shared an urban setting, similar themes, and middle-class characters who felt abandoned and as a result explored their childhood conflicts, their relationship with the adult world and their inevitable clash with reality.⁶

With the closing of Lunes de Revolución in 1962 and the departure from Cuba of many of its members in the following years, the narratives published afterwards in other periodicals reflected the Revolutionary government's new position towards the arts. Writers were now completely integrated into Cuba's revolutionary process and considered themselves workers for the people. The priority of literature was to reach the masses and to educate them in their history and culture and to contribute to the formation of Cuba's new society. Narratives now dealt more closely with Cuba's recent past as a contrast to its present. The emphasis shifted from an individual's anguish to a collective awareness of the environment. Style changed from experiments with time and space to a simpler construction with obvious shifts in the points of view. The themes of existentialism, fantasy and science fiction (very popular in the early sixties) gave way to historic themes: the struggle against Batista, the repulsion of Playa Giron's invasion and the fight against counter-revolutionary guerrillas in the Escambray. There was a preference for violent action narrated objectively in an unadorned style, direct, to the point, fragmentary, elliptical, including much dialogue.⁷ The influences were no longer

6 Ambrosio Fornet, Introd. Antología del cuento cubano contemporáneo (Mexico: Ediciones Era, 1967), p. 44.

7 Menton, p. 197.

Borges or Cortázar, but Hemingway and Juan Rulfo. One of the best writers in this new style in Cuba, whose work merits serious attention, is Jesús Díaz Rodríguez. His collection of short stories was published in 1966 under the title Los años duros.

Salvador Bueno summarizes the existing trends in today's Cuban short story:

Los cuetos con la temática revolucionaria forman sólo una parte (la esencial y más meritoria) de la producción narrativa de los últimos años. Las tendencias imaginativas y fantásticas no han dejado de producirse. Relatos de carácter onírico, de mágicas revelaciones de fábulas cotidianas; cuentos de carácter psicológico con personajes obsesidos por complejos y prejuicios, forman un sector valioso en esta narrativa actual, lo mismo que narraciones de ciencia ficción.⁸

Several women have published a substantial number of novels and short stories before and after the Revolution. Among those writing in the forties and fifties and publishing today, there are Hilda Perera Soto and Dora Alonso. In 1960 Perera published a novel, Mañana es 26, and a collection of stories, Cuentos de Adlis y Luas. According to Seymour Mentos, Perera's novel "is more ambitious structurally than the other 1959-1960 novels and is therefore somewhat closer to the mainstream of the Latin American novel, . . . the author falls far short of justifying a socialist revolution, and she is less convincing in her portrayal of the Batista reign

⁸ Prólogo, Cuentos cubanos del Siglo XX (La Habana: Editorial Arte y Cultura, 1975), p. 29.

of terror than are...others."⁹ Alonso, who became known in the forties as a criollista writer, published a novel in the same trend in 1961, Tierra inerme, and in the past few years has written stories for children and a new collection of short stories, Once caballos (1970), covering her literary experiences. Among the women who first started publishing after the Revolution, there seems to be a pressing urge to incorporate the revolutionary present into each narrative. Daura Olema García (Maestra voluntaria, 1962) and Anisia Miranda (Los becados, 1965) are only two examples of women writers who are closer to socialist realism (supposedly in disgrace after Che Guevara's discourses) than men writers in this period.

Recently Niveria Tejada, a Cuban now living in Paris, attracted the attention of Spanish-speaking countries when she won the Biblioteca Breve prize in 1972 for her novel Sonámbulo del sol. Like Severo Sarduy, she is influenced by Nathalie Sarraute and Robbe-Grillet's artistic techniques. Her protagonist is a mulatto who wanders around Havana by day and never sees the glittering lights of Tres tristes tigres or Gestos.¹⁰

9 Prose Fiction, pp. 8-9.

10 Prose Fiction, pp. 74-75.

...habría muchísimo vino y ron del mejor, café del que manchaba la taza, y acaso mujeres, de las rojizas, de las cobrizas, de las pálidas, de las oscuras--de las que llevan calzado de tacón alto bajo el encaje de las enaguas; de las que huelen a frangipana, agua de azahar, vetiver, y, más que nada, a hembra.

El Siglo de las Luces, Alejo Carpentier

Born in Havana in 1904 to a French father and a Russian mother, Alejo Carpentier is embedded in a universal culture. As a child he travelled to France, Austria, Belgium and Russia, and thus came into contact with a variety of customs and languages. His interests were as wide as his travels.

After studying musical theory for a time in Paris, he went to the University of Havana to study architecture. At the early age of nineteen he joined other writers to found the Minorista group; by 1927 he was coeditor of its Revista de Avance. His literary work and residence in Cuba terminated when he was imprisoned by the Machado government for being a Communist.

Carpentier left Cuba a second time to live in Paris. It was there that he established a close relationship with the members of the Surrealist movement. His interests now extended to music with which he experimented, aided by the Surrealist writers Robert Desnos, André Breton, Louis Aragon and Paul Eduard.¹ Immersed in this vanguard movement and in the growing interest in Black culture developing in France, Carpentier published his first novel Ecue-Yamba-O (1933).

As a participant in the Second International Congress of Anti-Fascist Writers, he visited Madrid for the second time in 1937. In his first trip he had participated in Spain's intellectual life, meeting Federico García Lorca. This time he had the opportunity to share his ideas not only with the Spanish-Americans Pablo Neruda, César Vallejo, Octavio Paz and Elena Garro, but also with the black American poet Langston

1 Klaus Müller-Bergh, Alejo Carpentier, estudio biográfico-crítico (New York: Las Américas Pub. Co., 1972), p. 25.

Hughes. Later on Carpentier would record Hughes' poetry in Paris.²

In Paris he also became interested in broadcasting, experimenting with sound effects and musical synchronization.³ Later on he would direct radio programming in Cuba and Venezuela. But his stay in Paris was also important for his development as a writer. His sensibility acquired depth and refinement at the same time that he moved away from the restrictions of Afro-Cubanism and Surrealism.⁴

For many years thereafter, Carpentier dedicated himself to reading all documents and literature concerning America. He discovered the immense possibilities for literary expression in this relatively unknown area. There was no need to invent a fantastic world; America was full of fables and myths that lived side by side with the most advanced technology. He decided, then, to leave Europe and discover that magic world, that absurd legend of Eldorado for which men gave up land and life. He returned to Cuba and travelled to Haiti—his first encounter with the magical past still living in the mythical present. These experiences and his first attempt to convey this magic realism came with El reino de este mundo in 1949.

After a visit to Venezuela, Carpentier decided to live there for a time. While teaching at the School of Fine Arts in Caracas, he took advantage of his stay in South America to discover that untamed nature hidden in the jungles where

2 Müller-Bergh, pp. 27-28.

3 Müller-Bergh, p. 28.

4 Müller-Bergh, p. 28.

few men, if any, had penetrated.

este país es como un compendio del continente: allí están sus grandes ríos, sus llanos interminables, sus gigantes-
cas montañas, la selva. La tierra venezolana fue para mí como una toma de contacto con el suelo de América, y meterme en sus selvas, conocer el cuarto día de la Creación.⁵

Man's desire to go back to his origins and to rescue his lost past by discovering the most primitive and magic elements of his environment were expressed in Carpentier's third novel, Los pasos perdidos (1953).

Although Carpentier was not living in Cuba during the years of repression under Batista's regime, nonetheless, he was well-informed of the events which recalled his own experiences with persecution and repression during and after Machado's dictatorship. El acoso, published in 1956, was an account of these experiences.

El siglo de las luces, which was not published until 1962, was almost completed by the time Carpentier returned to Cuba after the triumph of the Revolution. This novel, perhaps the most encompassing of his works, attempted to give an idea of the powerful Caribbean environment he lived in. America is seen as a land of so many possibilities that characters and plot almost dissolve in the setting. But it is a tribute to Carpentier's mastery as a writer, his ability to blend all these elements and give a sense of history and of the struggles of men and women to liberate themselves from oppression and thus become more human. If there ever existed

⁵ Alejo Carpentier as quoted by Klaus Müller-Bergh in Alejo Carpentier, estudio biográfico-crítico, p. 31.

an age of enlightenment, though it might have dimmed through the years, there is always a possibility of its existence once again.

Participating in the Revolutionary government as Director of Culture and organizer of the Feria del Libro, as coordinator of a cultural program for Radio Habana, and as cultural attaché with the Cuban embassy in Paris, Carpentier continues to write, publishing two novels in 1974: El recurso del método and Concierto Barroco. He has also written two other books on criticism: La música en Cuba (1946) and Tientos y diferencias (1964).

In 1953 Alejo Carpentier published his novel Los pasos perdidos presenting three female characters viewed by a male protagonist, which resulted in faithful resemblances of traditional stereotypes. However, within a nine year span Carpentier published another novel, El siglo de las luces, in which he creates a female character who, without being the protagonist, becomes the center of all the men in this narrative. Caddy Compson in William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury and Carpentier's Sofía are presented in similar ways. Although male characters are always in the foreground, they define themselves according to what the female character represents to them. Sofía and Caddy are always present in the narrative even when they are physically absent. Carpentier's portrayal of women has undergone a great change from mere stereotype to a woman who alone or alongside a man is a forger of history. The four characters to be discussed, three in Los pasos perdidos and one in El siglo de las luces, represent a writer's transition in his view of women in contemporary history.

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Los pasos perdidos⁶ is narrated from a strictly male point of view. There is no attempt by the narrator to be objective in his presentation of women; they are there for his benefit or detriment. The result of this limited visual angle is to enclose women in stereotypes. The novel attempts to trace the protagonist's search for his essence. He must divest himself of civilized commodities that have with time suffocated his true self. He returns to his past by penetrating the primitive and mysterious American jungle. To survive here, he must rely on instinct and primitive ways and shed the civilized coat that has become an impediment in this natural environment. Yet it seems that for this man of the city forgetting the learned roles is harder than accepting new ways. As an artist he feels this is the only place where he can truly create, but the tools to express this creation are found only in the civilized world he has tried so hard to leave behind. Realizing that art can only be expressed with these tools, he abandons the newly discovered Arcadia, promising to return with the necessary materials for his music. But these steps can never be retraced; the protagonist remains outside of both worlds--the civilized one he rejects for its hypocrisy, and the primitive one he is unable to find again.

Lloyd King has pointed out that the novel's movement is carried by the man-woman triangle.⁷ In the protagonist's present world it is the wife (Ruth)--lover (Mouche) relationship with the narrator. When the scene changes to primitive

6 Alejo Carpentier, Los pasos perdidos (Barcelona: Barral Editores, 1953; 1972). All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

7 Alejo Carpentier: A Latin-Caribbean Writer (Trinidad: University of West Indies, St. Augustine, n.d.), p. 21.

America, it becomes the narrator--Mouche--painter triangle. As the protagonist advances inland he begins to shed even the women who remind him of the civilized world he has decided to relinquish. The triangle thus becomes the narrator--Mouche--Rosario, and when he chooses to leave the primitive society, Marcos, the founder's son, becomes part of this last triangle with the narrator and Rosario.⁸ In the end, the protagonist loses all three women and remains alone on a middle road between the civilized world he has rejected and the Arcadia he will never regain.

In Los pasos perdidos character behavior is determined by setting. The protagonist-narrator and Mouche act differently in the big city and in the wild jungle. Other characters change their behavior depending on how that environment has affected the people they know. Ruth, the protagonist's wife, represents different roles as she notices the changes her husband undergoes when he returns from his excursion into the past.

When the novel begins Ruth is presented in a very affirmative manner. She is an actress dedicated to her profession, independent in her thoughts, affectionate to her husband and eager to undergo constant change to develop herself fully. She is described by the narrator as an attractive woman of thirty-five whose incessant energy he never stops admiring. In contrast, the protagonist seems feeble, dependent, disoriented and extremely passive. He feels overpowered by his wife's strength and has molded his life around hers. He follows her schedule to the extreme of programming their sexual life to Sundays, the only day when Ruth remains home until her

matinee performance.

Al no hallar un modo normal de hacer coincidir nuestras vidas--las horas de la actriz no son las horas del empleado--, acabamos por dormir cada cual por su lado. El domingo, al fin de la mañana, yo solía pasar un momento en su lecho, cumpliendo con lo que consideraba un deber de esposo, aunque sin acertar a saber si, en realidad, mi acto respondía a un verdadero deseo por parte de Ruth. (p. 11)

The protagonist always remains an observer and yields the entire stage to Ruth, never attempting to share the spotlight with her. They have been together for almost five years and he still prefers to remain a shadow and accept her wishes and decisions (p. 9). When Ruth leaves on a company tour, the narrator is left in a state of bewilderment and loneliness, for the center of his life is absent and he feels lost in a strange and confusing world (p. 13).

This first portrayal of Ruth is directed toward the creation of a strong personality: very independent, attached emotionally to her husband, yet always putting her career first. However, this assertion of personality is only possible because of the narrator's willingness to sacrifice his essence to please his wife. He stays in the background so that she can always have the stage for herself. He makes no demands on her, preferring to change his ways to achieve happiness and security for both. When he grows tired of this situation, instead of trying to communicate with Ruth, he chooses to take a mistress who will fill the empty hours during Ruth's absence. He is bored with his status but tolerates it, not knowing how to force a change or not willing to face the responsibility of those who make decisions.

Ruth only appears again in the novel when the narrator returns to the city after his liberating experience in the jungle. Because she has become an obstacle to his future happiness, the narrator now portrays her as a wife stereotype. Her only interest now is to win an audience which will see her as the abnegated wife who has been deeply affected by her husband's uncertain fate. This is the only reason the narrator can see for Ruth's overwrought display of affection: "Mi esposa ha dejado el teatro para interpretar un nuevo papel: el papel de esposa (p. 237)".

The independent character (who appeared at the beginning of the novel and is admired to a certain extent by the narrator) is transformed into a castrating monster when she becomes the protagonist's main obstacle in the achievement of his happiness in another environment and with another woman. Ruth goes through the various phases of the wife stereotype. First she is the rejected, martyr-like woman. When she is spurned for another woman, she becomes the nagging bitch who chokes a man rather than allow him to be free and go elsewhere. She is a vindictive woman who uses all her shrewdness to victimize him and give her final performance as the woman who is able to rise above the cruelty of a man who abandons her.

The narrator constantly tells the reader that Ruth is acting when she displays great emotion towards him. But there is really no evidence that this is a role, except that the protagonist can only see Ruth as an actress who has confused life and the stage. He rejects her, not necessarily because of her falseness, but because she has become a hindrance to his acquisition of freedom. He distorts his wife's image, as he will later do with Mouche, for she is now an enemy he must defeat to be able to return to his Arcadia and Rosario.

Mouche is presented from beginning to end as the mistress stereotype. The narrator's relationship to her is defined solely in terms of carnal desire; her beauty, knowledge and personality are of little interest.

a la noche siguiente me enternecía
con sólo pensar en sus desplantes, y
regresaba a su carne que me era nece-
saria, pues hallaba en su hondura la
exigente y egoísta animalidad que te-
nía el poder de modificar el carácter
de mi perenne fatiga, pasándola del
plano nervioso al plano físico. (p.29)

Mouche is described as a woman of the world, participating in various intellectual and social activities. She is an opinionated woman who displays a sense of security that the narrator unwillingly admires. Ruth and Mouche share an independent behavior that the narrator lacks and is constantly attracted to.

Astrology is Mouche's forte, and she surrounds herself with books and symbols pertaining to this "pseudo-science". The narrator pictures her as someone who has learned life from a book but who has not participated in the actual living of that life. There even comes a moment when she prefers to hide in her books rather than encounter reality.

a pesar de sus aficiones cartománticas,
no distingue en el cielo las mismas fi-
guras celestes que adornan su gabinete
de astrología. Y su anhelo de evasión,
sacado de fantásticas lecturas acerca
de restos de culturas milenarias, pirá-
mides aztecas y fortalezas incaicas, no
le permiten captar la presencia de lo
maravilloso. Carente de sensibilidad,
no se fija en lgs majestuosos paisajes
que la rodean.

Mouche's incessant search for adventure serves as a catalyst for the narrator to carry out his plans to find primitive instruments for a museum's collection. Her eagerness is contagious, and she arouses the narrator's enthusiasm in this enterprise. And yet it is in this new environment that Mouche loses all her confidence and self-assuredness. What once attracted the narrator, now becomes irritating. Mouche's constant intellectual talk and flirting makes him uneasy. As a result, he assumes the husband role by becoming possessive and jealous. He mistrusts her and constantly suspects her of going to bed with other men (p. 65). If Mouche is submissive and lets another woman impose her views on her, the narrator's image of his mistress as a strong and independent being begins to fade. It is by exposing Mouche as an amoral woman whose security and strength are simply successful masks in a civilized world that he begins to assert himself.

The narrator concentrates his worst attack on Mouche by unveiling her artificial beauty. Raymond Souza sees Mouche's personality diminishing with each step into the past: "She becomes less attractive to the protagonist, as the qualities of the seductive world of illusion she represents are revealed."¹⁰ That face, hair and body he was so attracted to, become ugly and dirty-looking in a natural environment (p.99). By destroying Mouche's physical attractiveness, which once was his only concern, the protagonist has given his death blow to this relationship and to the woman who has been a constant reminder of the world he longed to forget. His description of the ugliness he sees in Mouche's body is similar to V. S. Naipaul's description of anything that pertains to the fe-

10 Major Cuban Novelists: Innovation and Tradition
(Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1976), p.40.

male body. There is almost a joy in being able to expose this artificiality, for women are only painted images hiding emptiness and ugliness.

El cutis, maltratado por aguas duras, se le había enrojecido, descubriendo zonas de poros demasiado abiertos en la nariz y en las sienes. El pelo se le había vuelto como de estopa, de un rubio verde, desigualmente matizado, revelándome lo mucho que debía su cobrizo relumbre habitual al manejo de inteligentes coloraciones. Bajo una blusa manchada de resinas raras, caídas de las lonas, su busto parecía menos firme, y mal sostenían el barniz unas uñas rotas... (p.122)

The moment he annihilates Mouche, the protagonist builds a new female image, Rosario, who will represent the ideal he is searching for.

Most critics see Rosario as a symbol of mother earth and the primitive American woman.¹¹ Luis B. Eyzaguirre considers Rosario a mythic figure, essential to the development of a hero in search of his self-realization. Her function in the hero's life is the traditional mythic role found in epics.¹²

11 Müller-Bergh, p. 136, and Salvador Bueno, "Carpentier en la maestría de sus novelas y relatos", Unión, XIII, no. 1 (marzo 1974), 114-115.

12 Joseph Campbell in The Hero with a Thousand Faces (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1949; rpt. 1972), p. 116, describes this woman as the one who "represents the totality of what can be known. As he progresses in the slow initiation which is life, the form of the goddess undergoes for him a series of transfigurations: she can never be greater than himself, though she can always promise more than he is yet capable of comprehending. She lures, she guides, she bids him burst his fetters. And if he can match her import, the two, the knower and the known, will be released from every limitation. Woman is the guide to the sublime acme of sensuous adventure."

When he first meets Rosario, the narrator is attracted to her simplicity, self-reliance and independence. She does not wear a plastic face; instead her skin has been toughened by the elements of nature. Rosario does not display any fear of the unknown and is quite at ease in an environment that the narrator is completely ignorant of (p. 112). Seeing this lack of artificiality in her behavior, he feels that the only way to approach Rosario is by assuming the role of a male which, by becoming "civilized", has been lost. He should be rude, aggressive and possessive in his treatment of women (pp. 112-13). He believes that the moral code which predominates in this primitive society is what is natural to all human beings. Women, unlike Mouche in "civilization", owe fidelity and loyalty to men, whether husbands or family.

Para los que con nosotros convivían ahora, la fidelidad al varón, el respeto a los padres, la rectitud de proceder, la palabra dada, el honor que obligaba y las obligaciones que honraban, eran valores constantes, eternos, insoslayables, que excluían toda posibilidad de discusión. Faltar a ciertas leyes era perder el derecho a la estimación ajena, aunque matar por hombría no fuese culpa mayor. (pp.147-48)

While Rosario continues to be confident and secure in her womanly chores and in her encounter with nature, in her relationship to the narrator she displays a submissive and servile attitude. The protagonist has, at last, found a woman who knows her place in society; he becomes more confident and secure in himself--he is now the master, the center of a woman's world.

Me rodea de cuidados, trayéndome de comer, ordeñando las cabras para mí, secándome el sudor con paños frescos, atenta a mi pala-

bra, mi sed, mi silencio, mi reposo, con una solicitud que me hace enorgullecerme de mi condición de hombre: aquí, pues, la hembra 'sirve' al varón en el más noble sentido del término, creando la casa con cada gesto. Porque, aunque Rosario y yo no tengamos un techo propio, sus manos son ya mi mesa y la jícara de agua que acerca a mi boca, luego de limpiarla de una hoja caída en ella, es vajilla marcada con mis iniciales de amo. (p. 151)

Yet there are certain principles learned in the civilized society he comes from which make the narrator not wholly accept this "natural" behavior in women. Rosario lives for the present; the narrator is her man now and she dedicates every moment to him. There is no need to bring the past--her life with other men--into this relationship. Her intention is not to hide her past but to put the present in its proper perspective (p. 178). The narrator is consciously trying to accept this new way of life. He must see his woman, not as a companion leading an independent life (as was the case with Ruth and Mouche), but as a female who is always subordinate to his desires, and who will never challenge him intellectually.

Lo digo a Rosario, que acepta mi propósito con alegre docilidad, como siempre recibirá la voluntad de quien reciba por varón. Yo, para amarla--pues creo amarla entrañablemente ahora--he tenido que establecer una nueva escala de valores, en punto a lo que debe apegar un hombre de mi formación a una mujer que es toda una mujer, sin ser más que una mujer. (p. 196)

Even though Rosario is presented as the ideal woman for any man who lives close to nature, there are certain attitudes in her personality which alter the portrayal of sub-

mission, passivity and servilism of this hembra. When the narrator proposes marriage to Rosario, expecting her to jump at woman's supposedly greatest desire, she rejects him, giving him arguments that not even a Ruth or a Mouche, intellectual women rebellious of their treatment in society, could ever expound. Rosario argues that marriage is a legal tie that leaves a woman defenseless with a man. It is the realization that a woman may leave at any time that makes a man give special treatment to her. He has no bill of sale that would make a woman an object of his possession. If she stays it is because she wishes, and not because it is her duty (p.221).

With this sole exception, in this novel the narrator portrays Rosario as the woman par excellence whom all men seek. She is not a threat to man but a catalyst, for she will sacrifice herself for the welfare of the man she loves. She will give him freedom and at the same time deny herself that right in order to please him. This is presented as woman's natural role as a contrast to the learned roles exemplified by Ruth and Mouche. The moment civilization intrudes, women are changed into oppressive beings who can only play roles and manipulate people. Just as in René Marqués' stories educated, middle-class women are castrators of males, Carpentier's city women are viewed by the narrator in the same way. The moment the protagonist of Los pasos perdidos is free from this pressure and near Rosario, who never makes demands of him, he is able to express himself as an artist. Strong, domineering women destroy the creative impulse in man. Only simple, submissive and servile women, who are willing to be a man's shadow, will allow man to express his inner self.

Alejo Carpentier has made a moment in history the protagonist of El siglo de las luces.¹³ The novel begins in the year of the French Revolution and ends in 1808 with the outbreak of the Spanish rebellion against French occupation. They are just a few years which trace how a new phase for humanity had begun, how it was betrayed, and how it established the foundations for another phase in history, this time in another part of the world --America. Within this frame a few characters emerge who travel and experience this moment in history. They are at once witnesses and participants of their times. Perhaps because history is the focus in this novel, no one character is more important than the other. Whether in the background (Carlos, Jorge, Ogé) or the foreground (Victor, Esteban, Sofía), no one character emerges as a stereotype. They are all people who live their particular time in history.

The first setting in this novel is a mansion in Havana, Cuba. From there some characters travel to Haiti and then to France. In Europe, Spain will be another setting before shifting again to America, arriving in the Caribbean, going through Guadeloupe, Cayenne and back to Cuba. The last setting unites America and Europe--the Casa de Arcos in Madrid stands desolate after the people protested on the streets against the French invasion, which in turn, precipitated a cry for independence in Spanish America. The characters travel to some of these places; the more they travel, the more broaden their range of experiences and awareness. Because of this life knowledge they become non-conformists in constant search of an ideal that continues to slip through their fingers and often alienates them from reality. It is in this effort to concretize an idea of life that the characters define themselves in this novel.

¹³ Alejo Carpentier, El siglo de las luces (Barcelona: Barral Editores, 1962; rpt. 1972). All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

In the short span of time covered three young characters will go through the process of awakening, maturing, and becoming aware of themselves as individuals and as collective beings. Another character will serve as initiator and norm. One by one the young characters will surpass the norm and thus define themselves on their own terms. The narrative begins when three adolescents are called back home upon their father's death. Carlos, Sofía and Esteban, nephew and foster son, lead a life of games in which anarchy reigns until a French négociant, Victor Hugues, forces the doors of their fantasy to open to the real world they had refused to acknowledge. Hugues brings with him history--he is the past and the future hope to the most progressive ideas of his time. Liberté, égalité, fraternité will become the standards to guide their lives.

While Sofía and Carlos remain behind, Esteban travels with Victor Hugues to Haiti and France and becomes a witness to this turning point in history. He sees the acts of men for what they are--a combination of goodness and cruelty, of sacrifice and egotism. After ten years of travelling and witnessing the betrayal of a revolution, Esteban returns to Cuba to find that Carlos and Sofía have become idealists of a movement he no longer believes in. All of Esteban's experiences cannot change his cousin's views, for they have not lived that particular moment as intimately as he has.

It is only when Sofía leaves Cuba to join Hugues in Cayenne that she begins to understand Esteban. She then decides to leave for a place where the ideals she cherishes still have meaning. She and Esteban move to Madrid and are given the opportunity to become participants in a revolution. Because Carlos stays in Cuba, he remains an observer of this

historical moment. The author gives him the task of ending the story by narrating Esteban and Sofía's final days. Carlos closes the Casa de Arcos, leaving inside memories and shadows which in time will fade and end in oblivion.

Cuando quedó cerrada la última puerta, el cuadro de la Explosión en una catedral, olvidado en su lugar--acaso voluntariamente olvidado en su lugar--dejó de tener asunto, borrándose, haciéndose mera sombra sobre el encarnado oscuro del brocado que vestía las paredes del salón y parecía sangrar donde alguna humedad le hubiese manchado el tejido. (p. 350)

Alejo Carpentier has confessed to Luis Harss that the meaning of El siglo de las luces is to be found in Sofía.¹⁴ She is a female character who is developed not merely as a woman, but as a restless human being just like Victor Hugues and Esteban. Through her growth into maturity she emerges as a sensitive, conscious and strong character who chooses to be a participant in history by becoming a part of a collective response against repression and injustice. She proves to be the equal not only of Esteban, the most experienced and politically aware of the three adolescents, but also of Victor Hugues, master in every art--business, politics and sex.

There are three basic sections to this novel, represented by three stages in Sofía's life--as an adolescent in Cuba, ten years later as a mature woman, and still nine years later in Madrid. In the first stage, Sofía is the young girl who has been isolated from the world and repressed as a woman by being imprisoned in a convent. If her father had not died

¹⁴ "Alejo Carpentier o el eterno retorno", Los nuestros (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1973), p. 82.

Sofía probably would have remained in the convent until she was eighteen and ready either to marry a wealthy young man or to make her stay in the convent a permanent one. Her education has been the learning of female trades--nursing, sewing, knitting, cleaning. She is taught to sublimate her desires and aggressiveness and behave in a passive and humble manner.

Upon her father's death, Sofía is summoned home to take over the household, while Carlos is called to take care of the family business. But neither is prepared to take on roles which they feel are alien to their desires and capacities; they are young and unwilling to integrate themselves in that stale world of their father. The moment Carlos, Sofía and Esteban are left on their own and pressure is no longer felt from the outside world, the three adolescents give way to their fantasies and behave instinctively; they reject all learned behavior, at least within the boundaries they set for themselves. The house becomes a small world where unopened boxes and useless furniture are transformed into fascinating caves in which they read about a world they only experience in their imagination (pp. 25-26). They play games and treat each other as companions, only using sex differences to bother and tease one another.

Sofía, a quien las monjas habían inculcado un temprano horror a la naturaleza del varón, se enojaba cuando Esteban, por broma-- y acaso para ponerla a prueba--, le hablaba de un matrimonio futuro, bendecido por una caterva de niños. Un 'marido', traído a aquella casa, era considerado de antemano como una abominación... (p. 27)

Lloyd King has described this scene in the Havana house as an instinctive Surrealist phase:

The teenagers indulge their capacity for fantasy and play, rejecting the humdrum responsibilities of daily life and shut up in their house as in a cave or womb they weave an innocent bohemian life style for themselves.¹⁵

Although it is impossible for Sofía to forget the moral code she was taught at the convent, little by little she pushes these concepts into the back of her mind and acts according to her desires and the new readings she is now encountering. The three adolescents act freely and never impose roles; on the contrary, during this phase on their lives, they intend to forget their learned behavior and act out their true selves.

With Victor Hugues' appearance, the adolescents' enclosed anarchic world ends. After shedding the false roles imposed by society, they are now ready to absorb the new ideas that are surging through Europe and America. Victor Hugues will not be only a liason between these two worlds but their initiator into the age of enlightenment. Under Hugues' influence, Sofía will develop her potential as a woman and as a political being.

With his vast experience as a businessman, traveler and politician, Victor Hugues speaks about oppression, freedom and revolution. These concepts dazzle Sofía, for they speak of a dynamic world she had only imagined through books. Now she discovers that there are men who pursue these ideals, and they are within touching distance. The world outside her house, which Sofía, Carlos, and Esteban had rejected for its hypocrisy and injustice, becomes the target of Hugues' attacks.

¹⁵ Lloyd King, p. 25.

'La tiranía debe ser combatida bajo todas sus formas.' Y había que empezar por algo, porque aquí las gentes estaban como dormidas, inertes, viviendo en un mundo intemporal, marginado de todo, suspendido entre el tabaco y el azúcar. (p. 71)

She learns of a new division in society: the oppressors and the oppressed. Only by rebelling can all people achieve happiness and equality (p. 72). Sofía sees herself now as part of a collectivity; she is not only Carlos' sister and Esteban's cousin but a human being who shares sorrows and joys with many other men and women on an island, a country and the world (p. 73). Revolution thus seems the natural way of achieving the freedom and justice every human being has the right to possess. It is natural to rebel against injustices, as it is natural to abolish any form of oppression (p. 73).

Only seeing Hugues as a political being, Sofía is confused when he approaches her on a level with which she is unfamiliar. Hugues treats her as a woman and not as the naive young girl she had always considered herself to be. Victor is the man of the world who sees a woman and assumes the role of the aggressive male to whom all women eventually yield. He uses the same approach with Sofía, creating confusion in her and receiving a violent rejection in return. When he lies next to her and begins to embrace her and draw her near his naked body, Sofía assents, for she likes the feeling it produces in her. It is only when she thinks about the situation that her religious and moral upbringing tell her to reject what her body desires (p. 58). This encounter marks the beginning of Sofía's awareness of herself as a woman. For the first time she has been regarded not as

a child whose whims must be satisfied, but as a woman who is desired by a man who seems powerful and estranged from her small, limited world (p. 62).

As Sofía becomes familiar with her body's desires and disregards moral concepts, she begins to discard her shyness and passivity. However, her sexual development is left unfinished when she remains in Cuba while Hugues and Esteban travel to France. During their absence, Sofía continues to develop politically, although as an individual, she conforms to the role society prescribes for a woman.

Throughout these ten years, Carlos and Sofía have become part of the criollo group, which represents the liberal wing of Cuban society. It is within this group that Sofía meets Jorge, the man she eventually marries. Together they attempt to organize sympathizers who will build the economic support needed for a revolution. Sofía confronts Esteban's pessimism with her own faith that in working together, freedom and equality will eventually be achieved.

No podía vivirse sin un ideal político; la dicha de los pueblos no podía alcanzarse de primer intento; se habían cometido graves errores, ciertamente, pero esos errores servían de útil enseñanza para el futuro; ella comprendía que Esteban había pasado por ciertas experiencias dolorosas--y mucho lo compadecía por ello--, pero acaso fue víctima de un idealismo exagerado; ella admitía que los excesos de la Revolución eran deplorables, pero las grandes conquistas humanas sólo se lograban con dolor y sacrificio. En suma: que nada grande se hacía en la Tierra sin derramamiento de sangre. (p. 262)

This political awareness does not run parallel to her development as a woman. With marriage Sofía has agreed to be-

come the stereotype wife. Her belief in independence and freedom for humankind is not applied to herself as an individual. Esteban is surprised and disgusted at Sofía's transformation from a strong, determined adolescent to a passive, submissive adult.

Era pavoroso pensar que un segundo cerebro, situado en la matriz, emitía ahora sus ideas por boca de Sofía--aquella, cuyo nombre definía a la mujer que lo llevara como poseedora de 'sonriente sabiduría', de gay saber. (p. 254)

She has not only become a "wife" but, in Esteban's eyes even worse, a bourgeoisie. Sofía takes pride in pointing out her husband's wealth and Irish ancestry. Her main concern seems to be centered around the cleanliness and order of the household; everything is in its proper place like a window display. This is in sharp contrast to the days of their adolescence, when they lived on boxes and upturned furniture. With Jorge she is completely attentive to his needs to the point of acting like a slave, ready to please her master at the slightest sign (p. 259).

Sofía fulfills her role of wife until Jorge's death. She nurses him at his deathbed and accompanies his hearse to the grave. But the moment she becomes a widow, just as when her father died, she casts off the role imposed by society and turns into a human being in search of happiness as a woman and as a political person. Without pondering too long, she gives up home, wealth, family and country to seek the man who to her still embodies the most advanced political ideas and her sexual and individual fulfillment.

At their first encounter, Sofía is very insecure not only about her political position, but also about her demon-

stration of affection, She is full of ideals but has never had the opportunity to concretize them, whereas Hugues has always been a man of ideas and action, seizing power to carry out what he thought right.

'Ahora háblame de tí.' Pero ninguna imagen válida, ningún suceso interesante acudía a la mente de Sofía en cuanto se refería a su propia vida. Ante el estrépito y las furias que habían llenado la existencia del otro, trabándolo en acción con personajes cuyos nombres llenaban la época, lo suyo era de una entristecedora pobreza. Tenía un hermano tendero, un primo negado a la valentía cuyas abjuraciones le parecían tan vanas, ahora que vislumbraba la grandeza, que las hubiera cubierto con piedad: la misma historia de su matrimonio era lamentable. Había oficiado de ama de casa. Había esperado. Nada más. Los años habían transcurrido, sin marcar... (pp. 312-13)

Sexually Sofía's insecurity is manifested in her shyness and nervousness as she awaits Hugues. She is again the passive creature who will receive a man's advances, transmitting only assenting signals yet never initiating the play of love.

It is actually living together with Hugues that brings Sofía the political and sexual maturity she had always sought. She becomes not only an equal to Hugues, but as she grows intellectually and emotionally she surpasses the man who had been her initiator and guide. Lloyd King sees in these two characters an attempt to establish a balance between negative and affirmative action.

The surrealists always contended that the disastrous political history of Europe was related to an over-stressing of the masculine factor, and that to redress the balance, the feminine factor needed to be

asserted....Hugues is obviously an example of male assertiveness and the insensitivity of the unbalanced male political will. Sofía is the feminine principle, an example of a woman who develops a tough femininity not only sexually¹⁶ but in terms of political ideals.

As Victor Hugues becomes involved in a quest for power and personal achievement, Sofía's image of him begins to acquire realistic tones. That sense of wholeness that Sofía longs for and thought to find in Hugues, has been sacrificed, and only he, the politician who does not question the morality of new French laws, becomes the center of life. Neither force nor seduction will prevent Sofía from leaving. She cannot live with a man who has betrayed not only himself but everyone who once believed in him. She grows tired of smelling death and living with the person responsible for this massacre. She must find a place where human beings are engaged in life and not destruction.

'¿Quieres volver a tu casa?', preguntó Victor atónito. 'Jamás volveré a una casa de donde me haya ido, en busca de otra mejor.' '¿Dónde está la casa mejor que ahora buscas?' 'No sé. Donde los hombres vivan de otra manera. Aquí todo huele a cadáver. Quiero volver al mundo de los vivos; de los que creen en algo. Nada espero de quienes nada esperan.' (p. 337)

Unlike Esteban, Sofía does not forsake her political stand and turn to cynicism; instead, she continues to assert her ideal and to search for people and places where these can

¹⁶ Lloyd King, p. 26.

be implemented.

By leaving Cayenne and Victor Hugues, Sofía has placed the past in its proper perspective; she has learned from the model, preserved the best and buried the worst. At this point she has become an independent human being assured of her ideals and her womanhood. Although Edmundo Desnoes believes that Sofía always remains dependent on a man and that her acts are determined by these companions,¹⁷ Sofía emerges at this stage of her life as a strong character who has pondered with great care her past experiences and has made a decision based on her needs as an individual and as part of a collectivity. She realizes that leaving Hugues means loneliness and an empty bed, but she is determined to face this future rather than betray her ideals by remaining with him (pp. 338-39).

Perhaps because of her social class upbringing, Sofía cannot integrate herself in an American movement. She has participated in the organization of opposition groups but always within her class. Whenever these groups seem to expand and have serious repercussions, there has been a response of repression by the government, forcing Sofía to leave and start anew somewhere else. It is Esteban's jailing which makes Sofía decide not to return to Cuba but to wait for Esteban's release in Spain. And so she withdraws and isolates herself from the dormant volcano the Caribbean has become.

It seems that every time there is a burgeoning revolutionary movement, Sofía's attachment to men prevents her from participating fully in this historic moment. As an adolescent she had expressed her desire to travel to other parts of the Caribbean, but the voyage is prevented when Esteban

¹⁷ Edmundo Desnoes, "El siglo de las luces," Casa de las Américas, IV, no. 26 (octubre-noviembre 1964), 101.

and Hugues hear about the revolution in Haiti and are unwilling to risk her life. Ten years later she is saved by Esteban from imprisonment, but she is unable to stay in Cayenne since this would mean an open confrontation with Hugues. It is only in Madrid that Sofía decides to integrate herself in a movement, and instead of allowing Esteban to interfere in this decision, she takes him with her and makes him a participant, changing at last their roles of observers.

Cuatro veces en la obra, Sofía menciona la necesidad de 'hacer algo' y finalmente encuentra su oportunidad muriendo en el levantamiento de Madrid en 1808, junto a los que luchan por el futuro. Dentro de una realidad que se hace cíclica en lo personal y en lo histórico, ella sigue creyendo en la posibilidad mística de un mundo mejor a pesar del fracaso momentáneo.¹⁸

In this novel Sofía becomes an embodiment of the three women in Los pasos perdidos, but without falling into a stereotype. There are times when she almost assumes a role, but the author has given this character a rebellious seed that does not allow her to conform for long. In this work where the focus is not on one character but in history itself, Sofía emerges as a complete person. She is a woman who loves passionately and gives up the security traditional roles offer to follow her lover. She abandons him when she realizes that he no longer has anything to share with her. She cannot accept a man who has betrayed his ideals. She has matured

¹⁸ Ariel Dorfman. "El sentido de la historia en la obra de Alejo Carpentier," Imaginación y violencia en América (Chile: Editorial Universitaria, 1970), p. 117.

enough to know that an individual lives and dies alone, that only as part of something larger can a human being feel she has a place in history.

El peso de tu cuerpo
sobre mi cuerpo
piel sutura cifrada
saliva Verde
sobre la espalda
vértebra entre vértebra
piernas anudadas
untados de laca fosforescente
los huesos
iluminan la habitación de muros negros
volúmenes articulándose
s'emboîtant
entrando
en silencio
aceitados
lentamente
unos en otros
unos en otros
resplandor
que desciende
por el muro
a lo largo del muro
astros muertos cayendo
hasta el mármol
de la sábana.

Big Bang, Severo Sarduy

Severo Sarduy's development as a writer has been seen as a series of voyages, both geographical and literary.¹ Born in 1937 in Camagüey, he moved at the age of nineteen to Havana, supposedly to study medicine. There he joined the group of writers of Ciclón, where he had published some poems while living in Camagüey.

His second voyage did not require a physical movement; he went from Batista's Havana to the revolutionary euphoria and confusion of 1959. Sarduy became a participant in this political process through his integration into Lunes de Revolución. His contribution to this periodical was surprising: except for a few poems, he wrote articles and art criticism--no fiction.²

In 1960 he received a scholarship from the Revolutionary government to study art criticism in Paris. He travelled extensively throughout Europe, and after studying for two years decided to stay in Paris. This has been his most extensive voyage and by far the most fruitful.

When Sarduy decided to separate himself from Cuba, he was trying to discover new roads in his life.

Al distanciarme de Cuba comprendí qué era Cuba, o al menos me planteé con toda claridad la pregunta: ¿Qué es Cuba? Mientras estuve allí no pude planteármela del todo y creo que nadie, en el interior de Cuba, podría resolver esa cuestión con total pertinencia puesto que estando dentro de su contexto, el contexto en sí es indefinible.

1 Roberto González Echevarría, "Són de la Habana; la ruta de Severo Sarduy", Revista Iberoamericana, XXXVII, no. 76-77 (julio-diciembre 1971), 726.

2 González Echevarría, p. 729.

Es como si nos preguntaran ahora cuál es el olor del oxígeno. No podemos saberlo; habría que respirar una atmósfera totalmente desprovista de oxígeno para poder determinarlo.³

His knowledge and further studies in art, and the relations he established with French literary groups, helped him find an answer to his quest for identity.

Applying techniques involved in the plastic arts, he tries to lead the reader to a higher understanding of a situation by presenting him with a painting whose colors are words and whose canvas is the book, thus interpreting reality in terms of painting rather than in conventional literary ones.⁴

Roberto González Echevarría, perhaps Sarduy's best critic, places Gestos, published in 1963, within the first period of the Tel Quel literary group. This period, extending from 1960 to 1964, was marked by the discovery of Russian Formalism and an uncertain position with regard to literature and political commitment. Literature was considered an autonomous system of signs.⁵ A basic feature of Sarduy's work, beginning with this first novel, is its theatrical element. Characters are either singers, actors or dancers;⁶ they move

3 Severo Sarduy as quoted by Emir Rodríguez Monegal in "Las estructuras de la narración: diálogo", Mundo Nuevo, 11 (agosto-1966), 16.

4 Donald Ray Johndrow, "'Total' Reality in Severo Sarduy's Search for Lo cubano", Romance Notes, XIII, no. 3 (Spring 1972), 445.

5 Roberto González Echevarría, "In Search of the Lost Center", Review 72, Fall 1972, p. 28.

6 Roberto González Echevarría, "Rehearsal for Cobra", Review 74, Winter 1974, p. 39.

as if unwilling to do so, swept away by outside forces which shove them into action.

Sarduy is in basic agreement with the nouveau roman's concept of language and literature. For this group a writer's commitment is based on a total awareness of the problems of his own language, of its importance, and of the artist's willingness to deal with it from within:

Esa es, para él, la única posibilidad de seguir siendo un artista, y también, sin duda, como oscura y lejana consecuencia, servir tal vez un día a algo, tal vez incluso a la revolución.⁷

Since language then becomes not only form but theme and reality, these writers reject language as mere communication or expression of thoughts. In Sarduy's words

En realidad hay otra dimensión del lenguaje que es la que el escritor muestra, una dimensión de placer, somática casi. Mi contacto con el texto es de naturaleza erótica. Escribir, como hacer el amor, son actividades totales, que comprometen a la totalidad del cuerpo.⁸

Sarduy has stated that the title Gestos is not limited to gestures regarding movement, but to the artistic technique, which serves to suggest movement in space by line repetition. "The approach conveys the spirit or essence of things rather than accurate aspects of appearance."⁹ This is exactly the

7 Alain Robbe-Grillet, Por una novela nueva (Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, 1973), p. 51.

8 Quoted by Basilia Papastamatui, "Severo Sarduy: una nueva interpretación del barroco", Imagen, nos. 14-15 (15-30 de diciembre 1967), 3.

9 James A. Schinnerler as quoted by Johndrow, p. 446.

quality conveyed in Sarduy's first novel, which gives a picture of Havana on as many levels as Cabrera Infante's Tres tristes tigres but contained in a mere one hundred pages.

With the publication in 1967 of his second novel, De donde son los cantantes, Sarduy is firmly set in his new style and has found the sought-after road for lo cubano. The two basic precepts he follows are: first, writing as a specific system subject to its own rules, not circumscribed to a meaning but open to a multiple of interpretations; second, the structuring of all knowledge as a language that hides the absence of a subject, creating a person where there was only absence before.¹⁰

Sarduy's style has been called neo-baroque to distinguish it from Carpentier's baroque style, which Sarduy emphatically rejects. He feels closer to Lezama Lima, who deals with the immense possibilities of the Cuban language.¹¹ In Cobra (1972) Sarduy continues to explore this theatre-world of language. His artistic essays have been collected in Escrito sobre un cuerpo (1969), and his most recent publication, Barroco (1977), probes even deeper into the world of language-literature. Although it seemed that Sarduy will continue to explore the possibilities of the narrative form, he did return to poetry once in 1974 with the publication of Big bang.

10 "Són de la Habana", pp. 731-32.

11 In an interview with Rodríguez Monegal, Sarduy has defined Lezama's baroque style as "tradición de cultura, tradición hispánica, manuelina, barrominesca, berniniana, gongorina." He contests that Carpentier is really a "neogótico" which he defines as "una construcción, de un andamiaje enorme, pero que es como el andamiaje del neogótico, perfecto y totalmente inesencial. La obra de Carpentier es una superposición, una acumulación, un desgaste." p. 24

Since language is the all-encompassing element in this literature, titles to Sarduy are of utmost importance. Thus, from a slight movement (*gestos*), he has travelled into a labyrinth of forms (*barroco*).

In Severo Sarduy's first two novels, *Gestos* (1963) and *De donde son los cantantes* (1967), the author creates a character who seldom appears in Spanish American literature. The poor, black woman has always been part of the background in prose fiction. Perhaps the few occasions when she was a protagonist occurred in the nineteenth century novel when the abolitionist movement had reached a peak. Yet, in contemporary fiction, black women have been almost absent from Puerto Rican and Cuban writing. With Luis Rafael Sánchez' 1976 novel *La guaracha del Macho Camacho*, Rosario Ferré's portrayal of Isabel la Negra, and Severo Sarduy's first two novels, writers today have begun to portray black women trying to break away from the traditional stereotypes of women and black people. *De donde son los cantantes* will be discussed first since characters here are sketched rather than developed. *Gestos*, his first novelistic attempt, contains Sarduy's best character portrayal, and by discussing it last, a study will be made of one of the few black women protagonists in Caribbean literature.

The character of Dolores Rondón in *De donde son los cantantes*¹² is just a chess piece in this narrative where language is the main force, and the setting, characterization and plot serve only to enhance the power and potentiality of

12 Severo Sarduy, *De donde son los cantantes* (Mexico: Joaquín Mortiz, 1967). All subsequent references to this edition will be included in the thesis and pages will be included in parentheses.

words. This Dolores and Estrella in Guillermo Cabrera Infante's Tres tristes tigres are portrayed as overpowering women who enter the scene with an uproar and leave that stage amidst applause. They become moments of great energy, but are flat characters, unchanged or stereotyped. In this novel, Sarduy's portrayal of Dolores follows very closely the traditional pattern of the selfish and ambitious woman.

In the section entitled "La Dolores Rondón" the author presents Dolores' story in the form of a play, where through the dialogue of other characters her life is presented. She also speaks about herself and dramatizes certain moments in her life. The starting point is the discussion of the epitaph/poem Dolores wrote for her tomb. The author takes each line to present a scene of the play.

The section opens with precise information about Dolores Rondón. She is from Camagüey and is catalogued as a prostitute and a poet who lived and loved a senator by the name of Mortal Pérez.

Duro oficio el de Dolores. Cortesana y poeta. Cortesana lo fue toda su vida. Poeta por un día. Pero el tiempo lo disuelve todo, como el mar en el mar. De la cortesana, de sus altas y bajas, que fueron las del senador Mortal Pérez, ya no queda nada. Pero el poeta nos mira, desde la muerte. (p. 57)

After this description nothing else is said about her until the narrator moves to the past and Dolores appears. Through her monologues and dialogues the action goes back and forth, tracing Dolores' life from her decision to abandon the place where she was a prostitute through the moment when she fulfills her dream of becoming an important lady, and until her loss of wealth and power, ending with her death.

Dolores is disgusted with the life she has been leading. She has known only poverty and filth, but believes that by abandoning this town she will be free from economic oppression. When she compares her situation with those who can live in comfort, she becomes determined to seek a new life where she will then be one of those she now envies (p. 60). Dolores places herself on a higher level than the people in this town. She has some possessions which she will sell in order to leave town; she is relatively educated and has been blessed by the saints.

De aquí me voy yo y he venido a vender todo lo que tengo: un reloj pulsera y un gallo fino. Con lo que me den, hasta Camagüey, por lo menos. Este es el aburde arranque. Yo hago como Cristóbal Colón, que quemó sus naves. Soy bailadora fina, a otros con la rumba de cajón. Letrada, lo soy, no muy leída. Calada en santos, apuntadora de las buenas. Al finjo, al corrido. (pp. 60-61)

Her philosophy is always to move forward; those who do not change never achieve anything. One must leave behind or get rid of anything or anyone who is an obstacle in one's path. Dolores is very aggressive with men and women; she attacks anyone who dares to say anything about her, whether he is a stranger or a friend.

¿Cómo? ¿Qué dicen esos viejos chochos que están allí? ¿Que me quedo? ¿Que aquí finalizó mi carrera? Ahora verán. ¡Oye, galletito! Tú, el de la boina, tú mismo. (p.61)

In Camagüey she becomes a follower of Mortal Pérez, an aspirant to the city council, who curiously enough is white and of Spanish descent. She is willing to sacrifice comfort and individual goals to be the driving force behind

this man whom she loves and at whose side she envisions a secure future (p. 69). Mortal is successful in his political career, and Dolores is able to profit from this in terms of power and wealth. It is in Havana, where Dolores tastes her greatest moment of personal fulfillment.

Dolores has achieved power, but this has not brought acceptance of her person in the social group she is now a part of. She must change her image of a poor, black woman and become the bourgeois lady she has always admired and envied. She must speak in a refined way, pronouncing all her s's. She must drink Tom Collins and whiskey on the rocks. She will use hydrogen peroxide to lighten her hair and special creams to whiten her skin. She keeps at her side a seamstress who will make her the same dresses ladies wear and a stylist who will straighten or curl her hair according to the latest fashion. Dolores has forsaken her past and transformed herself into a doll who moves, speaks, and dresses according to her social group. She has relinquished her strength and independence for the sake of being admired and treated as an object. She is willing to sell her soul to achieve wealth, power, and recognition.

Iré a donde sea. A Pekín, a Hong-kong.
Calva como me habéis dejado. Tuerta,
coja: no importa cómo pero llegaré a mi
destino puntualmente, como un tren ame-
ricano. La vida es una jabonera; el que
no se cae, resbala. Me voy. Ganaremos
las elecciones municipales, provinciales,
senatoriales, nacionales. Seré senadora.
Tendré cada día más admiradores: ¡El poder
está en las caderas! (p. 74)

She assumes the role of a tragic figure when Mortal loses his political position. She will not crumble and become desperate, rather she will accept this destiny and see

her life as a gleaming star that is no more. In a view on life similar to Calderón de la Barca's La vida es sueño, Dolores sees this stage of her life as her natural destiny. There is an established order in this universe, and no matter how someone attempts to alter it, in the end the poor will again be immersed in their poverty and the rich will continue to enjoy wealth and power.

Vuelve el río a la fuente, la luz a la
aurora, la fiera herida al bosque. Ca-
da uno en su agua. Cada pájaro en su
aire. Vuelvo al fondo del mar, con la
bata blanca de Obatalá, en la noche,
bandera de los muertos. Arbol soy,
sombra di. Lo oscuro asusta a los pá-
jaros, pero el día viene, ronda de ga-
llos. (p. 63)

Nevertheless, Dolores, like King Lear, will not forgive those who have betrayed her and will call on all natural and artificial elements to seek revenge.

Y a vosotros, servidores oscuros, bes-
tias que me habéis traicionado, la gue-
rra os diezme, el rayo os ciegue, la le-
pra os roa. Habéis prometido sin cumplir,
dioses de blancos. Puñal sé breve. No
repitas mi sangre. (p. 63)

She returns to the town she left many years before with no money and carrying only dreams and the determination to change her life. Having been reduced to a shadow in a faceless crowd, Dolores writes her epitaph in ten verses carved in marble, defying rain, wind, and time.

Aquí Dolores Rondón
finalizó su carrera,
ven, mortal, y considera
las grandezas cuáles son.
El orgullo y presunción,

la grandeza y el poder,
 todo llega a fenecer.
 Y sólo se inmortaliza
 el mal que se economiza
 y el bien que se puede hacer.

Dolores Rondón is portrayed as a dynamic woman determined to change her destiny of prostitution and poverty. She has the energy and capability to achieve any goal she sets for herself. Yet she chooses to attach herself to a man and ascend through him. She prefers to be the power behind the throne, sacrificing personal recognition in exchange for wealth and prestige. Perhaps behind this choice is the knowledge that a woman of her background has a limited radius, while a man like Mortal can achieve what she can only dream of. So although not in the foreground, Dolores is able to accomplish all her goals, except public recognition. One of the models Sarduy has used in this characterization is very closed to Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, and in the political realm, to the relationship of Evan and Juan Domingo Perón. These are women with great potentiality, who sacrifice their development to follow a man who they know would never achieve greatness without their own initiative and incitement. Because they know they will probably suffer rejection, these women use the traditional female weapons of manipulation and deceit to achieve, within the enclosed world in which they are confined, their personal ambitions.

Stylistically, Gestos¹³ has been greatly influenced by the nouveau roman movement, especially in its emphasis on

13 Severo Sarduy, Gestos (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1963). All subsequent references to this edition will be done within the thesis and indicated in parentheses.

the objectivity of life as seen through a camera.¹⁴ In this novel, the narrator tries to capture the unending movement of people on the streets of Havana at all hours as through a moving camera which takes overviews and close-ups. Within this movement moments are frozen when something unexpected occurs, for instance a bomb explosion. But as soon as the uproar diminishes the robot-like movement goes on, and the days continue to roll by in the same sequence.

Pasan de un lado a otro, de un lado a otro de la calle, el tránsito nunca cesa. No se detienen, no se vuelven sobre sí mismos: siempre de un lado a otro, sin llegar. Van apurados, vienen de sus trabajos, van y vienen, van siempre, vienen aunque no tengan trabajo. (p. 7)

In this multitude where only gestures are noticed, the camera once in a while focuses on a character--a black woman who is in constant motion and whose gestures become a role to hide her acts.

--¿Qué quieres que haga? Mira cómo me he comido las uñas, mira que uñas para poner una bomba. ¡Mira qué estampa! ¡Lavar por el día y poner bombas por la noche! Una artista poniendo bombas, ¡qué vida! Dinamitera y actriz. (p. 61)

She confuses and lulls people around her with her constant talk about the disgusting life she leads and her perennial headaches which no amount of aspirins can subside.

Ella dice 'qué dolor de cabeza', y luego 'buenas noches, miren qué estampa. Todo el día lavando. Sí lavando. Una artista lavando, yo lavando. Cantante, actriz y lavandera. Una doble personalidad. Mi-

¹⁴ Roberto González Echevarría, "Rehearsal for Cobra," Review 74, Winter, 1974, p. 39.

ren, miren bien esta estampa. Miren qué
manos para guantes, miren qué uñas para
salir a escena, miren qué pelo, no sé co-
mo ponérmelo...' (p. 11)

The narrator's camera eye at specific moments focuses on this woman and then withdraws to confuse her in everyone's constant movement, presenting a picture of a carnival with its colors, motion, and sound.

Gestos thus does not have a human being as a protagonist; the center of attention is people at a given moment. The author's aim is to capture the pulse of life of this time and place. In Carpentier's El siglo de las luces history was the protagonist; in Gestos, movement, gestures and life pulse are emphasized. Within this general concern, Sofía stands out as a complete character in El siglo de las luces; in Gestos the nameless black woman comes to the fore.

This view of Havana lasts two or three days of roaming through the streets of the city by day and night. The old buildings with multiple cubby-holes serving as living quarters for the working class, and the streets full of children making playgrounds out of sidewalks and stairways are the daytime sight. Ella, the black woman, spends the day catching up on her sleep and washing clothes for the middle class in order to survive.

Lavar el día la cabeza cantar la noche
la cabeza la cabeza qué asco de vida la-
var todo el día él no ha venido la cabeza
miren que estampa la aspirina la vida es
fantasía qué dolor de cabeza hasta que lle-
gue la muerte la aspirina. (p. 15)

The evening picture covers the streets full of shady people, mostly men, the boardwalk on the Malecón, and the bars and nightclubs where the black woman performs.

Ella debe esperar aquí abajo o salir sola a la calle, a deambular entre la gente que va y viene hasta que amanezca, hasta que rendida de buscarlo entre los que vienen de la playa, entre los que apuntan números, entre los que toman café, decida irse a su casa. (pp. 14-15)

This spectacle is only altered momentarily when the police raid a place or shoot at passers-by, or when news is received of a bomb explosion (p. 39).

The narrative as a whole attempts to capture the reality of a specific time in Havana. While revolutionary forces were advancing in the province of Oriente, Havana was living the tempestuous hours of the fantasy and limelights of a theater. Everything was the same, poor people worked, were exploited, and escaped their misery through dance, song and stage.

A pesar, o tal vez a causa del terrorismo esporádico y la represión policíaca que le servían de 'avisos de muerte', La Habana se lanzó desenfrenadamente a la frivolidad y el placer con un intenso espíritu de carpe diem.

Con las guerrillas en un Oriente lejano, casi mítico, y del que se sabía poco a causa de la censura, La Habana, como el Berlín de los últimos años de la guerra, se abandonó furiosamente a la vida para exorcisar a la muerte.¹⁵

Within this framework, a poor black woman leads a double life as a worker and as a revolutionary. Her case is not unique; she is one among many who work underground to end exploitation and pave the way for the revolutionary forces' eventual takeover. Since the camera presents objectively a slice of life,

15 González Echevarría, "Són de La Habana", pp. 733-34.

the narrative ends with another day gone--tired people returning from their jobs, carrying on their daily routine. The black woman expresses her wish that death and repression will end some day:

Será mejor no cantar. No cantar más si es preciso y vivir bajo los tiros con tal de que se acaben los azules con sus bates sus sirenas sus espejuelos verdes que dan asco. (p. 111)

This woman simply referred to as ella is special because she has been selected by the narrator, but she is one of many and her acts and sayings are not exceptional, for anyone is capable of such behavior. She is presented as someone whom very few people know, but whose acts are noticeable.

Pero ésta es la mejor de todos. Casi nadie la conoce. Aparece cuando quiere. Canta si tiene deseos. Siempre bebe. Ella dice 'qué dolor de cabeza, qué asco de vida, qué mierda', y antes de salir a la pista se toma una aspirina. (p. 10)

She is aware of her skin color and becomes very defensive when anyone uses derogatory terms towards black people.

--¿Negra de qué?--Ella se ha detenido. Los pies en perpendicular, una mano en la cintura, la otra sosteniendo la pequeña maleta. Desafiante, su mirada busca el dueño de la voz ofensiva. --Los negros somos gente como todo el mundo, ¿sabe?, ¿eh?, ¿sabe? (p. 54)

She considers herself an artist; she is a singer and an actress, and she takes pride in being good in her profession. Night for this woman is the moment of true expression when she can dedicate all her being to singing and acting. Being

an actress, she never forgets to include her headache as part of the obstacles that hamper her moment of happiness.

'¡Qué éxito, verdaderamente qué éxito!
¡Tres números de un golpe! ¡Tres seguidos!
¡Sin una gota de nervios! ¿Se me notó algo?
Algo nerviosa cuando salí, ¿cuando empecé?
Nada, ¿verdad? Todo muy correcto, ¡muy natural!
Esa es la palabra: ¡muy natural!
Y eso que claro, como todos los días,
un poco, es decir, una barbaridad de dolor de cabeza.
Todo un dolor. No sé que hacer con ella.
Terminaré cortándomela.' (pp. 13-14)

During the day she shares the same chores of poor women in her barriada. She lives in a small, delapidated apartment with little privacy. She washes clothes for money to pay the rent and to sing and act in the evenings. These women, whether living alone or with their children, must provide for themselves, since men are absent from their lives or cannot be relied upon. They are poor, uneducated and abused; they survive by doing the chores middle-class women reject. Thus, they become part of the most exploited group in the work force--the servants.

At night ella walks mostly among men. Life after dark has its special people--musicians, artists, bookmakers, vagabonds and people involved in underground activities. She does not fear this environment; she is part of it. She is a public figure, independent and secure, and knows how to deal with any man who approaches her. After her singing act, she goes to a bar, has a few drinks, and then takes a walk on the malecón or some other place where she can enjoy a sunrise.

There is a special man in her life who worries, motivates, and fulfills her as a woman. Yet her acts and decisions are independent of him. Whether he is by her side or away from

her, she will still be the washwoman in the day and the artist at night. She will continue to be the invisible revolutionary who after placing a bomb mingles with the crowd and fools the police over and over again. Nevertheless, it is in this relationship that her characterization comes closest to a stereotype.

The narrator describes her lover as a white young man. The emphasis on skin color immediately characterizes this man as an outsider in the woman's social group. This will be reaffirmed when he speaks to her in a formal tone with the selective vocabulary of the educated middle or upper class. Whether in public or in the privacy of her apartment, this man uses the formal usted; perhaps he needs to detach himself emotionally from the woman who is his partner in the underground activities and with whom he sometimes shares a bed.

El dice 'oiga' y se para en firme, como para decir 'deténgase, míreme, soy yo quien habla', para después, sonriente, añadir: '¿Ya me ha olvidado?' El está aquí. Ahora. El se acerca. El forma el centro. El se acerca cada vez más hacia el primer plano. (p. 17)

While he speaks about the heat or the coffee or the news from Oriente, Ella stares at him and goes over every inch of his face and body. Stopping at his nose, she detects some negroid trait that in her mind would draw him closer to her.

La nariz gruesa, de pequeñas ventanas, es lo que verdaderamente da el aire mulato a todo el rostro. (p. 18)

In a dialogue between thought and reality, the existing relationship between the man and woman is revealed. While he speaks about the coffee, she thinks of asking him why he has

been away so long, and of confessing to him how she has suffered from his absence.

--¿Ya me ha olvidado? ¿Tomamos un café?
 --¿Dónde has estado?
 --¿Un café fuerte?
 --Te he esperado, ha llovido toda la noche...
 --Aquí mismo, en el 'Vicky' hay buen café.
 --Y he estado caminando, sola...
 --¡Oye! ¡Dos cafés!
 --...por esta esquina..., por toda la ciudad...
 --Son seis.
 --vacía, vacía, siempre lloviendo...
 --Seis de diez, cuatro de vuelta, uno dos tres cuatro; gracias
 --siempre lloviendo. Esta será la última vez...
 --Un poco de agua..., sí tomo agua después del café; sé que se toma antes.
 --que te espere..., que piense... (p. 18)

To his solemn and reasonable tone she responds with emotion and spontaneity. There is an insinuation that this woman behaves chiefly on an emotional level, and that even her underground activities are motivated primarily by her love for this man. "--Claro que no, poner una bomba no es difícil. Yo pondré las que tú quieras" (p. 64). Because of her proletarian background and her color, it is implied (and so the critics have interpreted it) that she admires and loves this man because of his class extraction and his whiteness. She never sees herself as his equal but rather as an inferior who obeys orders from the most capable. In his presence she underestimates her capacity, although with her own people and with the police she regards herself as an equal or superior to the repressive forces she continuously dupes. Roberto González Echevarría has pointed out that Sarduy eliminates all serious matters from his novel by reducing the revolutionary act of placing bombs to a mere motivation of a woman in love who will do anything to gain her man's

affection.

La protagonista de la novela, esa lavandera-actriz (que suponemos mulata o negra), da, desde el principio, y mantiene a lo largo de toda la novela, ese tono de lirismo patético, sostenido, sobre todo, por la aventura amorosa que constituye el móvil secreto de la acción. Porque las peripecias de la lavandera-actriz convertida en terrorista, los riesgos a que se expone para dinamitar la planta eléctrica (que forma el núcleo del argumento), no son motivados por ideales políticos, sino por un amor.¹⁶

This critic also believes that love can never materialized primarily because of social and racial barriers.¹⁷ Although González Echevarría is a very perceptive critic, as seen in the many essays he has written on Severo Sarduy, I disagree with his characterization of this woman. There is of course an obvious insinuation that class and color are important in this relationship, but the woman's commitment to the revolutionary cause cannot be reduced to a mere emotion.

As a revolutionary the woman is portrayed as bold and extremely secure in her convictions. She never misses an opportunity to make people aware of their present situation. By instilling doubts nonchalantly, she discovers the people she can regard as supporters or as enemies.

--Oiga, ¿usted no siente el empuje?
 --¿El empuje?
 --El empuje general.
 --But, ¿what do you mind?
 --El de los otros, el de las cosas.
 --Oiga, perdóneme la pregunta: ¿Usted es 'aleluya'?
 --¿Cómo?

16 González Echevarría, "Són de la Habana", p. 737.

17 González Echevarría, p. 737.

--De esos que hablan del día en que se
acabó el mundo y eso, ¿you know?
--No, no, yo no know. Yo digó el empuje:
lo que asusta, lo que aprieta, los que es-
tán arriba...
--Usted es un poco barbuda, ¿no? (pp. 29-30)

Disregarding her lover's formal and solemn approach to-
wards strategy, Ella sees the placement of a bomb as a natural
process, as easy as carrying her suitcase. With a clear know-
ledge of the grounds she moves on, she plans her acts to take
advantage of her sex appeal and her artistic talents.

Basta de explicaciones. Poner una bomba no
es nada del otro mundo. Si todo fuera como
eso, yo me reiría de los peces de colores.
Empezaré a arreglarme con tiempo. Lo primero
para poner una bomba es ir bien vestido. Así
todo el mundo piensa que voy a actuar. Como
ya están acostumbrados a verme con la maletica,
nadie imaginará que llevo otra cosa que mis ma-
quillajes, es decir, mis aspirinas y mis polvos.
(p. 63)

She evaluates her work, recognizes her mistakes and takes all
the precautions necessary to avoid a second error and endanger
her companions and her own life (p. 65). Her past experience
and her present convictions allow her to remain unruffled under
great stress. Carrying a bomb in a suitcase, waiting for the
police to conduct their routine search can be an unnerving ex-
perience. Yet the woman plays the role of someone innocent and
undisturbed by these checkups, since she has nothing to hide or
tell; she is the apolitical actress and singer.

Ella ha colocado la pequeña maleta junto a
la columna; permanece de pie, muy derecha,
los brazos cruzados, la respiración entre-
cortada, el sudor corriendo por todo el cu-
erpo....Ella marca con los tacones el com-
pás de la música, se arregla el peinado
abriendo los ganchos con la boca y colocán-

dolos entre las numerosas ondas.
 --¿Usted qué trae?
 --¿Yo? Nada.
 --Entonces váyase al carajo.
 --Ah...bueno... (p. 74)

Aware of her responsibility not only to the cause she is struggling for, but to her other companions involved in the operation, this woman is very cautious in every movement she makes. Just like an actress who has rehearsed her role to perfection, she goes over every detail before the performance.

La maleta está preparada: una linterna, un alicate, una cajita de aspirinas, una revista de modas y una bomba. Ella se ha vestido para la ocasión: raso azul brillante, uñas y pelo arreglados. La maleta deja ver el borde de un libreto cuidadosamente colocado. (p. 67)

Her job requires her to trust no one and keep a distance from the people who in any way approach her. However, she is alert and apprehensive of any dangerous moment, and will immediately take advantage of any opportunity to carry out her plans, or to escape, if this is required. During a police search, at the precise moment when her suitcase is about to be opened, an oriental (el asiático) captures the attention of the police. In a second, the woman disappears, suitcase and all.

--¡Hijos de puta!
 El chino grita al final de la fila mientras corre hacia la puerta de salida zigzagueando entre las columnas.
 --¡Aquí llevo una bomba! ¡Aquí llevo una bomba!
 Los policias se precipitan a lo largo del portal tras el chino....
 Mucho más lejos, ella corre. (pp. 75-76)

After accomplishing her mission, the woman goes to the theatre to play the role of Antigone. Her world becomes Thebes and her battle is now the preservation of her individuality in defiance of a law she knows is unjust. Her lines become confused with her own thoughts when she knows death is near and she will never share the warmth of a man's body.

En el aire queda aún el eco de los últimos textos: 'la ley exige obediencia'. Ella se dirige a Creón: 'Sin esposo, sin boda, sin haber sido amada.' Otra vez. Otra vez sola. Rodeada por los otros, rodeada por las cosas. (p. 92)

By the time the play is over, she knows her lover will not come back. He has either disappeared, as he had done previously, or he has been killed. Either way he is no longer a part of her life. She is saddened and suffers greatly behind her many masks.

Quién se queda en su casa, quién no da vueltas y vueltas, quién encuentra un rincón para detenerse, mirarse en un espejo, llorar. Un rincón donde no haya un tiro, un 'azul', una niña recitando. (p. 110)

But the struggle continues and she knows that both of them are only pieces in this apparently incipient movement. Their lives must be useful to the cause, and there is no time to sit and cry over a dead companion. Life goes on and the struggle never ceases in the collective movement of which this woman is an integral part.

Severo Sarduy and Pedro Juan Soto's women come from a working-class background, burdened by poverty and the imprisonment in fixed roles. Within this class, Sarduy chooses as his stage the underground world of singers, dancers, musicians and actors.

A feature of Sarduy's work which runs through all neo-baroque literature is its theatricality: its insistence on the theatre as the scene of action; the presentation of its characters as singers, actors, vedettes.¹⁸

In this world of vaudeville, fantasy and reality combine in the darkness of the night and the spotlight of the stage. For Sarduy skin color is as important as class extraction. His women are either black or oriental, but even this element suffers change. In the course of the narrative the characters are transformed into princesses or fairies; they dye their skin to become white, yellow or black; they even go from being women to turning into men or becoming hermaphrodites. In this world of unreality everything is possible with make-up and costumes. There is no class or color when the night begins and the lights of imagination are turned on.

Sarduy's women are portrayed as emotional beings who usually get involved with unruffled and cool-headed men. They live passionate moments with great intensity, yet they never renounce their identity. They remain the revolutionary woman in Gestos and the forceful, ambitious Dolores in De donde son los cantantes. As intensely as they live their affairs, they always remain in control of the situation in which they are involved. They are able to continue their lives as independent beings when their men leave either by death or by abandonment.

Women are presented in constant movement and transformation. They are in a perennial search for meaning to their lives as artists and human beings in a specific time and space.

¹⁸ Roberto González Echevarría, "Rehearsal for Cobra," p. 39.

Men enter and leave their lives without ever becoming a pivot for them. Although Sarduy's women sometimes come close to the mistress stereotype, they are rescued and redeemed by the author's creation of the theatrical world in which no one remains himself for too long.

Lloraba por su abuelo, por su bisabuelo,
por el tatarabuelo, y así, arriba y abajo de sus
sangres, por la madre de la madre de su abuela
Andrea, la de las hojas de salvia en las sienes
pálidas, la del fogón y la batea, ella que no
tenía comida propia para cocinarle a sus hijos,
ni ropa apenas con qué cubrirse el cuerpo es-
cuálido...

Pero Chacha estaba allí. Y como Andrea,
como la madre de su padre, como todas las madres
guajiras que eran y que habían sido, le durmió
el miedo a su destino incierto con el pezón oscuro
que florecía con goterones blancos...

Tierra Inerme, Dora Alonso

Dora Alonso, now in her late sixties, began to write in the criollismo trend of the thirties, but grew and changed with her country and its literature by taking a new direction in her most recent writing.

Born and raised in the rural province of Matanzas, it was natural for Alonso to participate so eloquently in the criollista movement in her country. Through the short story she denounced the poverty, ignorance and oppression the peasants were immersed in through the government's indifference or consent. Alonso was able to become part of Cuba's political and literary groups through her involvement in the movement against the Machado dictatorship. Because of the massive participation of women in these events and the crisis into which the country was plunged, there was a political and literary acceptance of women as equals.

In 1936 she participated in a literary contest for women sponsored by the "feminine section" of the magazine Bohemia. Her short story "Humildad" won first prize. This acknowledgement brought her to the attention of literary circles, and in 1937 Alonso was included in Ibarzábal's anthology of short stories Cuentos contemporáneos. With her story "Oro y sangre", Alonso joined the mainstream of criollismo in the Caribbean headed by Juan Bosch from the Dominican Republic and Emilio S. Belaval from Puerto Rico.

In 1944 Alonso decided to experiment with the long narrative form and published her first novel, Tierra Inerme, which was highly praised. In 1947 she was the recipient of the Hernández Catá prize for best short story.

In the next thirteen years Alonso disappeared from literary circles. From an extremely conservative female point of view, Concepción Teresa Alzola attributes this absence to Alon-

so's marriage and her natural inclination towards domestic tasks.¹ Besides the confinement of a marriage, Alonso also moved to Marianao, separating herself geographically from the center of literary involvement. Perhaps the most important reason for this early retirement was the standstill to which criollismo had come and a necessary self-evaluation as narrative writer.

Two years after the Cuban Revolution Dora Alonso's 1944 novel was submitted to the Casa de las Américas literary contest and awarded first prize for that year. Because of the time in which it was written, the novel remains in the criollista tradition: there is no experiment with form, and the theme is basically the struggles of the peasants with the forces of nature and with the injustices of an oppressive government. The novel was officially praised for its theme and for the novelty of being written by a woman. Some critics even tried to fit the novel into a pattern of socialist realism that is not there.²

It is not until 1966 that Alonso emerges as a writer in a new style attuned to Cuba's new reality. Taking some essential elements from her criollista stories, such as the tall tales, the human correspondence between characters, the freedom found in children and animals' instincts, and mixing these with a touch of fantasy, Alonso began to create her literary world. She has served the Revolution by committing herself to the writing of children's books, an area of little importance be-

1 "Cuentística de Dora Alonso," Unión, I, no. 2 (julio-agosto, 1962), 98.

2 S. Ramos, "Dora Alonso: Tierra inerme," Casa de las Américas, II, no. 9 (noviembre-diciembre 1961), 167-68.

fore 1959.³ She published two collections of children's stories in 1966: Las aventuras de Guille and Ponolani, and has also written plays for children.

Dora Alonso believes that the Revolution's best contribution to culture has been the incorporation of the masses into the country's educational plans. A writer, she states, is a mirror reflecting reality, whose literary production is conditioned by the existence of this Revolution.⁴

While creating children's literature, Alonso has experimented with other themes and forms, and has developed a new style immersed in fantasy and symbolism. Once caballos, a collection of her short stories published in 1970, is the fulfillment of a writer who learned how to grow with time. On a literary level, Dora Alonso and Jean Rhys, writing in solitude in the English countryside, have much in common. After long periods of silence, both women, old in years, emerged with a new vitality and new ways of expressing their awareness as women and human beings. They have refused to be crushed by time and space; both women continue in their sixties and seventies to create.

The rural area, especially the inaccessible mountain region, was the setting for most of the criollista literature of the forties. A procession of poor farmers, large and small landowners, political caciques, and well-meaning bandits passes through the pages of Alonso's stories. The exploitation of the poor by landowners with the consent of the politicians is al-

3 Olga Marina Elizagaray, "Dora Alonso por el reino de la fantasía," Bohemia, LVIII, no. 37 (1976), 10-13.

4 "Literatura y revolución," Casa de las Américas, IX, nos. 51-52 (noviembre 1968-febrero 1969), 131.

ways at their core. A feeling of impotence permeates the characters' lives, which results in a generally pessimistic tone.

It has usually been difficult for writers within a movement to break with the trend they know best and to experiment with new forms. In the case of the criollistas this has been extremely hard. Abelardo Díaz Alfaro, for example, is still writing today estampas jíbaras which really belong to the literature of nostalgia. For Dora Alonso the transition has been a long one of literary revision and political changes. For this reason her novel Tierra inerme,⁵ published in 1961 although written much earlier, relies heavily on the literary trend of the forties.

The novel's setting is the mountain region, and the characters fall into a social structure consisting of corrupted government officials, landowners, profit-making doctors, likeable and humane caciques, and the mass of poor, uneducated, ill-fed peasants. The story centers on the family of a small landowner, Clemente Muñoz, who, contrary to wealthy people in this region, is a hard worker who treats his employees in a just manner, projecting a father/patron image to the peasants.⁶ It is interesting to note how Alonso romanticizes a situation that is clearly a case of exploitation, even if done on a small scale. A good point of comparison would be Manuel Zeno Gandía's naturalistic approach to the same situation in his 1894 novel La charca.

5 Dora Alonso, Tierra Inerme, Cuba, ayer y hoy (Buenos Aires: Editorial Ambos Mundos, 1965). All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

6 Seymour Menton, "La novela de la Revolución Cubana," Cuadernos Americanos, XXIII, no. 1 (enero-febrero 1964), 236.

The main character in the novel is Clemente's niece, Ernestina. She was raised in Havana, although she always spent long vacations in the country. After her mother's death and her break-up with her fiancé, Ernestina decides to live with her uncle. Here is a young, attractive woman who has learned a trade, lived and worked on her own in the city, and yet chooses to bury herself in an environment which will extinguish her potentiality. Furthermore, she becomes the housekeeper and cook for her uncle and two male cousins. She simply accepts this role as normal. Never does it cross Clemente's mind to do any housework or to allow Ernestina to get a job in town. The main character's consent to this encasement reflects the author's sex awareness at this particular time.

However, there are many instances in the novel when the author is obviously drawing the reader's attention to the absurdity behind certain myths. The role of follower and shadow that a wife must play is illustrated in the scene in which Wenceslao and his wife, Clemente's friends, say farewell after an all day visit.

Pero el viejo tripudo bostezaba ahora como el perro: todo dientes y gáznate al aire, llevando la quijada hasta el cuello. Y su mujer se levantaba a la señal inequívoca del sueño rutinario que le indicaba despedirse e ir delante, como establece el matrimonio: delante para recibir órdenes. (p. 52)

When describing how the peasants relate in matters of sex, the author captures the variations of machismo as it is manifested in saying and gossip. A peasant admiring another male friend describes him as

un toro. Un pachote. Tres mujeres tuvo. A unas las mató entre el catre, el fogón y los partos. A las otras haciéndoles diez hijos. (p.20)

Throughout the novel the author shows vividly how peasant women are worth less than a head of cattle. They are in the household to clean, cook, and take care of the children. They are used for sexual gratification, with no concern for their feelings or willingness to participate in the sexual act. Their function is to be there whenever they are solicited. The greatest gift a woman can give a man is a male child.

El día del nacimiento cuando el padre se arrió a la recién parida para ver al crío, sonrió al registrar con su mano dura entre los trapos:--Es un macho...¡Es macho! Salió riendo, contento, mientras Andrea sonreía también aunque apenas la había mirado a ella. (pp. 30-31)

When Ernestina attempts to advise one of the peasant women who seems to be perpetually pregnant, she encounters the impenetrable wall of ignorance. The guajira is aware of two birth control methods, the condom and withdrawal, but she does not use them because her husband does not like them, or because she feels that God will punish her.

--Es verdad; yo a veces lo pienso. Con esta miseria no debieran venir más muchachos...
--Tú tienes culpa también. Niégate...Que se cuide un poco. Que te evite los hijos. Ya está bueno de muchachos muertos de hambre. ¿No te das cuenta? Te moriras en un parto cualquier día. Y después, ¿qué será de esas criaturas?...

--No me atrevo a negarme...¿te das cuenta? Andrés no quiere hacerlo en la otra forma... No le gusta. Si se lo propongo buscará otra mujer. Mejor seguir así, hasta que Dios quiera...

...ya lo había intentado una vez...¿y qué sacó? Algo malo. Sacó únicamente el más raquítico de sus hijos. ¿Se daba cuenta ella

por qué Ramoncito salió tan ruin, tan chiquitico, y sietemesino...? Claro: si apenas sería una gota... (p. 23)

Ernestina is always portrayed as a woman whose world does not revolve around a man. She is able to control her emotions and to lead her own life away from a man who may love her, but who may also suffocate her individuality. She is not willing to let any man use her; she will decide who will be her companion. As should be expected in a conventional novel, Ernestina falls in love with a man educated in the city and whose links to this region lie in family ties and a dedication to the betterment of the peasants. Guillermo is a sensitive, intelligent young man who respects Ernestina and is not afraid of being less of a man for expressing his feelings. The author's portrayal of Guillermo is handled with the same subtlety and tenderness reserved for female characters,

With the short stories written in the sixties, Alonso undergoes her transition from an exhausted literary trend to a young, invigorating search for themes and style to suit a revolutionary period. Nevertheless, Alonso is a woman whose literary formation began and surged in criollismo; thus, she has retained various elements from that period. Her collection of stories Once caballos, from which three narratives have been chosen for analysis, have as setting a zoological park near Havana. The environment is urban, yet close to the rural-ity of her previous stories, since they will deal with people's treatment and relationship to animals. In all of Alonso's stories, the natural environment is described in great detail. The author appeals to all senses in her descriptions, which sometimes become enumeration, whether it be the smell of budding flowers or the flopping sound of rats falling into a

barrel of tallow. Although settings may vary, her characters are still poor, uneducated and unable or unwilling to adapt to a city life in which they consider themselves as outcasts.

If one had to choose a story by this author which captures a moment and transcends the particular with its symbolism, and in which every part fits perfectly as the gears in a watch, it would be "La rata".⁷ The same description may be applied to Abelardo Díaz Alfaro's "El josco".⁸ Both authors choose to offer a personification of animals seldom considered as comparable to humans. They become the main characters of stories dealing with a society where men have forgotten their human qualities. The animals in their instinctive behavior capture the feelings that men have put aside to achieve commodities. Josco, the black bull, symbolizes the Puerto Rican entity, forced to change his ways so that progress may continue at a rapid pace. His rebellion becomes a cry in the mountain, for the forces of power will not listen. In keeping with the pessimistic outlook in Puerto Rican literature during the forties and fifties, Josco throws himself from a cliff, ending his life but preserving his integrity.

In Alonso's story, the rat's world is enclosed and dark. Unlike Josco, she does not desire light and freedom, but only the warmth and protection a granary can offer. This is the place the rat was born, and she has come to know every safe and dangerous place. She knows where she can find food and

⁷ Dora Alonso, "La rata," Cuentos (La Habana: UNEAC, 1976), pp. 105-108. Originally published in 1962. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

⁸ Terrazo (San Juan: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1948; rpt. 1967), pp. 17-23.

shelter any time. During the day the rat sleeps, although she is always vigilant for any strange noise. At night her work begins, investigating every corner in search of food. The owner of the granary is a contrast to the rat. He works in the daytime and rests at night. His concern is not for food and shelter, but for the profit he can make in his business. As long as he can sell the food he stocks in the granary, he does not care whether the tallow he sells is filled with rats and roaches, or if the corn has been gnawed by the rodents. His business is selling; there is no concern for the welfare of the poor who buy.

Voces, rostros parecidos, asomando para recibir onzas de menos y más bichos ahogados en la manteca, según el cucharón hurgaba más abajo, revolviendo sus distintas muertes. Los gruesos dedos apartaban las manchas aladas y oscuras, sirviendo el resto cuidadosamente, sin desperdiciar. (p. 107)

The rat is about to breed when the narrative begins; she finds a distant place in the granary to make her nest. Even before she finishes stocking up food for the unborn, her womb stretches and the babies come forth.

Esta noche, sus hijuelos dormidos empezaron a removerse en su pequeño vientre inflado. Antes de poder roer de los granos, del tocino, de cada una de las cosas amontoandas, sintió dilatarse su entraña, salir sus hijos uno a uno... (p. 106)

Since she is now inside the granary in the daytime, she is very fearful of being discovered. But the owner does not bother to clean or move the stacks of grain. Once the man finishes his business in the late afternoon, the rat is again free to find food without fear.

The mice grow and the rat is on her own again. As time passes she breeds again and again, continuing the same life pattern. Appealing to all the senses, the author presents a world of filth; the smell of roaches, the touch of snouts and the sound of winged insects (p. 108). As a parallel to this world, the man continues to exploit the peasants by cheating them and selling them rotten food which causes illness and malnutrition. The poor continue to be indebted to this man, who is responsible for their life of misery. What for the rat is freedom and happiness, is for the poor the cause of suffering and frustration.

In contrast to "El josco"'s pessimistic ending, there is in "La rata" a turnover which reverses the man and the rat's world. Those "wretched of the earth" unite and demand their right to be treated as human beings. They destroy the debt notebook and open the doors of the granary so that food be accessible to all the needy.

El golpe llegó por las mismas figuras y aquellas caras ojerosas. Entraron unidas, con mudo encono. Cada saco podrido, cada cueva de bichos, cada nido de rata se removió en un pánico total y breve. La claridad bañó en limpia lechada los hediondos rincones y su historia de tantos, tantos años... (p. 108)

The author has chosen to personify an animal which is universally scorned for its filth and disgusting appearance. In this story the rat is converted into the portrayal of a woman whose life revolves around survival for her and her children. Similar to any poor, uneducated woman on her own, the rat's concern is for food and shelter. This preoccupation is her drive to survive confronting the risks of life and becoming adept at the game of deceiving. The rat acts independently;

there is never any mention of a companion; she breeds and cares for the little until they are on their own.

The rat's fear is concentrated on the man. He represents the strange world of human beings who have the power to destroy not only her, but her whole world. The man thus comes to mean exploitation, cruelty, and above all, numbness of human feelings. As long as he can make a profit he will oppress the poor and abandon the granary to the rats. With the Revolution the peasants recapture their humaneness and destroy the agent which had turned them into animals of prey. The rat's world disappears when the poor can live again as human beings.

"Una"⁹ tells the story of a woman married for fifty years whose husband has just died. The narrator, who is the harbinger of this news, recollects some memories she keeps of the life of this simple woman. She is portrayed as the ideal woman who dedicated all her life to being a wife and mother and who never questioned the validity of these roles.

The image that always recurs in the narrator's memory is of seeing this woman working--cooking, cleaning, feeding the children. She seemed to be always pregnant or with a small child in her arms.

Remonté el pasado. Siempre ella aparecía
trabajando. Unas veces (muchas realmente),
dándole vida a un nuevo hijo, lo que hacía
lucir más pequeña su figura y más redonda.
Sobre el hijo por nacer, el delantal estam-
pado de tizne y grasa; sobre la frente man-
chada de pigmento, los mechones pegados por

⁹ Dora Alonso, "Una", Cuentos (La Habana: UNEAC, 1976), pp. 111-115. Originally published in 1965. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

el calor cercano del fogón. (p. 112)

She was a woman in constant movement. She milked the cows, brought huge pitchers of water into the house, washed piles of clothes, and never worried about her broken nails, chafed hands or prematurely aged looks. She always accompanied her work with songs from the days of courtship. Toil became pleasure, for she saw in these activities her meaning in life. She was never sad or overburdened; she sang when she washed and when she rocked her children to sleep. Both acts were equally significant (p. 113). She raised her children, all boys, to be independent and self-sufficient. She never clung to any of them, but instead let them develop and go on their own. She respected their decisions and refused to play the role of martyr-mother. When her eldest committed suicide, she was saddened but never blamed his death on anyone.

Dijo algo así, como que estaba en su derecho de rechazar lo que ya no quería. Sin reclamarle nada por haberlo parido. (p. 113)

Her love for her husband never waned, on the contrary, it had grown stronger and firmer with the years. She had not relinquished her personality; she had stood by him, but also fought with him when their ideas differed (p. 113).

The picture the author has drawn of this woman is so idealistic that she emerges as a figure as romantic as one in William Wordsworth's Lucy poems. The narrator's memory is veiled with the childhood years that tend to erase the ugly and enhance the beautiful. It is hard to envision a woman who for fifty years battled with poverty, hard work, and clashing personalities and never doubted or lost her joy of living. This is not just an outstanding woman but a mythic figure. The title "Una" accurately describes her, for she remains a

unique and almost fantastic person in this collection of stories.

"Un gato siamés"¹⁰ belongs to the group of stories published in Once caballos whose setting is the zoo on the outskirts of Havana. The structure of the story closely resembles Gabriel García Márquez' treatment of the fantastic element. Setting description abounds in the story, creating a realistic environment for the characters to act out their roles, leading to a surprise ending where the real and the fantastic merge.

The narrator, an older woman, habitually visits the zoo every morning. She meets here an eight year-old girl to whom she is immediately attracted. A friendship develops between these two generations; they share the nostalgia of the past and the excitement of the discovery of the new. The fierceness of the jaguar and the dance of the condor magnetize their attention, perhaps because they desire to have the qualities of these caged creatures. Although each character's past life is kept secret and no prying is attempted, the narrator, on seeing a Siamese cat, recalls a moment in her life when she was fascinated, as the young girl is now, by nature-its plants and its animals. She describes the scene as an enchanted place, just as a child would envision it.

--Cuando yo era una niña vivía en una casona encantada, con rosas y caballos. Caballos de espuma y sombra, que tascaban el bocado,

¹⁰ Dora Alonso, "Un gato siamés," Cuentos (La Habana: UNEAC, 1976), pp. 153-60. Originally published in 1969. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the body of the thesis.

llevando de jinete una brava chicuela. Por los patios croaban sapos y echaban ramos los paraísos. En los corrales bramaban los toros. Pero lo más bonito era mi gata amarilla, llamada Mandarina, que tenía un ojo azul y el otro verde. (p. 159)

The hidden past is no longer a mystery and the imaginary world vanishes, and only an old woman reminiscing in the zoo remains.

Parecía escucharme con mucha atención, interesada y triste. Me dijo, en voz muy baja:
--Esa es mi casa y Mandarina es mía.
Al volverme y no verla a mi lado, comprendí.
(p. 160)

The narrator portrays herself when young as physically plain, unattractive and therefore rejected by most grown-ups. This may be the reason why she is always alone, discovering the mysteries of life unaccompanied by child or adult. She seems in great need to communicate with someone. Although timid, she responds to a friendly gesture.

Se daba vuelta y sonreía con infantil orgullo, mostrando unos dientes parejos y una cara fea donde únicamente los ojos sabían hablar. Vino a mí, todavía conmovida, pero feliz de sí misma, de haberse probado quién sabe qué cosas frente al yaguar. No parecía tímida, pero yo sabía que lo era y mucho. (p. 154)

She speaks incessantly, as if there were not time enough to express all her ideas, and in fear that this companion might go away very soon. Silence would only reveal her shyness: "Hablaba sin cesar, por temor a quedarse sin palabras" (p.155).

As an older woman, the narrator contemplates her surroundings and finds ecstasy in sitting under a great tree that breathes life in its age-old existence.

Las vivencias del árbol, sus raíces adventicias que vienen a buscar la tierra como resueltos hijos y a ella se agarran y arriba vuelven en tronco vigoroso, para soltar de nuevo al viento los hijos de su fertilidad, me contentan mucho. (pp. 153-54)

She is now a listener who rediscovers life through the experiences of a young girl. The narrator is also a loner at this stage of her life; in her own way she reaches out for someone to share her experiences with. Her shyness and strangeness become barriers in seeking communication. So she turns into a recipient; she will listen and at times guide and explore together. She feels that this newly found happiness can be recaptured through her memories (p. 158). However, even the detailed and elaborate description of everything they find in the park cannot prolong this moment of fantasy. The recollection of the Siamese cat and the narrator's conveyance of this childhood memory breaks the spell. Only memories remain.

In this story the author has begun to portray her protagonists as human beings in a real world dealing with concrete problems. There is fantasy, but it is the natural escape of human beings who fear and shun their present, and even perhaps their future. The older woman image, which at times borders upon the old maid stereotype, will be developed further in the last story to be examined, "Algodón de azúcar".

In "Once caballos"¹¹ as in "La rata", the world of animals

¹¹ Dora Alonso, "Once caballos," Cuentos (La Habana: UNEAC, 1976), pp. 163-169. Originally published in 1969. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the body of the thesis.

is presented as a contrast to the world of men. However, this time human beings are mere shadows that represent a fixed world where life is judged for its practicality rather than its humaneness. Men appear as watchdogs; they have a job to do and are indifferent to the struggles and sufferings of the herd. On the other hand, the horses are attributed intensive feelings and emotions, making them human figures.

no podemos dejar de apreciar en el asunto de nuestro cuento la intención clara de destacar los aspectos 'instintivamente sensibles' del mundo animal para, sobre la base de la analogía que mantienen con los elementos del mismo orden de la vida humana, llegar a un grado de humanización del animal que le permite aludir e identificar, hasta casi confundirse, al ser humano.¹²

As the tired herd advances towards the slaughterhouse, detailed descriptions are given of the surroundings.

El aire olía a café, a boñiga fresca, a hierba cortada, y aventaba los ollares de la hambrienta caballada. Un reguero de bosta iba marcando su paso. (p. 163)

The horses are characterized by their fatigue, old age, and hungry looking appearance. They are animals drained of their life force and worked to their last drop of sweat. They appear useless and ready to collapse at any moment.

Cojeaban algunos en la calle solitaria. La misma yegua tenía los cascos podridos de rancia y entorpecidas las articulaciones por los sobrehuesos....Al contorsionar el flaco cuerpo se marcaban los costillares bajo la piel costrosa. (p. 163)

12 Eduardo Toural, "Análisis del cuento 'Once caballos'", Revista de la Universidad de Oriente, XII (octubre 1973), 196.

The story focuses on an old mare which, although famished and weak, does not anticipate death because she carries life in her womb.

Sofocada por su gran barriga, la yegua resollaba fuerte. El hombre la mantenía nerviosa aguzándole el instinto. Sus orejas marchitas descubrían ruidos desconocidos, inquietándola. Apenas conseguía moverse dentro del corral. (p. 164)

When the sun rises, the slaughter will begin. But the mare is unaware of her destiny as she feels that her moment of giving birth is near. She cannot think of her own hunger and exhaustion (p. 167).

This particular morning is described as dirty light ("la sucia luz que antecede al sol") because it will be the end for these old horses which now have nothing to offer man and must be destroyed. The first horse is taken up the ramp; he perceives the danger but is still stunned by the death blow.

El matarife, ató una soga al primer pescuezo y, tiró delante. Las patas flacas, inseguras por el hambre, subieron la rampa. A su llegada arriba, todavía enredado el último ensueño, el caballo recibió en el pecho el golpe del cuchillo, desplomándose entre convulsos pataleos. (p. 168)

The smell of butchered blood mingles with the rupture of the mare's womb and the birth of a blood-stained colt reaching out for life. There is no place for death in the mare's world, as she offers her child the emaciated nipples of her worn, starved body.

Grotesca y torpe, su cría consiguió levantarse, tambaleando. La madre abrió sus patas en un ofrecimiento de pobreza. El potrillo aceptó sin miedo. (p. 169)

Similar to the personification of the rat, the mare is seen in the role of mother. She is the bearer and preserver of life, even in an atmosphere of death. The alazán which appears in the story represents male virility and energetic force--a clear contrast to the mare's languidness and dimness.

El potro alazán, por ejemplo, es la clara expresión del instinto y de la vitalidad animal; es, además, el elemento activo dentro de la famélica caravana, y este aspecto distintivo lo coloca en evidente relación de interdeterminación con ella: ambos se definen mutuamente por contraste.¹³

However, the mare is strong enough to ward off the alazán's advances. Her only concern is her unborn colt. She accepts discomforts, mistreatment, and injustices so long as her loved one is not hurt. She relies only on herself and separates from the herd to seek a safe place to give birth. Neither the smell of blood nor the sound of the butcher's knife can divert her attention from the care and love she must give her colt. Like the rat, the only one capable of upsetting her world is man. The mare is at his mercy, for she has no control over these outside circumstances. To man she is not a sensitive being, but an animal to be used, worn out, and disposed of.

Twice Alonso has used animal symbols to portray females who are strong, independent, sensitive and able to survive and retain their humaneness under the most adverse conditions. This world of emotions is populated by females, while the world of exploitation and insensitivity is made up of men.

In "Algodón de azúcar"¹⁴ the zoo has become a world of illusion, like the circus, where a woman can believe she is someone else and can imagine the pleasures of love-making by watching the monkeys, the lions, the tigers, and even the birds. She is able to see anything she wishes through her prism of unreality.

The story deals with Lola, a woman in her late sixties who is trying to recapture the spirit she once possessed in her youth. As a girl she created a personal world made of butterflies, but she always touched the outside with the awareness of her boy playmates. As an adolescent she dreamed of beautiful dresses and huge ballrooms, while desiring the closeness of young men. At twenty she escaped her dull destiny of a seamstress when spring fever arouses her sensuality. But as the years went by, her dreams were shattered and her passion suffocated by a mother who constantly pulled her into the conformity of fixed roles. Her rebellion only produced a change of setting--from Minas to Havana--but her mother was always present to remind her of her filial duty and the behavior expected of her as a single woman.

By the time her mother dies, she is already fifty, and her hopes of finding a man to be her sexual partner have become lost in the wrinkles on her face and the fatness of her body.

Ya ella era sólo arrugas y bolsas, rematada por una fea melena deslucida por la permanente. Una mujerota de cintura ancha y piernas parejas y gordas como patas de piano, brazos de carne colgante y pies que caminaban torcidos como los de un loro suelto. (p.190)

14 Dora Alonso, "Algodón de azúcar," Cuentos (La Habana: UNEAC, 1976), pp. 187-194. Originally published in 1969. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the body of the thesis.

As the years go by, Lola departs more and more from reality and immerses herself in the memories of a past which she has chosen to make perfect. In her mind she becomes young again, and her passion grows as she sees couples of human beings and animals, close together, caressing and making love.

La anciana virgen del algodón de azúcar
buscaba a ciegas el encuentro con todo lo
que trinará o rugiera amor y amor. Largos
ratos quedaba quieta, atisbando el senti-
miento que descubriría. En la cuidada cárcel
deba inicio la sola alegría del cielo y las
cópulas. (p. 192)

She begins to transform her outward appearance so that it reflects her state of mind. She wears jewelry, high heels, French perfume, flowers on her breast. She carries a hand mirror which seems enchanted, for the only image reflected is that of a young, attractive woman. She even transforms the men in the zoo; the old and ugly become in her eyes young and handsome. The last scene in the story captures the moment when Lola, after flirting with a zoo worker, looks into her mirror and sees the attractive woman she was in her twenties.

Lola se apresuraba a abrir su bolso y le
temblaba la mano al sacar el espejo.
Desde la pulida luna, la muchacha de Minas
le sonrió. (p. 194)

Reality has been forsaken; Lola's fantasy world has taken over completely.

Every stage in Lola's life is marked by her sexual awakening and desire, which is constantly being frustrated by her mother, who is portrayed as the upholder of the most conservative conventionalities in society. Lola's only contact with sensuality becomes a prostitute for whom she makes dresses. Lola admires this woman who smells of bed and tobacco. But

the mother is always present, and Lola cannot satisfy her curiosity by asking intimate questions. As she grows older, she weighs herself down with excessive glitter from jewelry and make-up. She attends dances alone, looking so eager that men shun her presence "como se evita una pira devoradora y paciente" (p. 189).

When she is forty she wins her first and only victory-- her mother consents to move to Havana. But Lola does not realize then that the place did not really matter, for she drags along the same impediments to the fulfillment of life with a man. She is even willing to live with a man and to support him if necessary, but her mother clings to her and frustrates Lola's plans once again.

Lola luchó diez años más por tener un hombre en cualquiera de las dos formas: Cástate conmigo o te pongo un cuarto; pero la madre, contrapuesta a la naturaleza, se le colgaba del cuello con parecida obstinación y ahogó los últimos murmullos de su necesidad. (p.189)

When her mother dies Lola realizes that it is too late to start a new life with a man. She reconciles herself to leading an empty and unfulfilled life. She performs menial jobs which provide her necessary daily sustenance. When a new order is established in the country, Lola no longer has to rely on chance and whim to sell lottery tickets. She is assigned to the cotton candy booth at the zoo. After so many years of struggling to make a living, she had acquired the security and tranquility needed in old age. However, since her sexual desires had never been fulfilled, her dormant sensuality comes alive every day at the zoo, and in time forsakes reality.

Vieja ya, se hizo un refugio con todo lo que dejó de vivir. Como otros disponen verdaderas memorias, Lola desenterraba los fantasmas y las mariposas. (p. 191)

Alonso's female characters are poor women struggling to survive on their own in a world controlled by ambitious and greedy men. Whether as symbolic animals, like the rat and the mare, or as aged women, her characters depend on no one, and men, for whatever reason, are absent from their lives. With the exception of the ideal woman in "Una", there is no communication with men. All these women or female creatures lead a life of hard work; they survive by their endurance and capacity to withstand pain and adversity. They are practical, aware of their situation, and sensitive to their surroundings. They never lose their ability to enjoy the beauty of a budding flower. They also face reality with a touch of magic; they put aside the ugliness they do not want to see, at times leaving reality completely behind, like Lola.

Cuba: Carpentier, Sarduy, Alonso

The three Cuban writers discussed in this chapter place great importance on setting. They take great care to describe in detail the environment in which their characters move. Carpentier gives his readers a travel book in which interesting characters and exciting adventurers are found. Sarduy's environment seems to move his characters. It is a world in permanent motion, which only stops to focus for an instant on someone. Alonso's characters are always aware of the beauty or ugliness which surrounds them.

All the authors present their female characters as immersed in a social and political context. Whether they participate in the changes occurring in their countries, like Sofía, 'ella' and Dolores, or are swept by revolutionary winds, like Alonso's characters, women emerge as social and political beings, not as mere victims of uncontrollable forces.

Women are portrayed by these writers as profoundly affected by their sexual life. They are deeply involved in the search for affection and sexual fulfillment. When this process is curtailed, they become frustrated and escape into a fantasy world where their sexual needs are met.

Alejo Carpentier's portrayal of women begins with the fixed roles assigned to Ruth, Mouche and Rosario in Los pasos perdidos, and evolves towards the creation of a female human being who becomes "an active, conscious, and free agent of history."¹ His early rejection of independent, educated, urban women follows the pattern seen in René Marqués and Pedro Juan Soto's stories. From the shattered pieces of this mold, Sofía, the representative of the passion and nature of the masses of

1 Roberto González Echevarría, Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at home (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p.232.

the oppressed,² emerges. Carpentier's characters differ in economic and social backgrounds. The bourgeoisie is represented by Ruth and Mouche, the poor by Rosario, and the merger of aristocracy and the wretched of the earth is found in Sofía.

Severo Sarduy concentrates on one group of women: the indigent black. A departure from the mistress stereotype, his women evolve as independent human beings capable not only of surviving their adverse situation, but also of becoming agents of change as individuals, like Dolores Rondón, or as collective beings, like 'ella'. These women must survive in a society which oppresses them for being black, for being women and for being poor. Aware of this situation, they wage a continuous war against society, within or outside the structure. Yet to realize themselves as women, they must become part of the imaginary world of theatre illusion. Here they set the rules and fulfill their needs as women and human beings.

Dora Alonso draws her characters very close to the model of the mother, but never the wife. She presents maternity as an instinctive and humane female trait. Perhaps this insufficiency in men accounts for their destructive drive. Sex is seen as a biological need that must be satisfied, just as hunger and thirst must be satiated for better physical and mental health. This fulfillment does not depend on a central male figure; men seem to be absent from the lives of these women. In the portrayal of aged women, Alonso begins to depart from the old maid stereotype, presenting them as leading solitary lives out of economic pressures, family responsibilities, and not necessarily because of male rejection or preservation of virginity. Conventionalities are kept for family's sake and

2 González Echevarría, p. 230.

not because of religious convictions or social standards. Similar to Pedro Juan Soto's characters, Alonso's women give vent to their sexual frustration by creating a fantasy world where adverse circumstances have been defeated and they are granted a second opportunity to find happiness.

Dora Alonso follows the traditional idea found in Latin American literature that women can find happiness and fulfillment only when they center all their activities around a man. A man is a woman's strength and life-motif. In his portrayal of 'ella' and Dolores, Severo Sarduy holds this same concept, although his women are able to escape by virtue of his vacillating camera eye. Alejo Carpentier destroys this pattern with the creation of Sofía, who relinquishes Victor Hugues to seek out a place and cause and find people committed, like herself, to life and not death.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WEST INDIES

...in a society like ours, fragmented, inorganic, no link between man and the landscape, a society not held together by common interests, there was no true internal source of power, and that no power was real which did not come from the outside. Such was the controlled chaos we had, with such enthusiasm, brought upon ourselves.

The Mimic Men, V.S. Naipaul

When C. L. R. James presented the barrack-yards in Minty Alley (1936), he chose a background that the West Indian reading public wished to forget or pretend did not exist. It is through these first writings, including de Lisser's Jane's Career, that the dispossessed, the majority of West Indians, were incorporated into the literary scene. Whether it is Port-of-Spain in Trinidad or Kingston, Jamaica, the slums are there, defying time and all those who wish to ignore them. James Baldwin's description of Harlem, on re-visiting the place he had left fifteen years before, would also fit the barrack-yards:

Harlem, physically at least, has changed very little in my parents' lifetime or in mine. Now as then the buildings are old and in desperate need of repair, the streets are crowded and dirty, there are too many human beings per square block.¹

From a sociological point of view, David Lowenthal explains that the apparent cause of the inability of these conditions to change is due to social stratification: a small upper class controlling access to power and rewards, followed by successively larger middle and lower classes which have less and less status, wealth, and self-esteem.² Because of this structure, there are some unsolvable problems in the Caribbean, whether the island is a colony or an independent nation. It was large-scale unemployment that prompted the awareness and political changes in the thirties and forties, and it is that same situation which today makes the West

1 "The Harlem Ghetto," Notes of a Native Son (Boston: Bantam Books, 1955), p. 57.

2 David Lowenthal, West Indian Societies (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 91.

Indies a stage for political games. V. S. Naipaul calls West Indian politicians "mimic men", and his description of them can be traced from his first novel The Mystic Masseur (1957) to his recent publication Guerrillas (1975). It is enough to read one of Gordon Lewis' accounts of these political games in the fifties to see how close Naipaul portrays reality.³

The elite system of education practiced by the British since the nineteenth century left very deep traces in the West Indian school system. Even today the percentage of those who attend school is very low, although elementary school is compulsory. Families, as well as the government, tend to favor the education of boys rather than girls. For East Indian children public education has created an additional problem, since schools have tended to Christianize all children. This imposition was repealed in the forties, but since most teachers are Christians, it has been difficult to change this practice. The higher the education, the more elite it becomes. "To many, a first-class education still means a European education. The University of the West Indies, too elite to cater for most local needs, is not elite enough to suit some."⁴

The West Indies, with its individual differences, consists of a great diversity of ethnic groups. This aspect has enriched Caribbean culture, but it has also made integration and national identity harder to attain. The East In-

³ Gordon K. Lewis, The Growth of the Modern West Indies (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968), p. 209.

⁴ Lowenthal, p. 213.

dians, the Chinese, and the white Creoles have maintained themselves as isolated groups in the islands. This has created a great deal of friction between these ethnic groups and the black population, which in most cases is the majority. Within the black population, differences in shades of color have divided the population even further. Lowenthal traces this division to the post-emancipation period. "The elite minority kept its predominance and with imperial support preserved the old distinctions--distinctions based now on colour rather than on servitude."⁵

It is in this interrelationships among Europeans, Creoles and blacks, dating back from emancipation, which creates the problems of friction and identity revealed in West Indian literature. Wally Look Lai, in an excellent essay on Wide Sargasso Sea, discusses this theme as a symbol of the entire novel:

One of the ironies of slavery is that both whites and blacks, though isolated from each other, are nevertheless tied spiritually to each other in a strange kind of love-hate relationship which can easily degenerate into violence. Tia rejects Antoinette, playing the role defined for her by history, but in spite of this she cannot help feeling a sense of loss as they confront each other across the chasm created by the same history which made their friendship possible.⁶

5 Lowenthal, p. 88. The author further adds that later immigrants of alien heritage made class differences still more complex, for their status was based on servitude and on ethnic identity. Although today certain values permeate the entire Caribbean social order, in everyday life classes remain sharply divided.

6 "The Road to Thornfield Hall," New Beacon Reviews: Collection One (London: New Beacon Books, 1968), p. 46.

In this novel the strangeness and distance between the European and the Creole is seen in the relationship between Rochester and Antoinette. The first is an Englishman to whom the West Indies is only a place he has heard of, an island to visit but never to live in. For the Creole, the West Indies is home; she merges her European background and the experience of living in this new country with a black population which, although subjected and reduced to mere servants, projects a culture that is absorbed by the Creole almost unconsciously.

It has been the values of the Creole (defined as the white West Indian) and mulatto middle class with its indifference to and rejection of West Indian culture and its imitation of European values (as is the pattern among the colonized) that thwarted the formation of a reading public. This in turn forced many West Indian writers into exile. Wilson Harris, commenting on one of these writers, says:

I recall Roger Mais, whose work may be naive in some respects, and unfulfilled in others, but whose life is a symbolic reminder of the brutal philistinism of the middle classes and and upper ruling classes in the West Indies which have thwarted, on many occasions, the rise of the liberal imagination.⁷

As a result of this apathy, no attention or money was given to establish publishing houses or book distributors which would in turn encourage West Indian writers to remain in their own countries and write for their people. The importance of publishing houses as the backbone for the promotion of a national literature was stressed by Robert Herring,

7 "Tradition and the West Indian Novel," Tradition, the Writer and Society (London: New Beacon Pubs., 1973), p. 47.

editor of Life and Letters, in 1948:

There are Jamaican authors and have been for long....But there is no Jamaican publisher. Consequently, authors...go to America. If a Jamaican poet wishes to produce his slim volume he has to do so at his own expense....Until books can be published there can hardly be expected to be readers. A poet may write on a desert isle...but readers can't read or develop in reading without books.⁸

Among the writers who left the West Indies were Samuel Selvon and V. S. Naipaul from Trinidad, George Lamming from Barbados, and Andrew Salkey and Roger Mais from Jamaica.

Although circumstances have been on the whole unfavorable for the development of a national literature, fiction writing has steadily increased, the fifties being its upward turning point. Antonio Benítez Rojo follows the development of the novel from its incipient beginning in the first two decades of this century (eleven novels published) to the boom experienced in the sixties (more than one hundred).⁹ The themes in West Indian prose fiction vary greatly because of the ethnic groups which make up this society. But as a result of a common historical background, all the writers begin from the same roots. A. J. Seymour believes that West Indian narrative is primarily historical, involving autobiography and the quest for personal identity.¹⁰ V. S. Reid from Jamaica

⁸ As quoted by Kenneth Ramchand, The West Indian Novel and Its Background (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 73.

⁹ "¿Existe una novelística antillana de lengua inglesa?," Casa de las Américas, XVI, no. 91 (julio-agosto 1975), 192.

¹⁰ "The Novel in the British Caribbean," Bim, II, no. 43 (July-December 1966), 177.

was one of the first West Indian novelists to deal with the history of the islands. He attempted to find a sense of the past on which to build the present and at the same time experiment with the form of the novel. In 1949 he published New Day, which deals with the Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865 in Jamaica. James T. Livingston points out the importance of this work:

It is remarkable not only for its powerful evocation of Jamaican history in human terms, a history unknown to most Jamaicans, but also for its demonstration of the creative possibilities inherent in using Jamaican dialect. In both ways, Reid foreshadows important elements in the literary movement that has emerged in the Caribbean.¹¹

Some of the writers who in the fifties contributed to the development of a national literature recognized by European critics, will be mentioned together with writers who began seriously to deal with the image of women in their works. Phyllis S. Allfrey, a Creole from Dominica like Jean Rhys, is the first West Indian woman to publish a novel. In The Orchid House (1953) Allfrey is primarily concerned with social and political themes in her narratives. She presents Joan, one of the main characters in this novel, as a labor organizer who rejects the values of her social class for the welfare of the collectivity. George Lamming from Barbados starts his career as a novelist with the semi-autobiographical novel In the Castle of My Skin (1953). Lamming and later V. S. Naipaul were able to achieve recognition in England and open the publishing market for other West Indian writers.

¹¹ Caribbean Rhythms (New York: Washington Square Press, 1974), p. 40.

In 1957 John Hearne from Jamaica published The Faces of Love, which, according to Kenneth Ramchand, is the best presentation of a mulatto woman; Rachel Ascom, the female protagonist, is not a stereotype but a human being.¹²

Samuel Selvon from Trinidad is the West Indian author who perhaps has experimented most successfully with the use of dialect. In his collection of short stories Ways of Sunlight, published this same year, the author "takes up the stance of the calypsonian or ballad-maker and both the standard English and the West Indian standard are abolished."¹³

The fact that many West Indian writers still writing about the West Indies live in England or elsewhere outside the Caribbean and consider their country not England but the island they were born in, must be taken into consideration in the discussion of their works. Their depiction of the West Indies is covered with a veil of nostalgia or possesses dream-like quality. In the case of V. S. Naipaul, absence has resulted in a detachment creating a static description of a place that can never evolve into a better society:

The history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told. Brutality is not the only difficulty. History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies.¹⁴

12 The West Indian Novel, p. 50.

13 The West Indian Novel, p. 102.

14 V. S. Naipaul, The Middle Passage (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1962; rpt. 1975), p. 29.

That the sun may never set upon the great British tradition of Democracy which chains men and women and little children with more than physical chains--chains of ignorance and the apathy of the underfed and the submissiveness which is a spiritual sickness in the thews and sinews of a man.

"Now We Know," Roger Mais

Roger Mais was born in Kinston, Jamaica in 1905; he was raised in a rural environment amidst a religious, conservative, middle class. What remained of this upbringing was a love for the countryside and a religious spirituality evident in all his works. After high school he entered the civil service, and from there he went into journalism, his writing apprenticeship. He was a reporter for the Jamaica Mail, published a magazine, Pepperpot, and became a professional photographer.¹

He became a socialist and was involved in the Jamaican upsurge for independence in 1938. In 1944 he agitated against colonialism and after the publication of his article "Now We Know" in Public Opinion, he was charged with fomenting sedition and sentenced to six months of hard labor.

It is doubtful whether the actual prison sentence gave him any new principle from which to work. It confirmed and strengthened those he already had, and it gave him² the unvaluable objects with which to work.

After imprisonment he had to start anew to make a living. He assisted in the running of a dairy, planted rice, manufactured and sold table delicacies; he also wrote for newspapers and put out another magazine entitled People.

In 1951 Roger Mais decided to leave Jamaica. His reasons were expressed in this article published in Public Opinion:

1 James T. Livingston, Caribbean Rhythms (New York: Washington Square Press, 1974), p.45.

2 John Hearne, "Roger Mais: A Personal Memoir," Bim, VI, no.23 (December 1955), 148.

There is in this country, alas, a moated-tower of mediocrity, close and unassailable, and it holds such sway, it has acquired such a body of mediocre opinion about it that it is useless to try to make a dent in its smugness and its exclusiveness and its indifference to anything that does not come entirely within its³ limited scope and compass and influence....

He first went to London, to which he never became accustomed; then he moved to Paris, which he loved. Here he met Richard Wright, who had some influence in his prose writing.

In December 1954 he returned home very ill, but refused to submit to death. A few months later, however, he died of cancer at the age of fifty. Fred Wilmot draws a picture of this truncated life:

Some men grow like trees. They send down firm roots in the soil, seeking the nourishment and warmth and strength that comes from their native earth. They are connected to their earth by a rich taproot, strong seeking, that draws from the richest places of nourishment. And they give as much, if not more, than they take. For they change the food that nourishes their minds. It becomes transmuted by the chemistry of their imagination, and is made that much richer. Some men grow like trees, and such men are like Roger Mais.⁴

Mais published two anthologies of short stories and poems: Face and Other Stories (1939) and And Most of All Man (1940); and three novels in three years: The Hills Were Joy-

³ "Why I Love, and Leave Jamaica," Public Opinion, June 10, 1966.

⁴ "Postscript," Kyk-Over-Al, VI, no. 20 (Mid-year 1955), 166.

ful Together (1953), Brother Man (1954), and Black Lightning (1955). He also wrote many articles and uncollected stories, published for the most part in Public Opinion from 1942 to 1945.

In an article on major figures in West Indian literature in the fifties, Stuart Hall has classified Roger Mais' novels as belonging "to the genre of the 'stream-of-social-consciousness.'"⁵ In Mais' works emphasis is primarily placed on the environs, and characters are seen as part of the setting. Although expressing a certain contradiction, Mais continuously stated that he was a writer and not a politician.

I've decided that politics isn't my line.
If I have any influence it will be as a
writer. My purpose in writing The Hills
Were Joyful Together was to give the world
a true picture of the real Jamaica and the
dreadful conditions of the working classes.⁶

Yet, his books aim at making people aware of a social situation created by a political structure against which he fought all his life. As a result of Mais' concern for the wretched conditions of the poor, the center of interest in his novels lies on theme. Concepts are presented, discussed from various angles and rarely resolved. Characters serve to illustrate an idea or to become the author's mouthpiece.

⁵ "Lanning, Selvon and Some Trends in the West Indian Novel," Bim, VI, no. 23 (December 1955), 175.

⁶ Roger Mais as quoted by Karina Williamson in "Roger Mais: West Indian Novelist," The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 11 (December 1966), 141.

Besides religious allusions there are dramatic presentations of religious services, similar in intensity and meaning to James Baldwin's Go Tell It on the Mountain.⁷ Perhaps what makes scenes memorable in Mais' first novel, The Hills Were Joyful Together, is the author's ability to maintain suspense and give a vivid description of the action. As Gerald Moore has pointed out, Mais is at his best in sequences of rapid action.⁸ The conveyance of violence through gory, descriptive details recalls some of the best scenes in Richard Wright's Native Son and The Outsider. This violence, easily identifiable by a mass audience, will permeate the sexual relationships of his characters.

The emphasis on environs in Mais' first novel is diminished so that in his second novel, Brother Man, there is a pivotal character to whom all other relate. However, the emphasis of the novel is not placed on this character's shoulders. In the case of his third and last novel, Black Lightning, a main character emerges; it is a rural setting where conflicts arise from an individual's internal struggle rather than from confrontations with a hostile society. In the same way that there is a shift in the importance of setting from his first to his last novel, Mais' presentation of women moves from an attempt to draw them as complete personalities to the easy imitation of stereotypes found in Black Lightning. Instead of dealing with individual female characters, this analysis of Roger Mais' works will be based on

7 Adrienne Baytop, "The Emergence of Caribbean English Literature," Latin American Literary Review, IV, no. 9 (fall-winter 1976), 34.

8 The Chosen Tongue: English Writing in the Tropical World (London: Longmans, 1969), p. 88.

relationships, since it is in the interrelation of women and men that characters are portrayed.

Even though Black Lightning⁹ is crowded with male figures, women are the direct or indirect cause of their sadness or happiness. The main character, Jake, is pitied by the townspeople because his wife has run away with another man. Everybody sees Jake as a martyr and Estella as a bitch. All of Jake's shortcomings are blamed on her; no one questions Estella's reasons for leaving Jake. There is only one short, confusing scene, almost at the end of the novel, when Estella attempts to explain her inability to live with Jake. But her words are almost drawn out in Amos' insults.

'I'm talking about Jake. We got on fine, until he found out that he was leaning on me too much...'
 'You! You don't think a hell of a lot of yourself, do you?'
 She said quietly: 'I know what I am talking about. He knew it, and he hated to know it. For a time he tried to close his eyes to it...it was bound to destroy him....It was while he was trying to finish his carving that he found out.'
 'What do you know about it?'
 'And then for months he stopped working on it...and life with him became unbearable. I couldn't tell anyone what I went through in those months...he and I, both.' (p. 215)

Perhaps because of the brevity of this scene and since it comes in the midst of great tension, Estella's image as the

⁹ Roger Mais, Black Lightning, included in Three Novels of Roger Mais (Kingston, Jamaica: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1955; rpt. 1970). All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

wife-bitch who dared to be unfaithful remains in the reader's mind.

Black Lightning deals basically with Estella's departure and Jake's rebuilding of his life afterwards. His objective in life becomes the completion of a huge wooden sculpture of Samson. But his work is interrupted when he is blinded by lightning. The novel traces Jake's battle to remain himself despite his handicap. Once he has lost a meaning for his existence, he commits suicide.

Through the characters of Amos and Glen, the roles of women and men are defined. The concepts are presented as traditional beliefs that should always hold true. Even though the characters at times question the validity of these roles, after some thought they are convinced of their correctness. The incident with Estella, in the eyes of these men, upholds the idea of women being treacherous and the belief that a man should never trust nor give himself entirely to them. Men continue to see women as either good or bad. A good woman will hold on to her virginity until she finds the proper man who will marry her. A bad woman will lie with any man she desires and can never be taken seriously. Yet, a man will always attempt to seduce a woman. It is a natural desire in men which women are unable to understand.

He chases gals, yes.

The question, whether she knew or not, was of no importance right now.

And there was nothing he could do about it: it was something in his flesh. Like a ping-wing macca that had broken in there and couldn't work his way out again, and it was festering.

He fought against it hard, God knew, but it had him licked from the drop of the cap. Women did that to him. He just couldn't help himself anyhow. (p. 143)

Women accept these concepts; and Bess passes them on to her daughter Miriam, who questions the role she is forced to play.

'They are all alike,' she grumbled, 'they are only around when there is something to be got. Good-for-nothing bunch, the lot of them, I say.' (p. 58)

In withdrawing from the urban setting, Mais has also withdrawn from everyday realities and has romanticized his characters and the roles he has placed women in. In this idyllic setting, women conform to middle-class patterns of virginity and marriage. In regard to characterization, this is a regression in Mais' work.

Brother Man¹⁰ was Mais first attempt to create a central character who would denounce the social and economic oppression of the poor and also offer an alternative to their misery through the philosophy of "peace and love". The attempt fails because Mais is still too close to the reality of his people to do other than present life in its crudest stage. There are no easy solutions; Brother Man is still an idealist and will be misunderstood and mistreated as Christ was, as long as power and oppression are exercised by a chosen few. Ambiance is thus still the focus of this novel.

There are two basic stories in Brother Man which at times converge but for the most part are developed and resolved separately. Brother Man is a Rastafarian who after

¹⁰ Roger Mais, Brother Man, included in Three Novels of Roger Mais (Kingston, Jamaica: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1954; rpt. 1970). All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

experiencing the treachery found in many human beings chooses to impart goodness to everyone, for this alone will bring out the best qualities in them. He gives money to the very poor, comfort to the anguished, and shelter to the dispossessed. He finds a young girl of seventeen soliciting on the streets in exchange for a plate of hot supper and decides to take her home and give her shelter and protection. To Minette's confusion, he chooses to remain celibate. Nevertheless, Brother Man is not able to reach out to every individual's goodness; out of jealousy, he is framed, put in jail, then released and publicly dishonored by the same people he had dedicated his life to help. The parallel with Christ is obvious.

The second plot deal with the relationship between Papacita and Girlie. They rightly belong to the lumpen group within this poor community. Papacita is a thief who will go to any extent to acquire money to squander on women, clothes, and drinks. Girlie supports him and never objects to this abusive treatment unless she suspects him of having other women. She does not think ill of his stealing and murdering, or abusing her physically and extorting money from her, as long as she continues to be his woman. Neither possesses class awareness, dealing only on an individual level. When they separate, Girlie seeks her revenge and eventual destruction by killing Papacita and then turning herself in, since she does not have the courage to kill herself.

Minette, Brother Man's companion, is portrayed as the wife stereotype. She is an innocent girl from the mountains who decides to leave behind the family's misery and try to survive on her own in an alien and hostile environment.

She had run away from the country to come to Kingston, and what had happened to thousands of girls before, had happened to

her. She was hungry and homeless, a girl of seventeen, without hope and without illusions. (p. 32)

She learned very quickly that by offering her body to men, she could still the hunger in her and secure a place for the night. In this way she had met Brother Man. But instead of sleeping with her, the stranger had given her food and shelter and asked her to stay, demanding nothing in return. The moment she is given an opportunity to serve a man, Minette becomes the perfect housewife. She cleans, cooks, does the shopping, and is always there to serve Brother Man's needs at any time. The independent girl who left home to be on her own turns into a submissive creature who can only view her life in terms of a man.

The only instance in which Minette continues to be aggressive and refuses to accept Brother Man's position is on sexual matters. Minette wants to make love to the one with whom she has lived under the same roof for two years. She sees his apathy towards sex as part of his religious beliefs, but she is convinced that with time and persuasion, he will agree to have sex with her. However, Minette also feels that if Brother Man refuses to take her as a sexual partner, she must then seek someone else, for her desires must be satisfied (p. 115). She approaches him in every way possible: with looks, casual rubbing, and aggressive advances.

She felt suddenly weak, as though she was going to buckle at the knees any moment now. She pulled up her nightdress and knelt down on the cold floor beside him.... She was almost panting. An urgency within her gave her courage. She seized his hands, held them hard, pressed them against her breasts. (p. 136)

This was Minette's last card and she played it well. Brother Man lowers his defenses and gives in to his desires.

He took her by the wrists, pulled her hands down from her face.
No words passed between them; but something did, something that went without words.
Slowly his arms went around her, pulling her towards him. She opened her eyes, as in a dream, and felt his hot, panting breath upon her face. (p. 137)

This is the only scene in this novel where love is without violence and on a purely emotional level.

The terms on which Papacita and Girlie's relationship develops are in complete contrast to Brother Man and Minette's. Although both women define their existence in terms of a man, Girlie's attachment to Papacita is so strong that his absence results in her personal destruction. Since Papacita is the pivot in Girlie's life, a very close look at him is necessary before discussing the mistress stereotype she conforms to.

Papacita and Pedro Juan Soto's portrayal of Microbio have the same elements of the lumpen male character. He is an irresponsible man whose only concern in life is his particular version of happiness, consisting of an abundance of sex, liquor, and entertainment. Work is for fools, smart men like himself are dedicated to outwitting others and getting the most with the least effort. It is difficult to tell if Papacita really loves Girlie or if his feelings are shaped by her appeal as a sex object and by the convenience of living with someone who provides life's basic necessities without his contributing in any way. He has no regrets about living off someone; on the contrary, he has the audacity to demand that his whims be granted. His relationship to women is based on sexual desire--a woman is simply an object used to satisfy a

man's "itching". In the absence of this function, women are discarded, and new flesh is then sought. When he looks at Girlie, he sees only a body he can sexually possess.

He watched her sweeping, tidying, making the room like new, without letting her know that he was watching her; he watched her every moment, feeling deep down that hunger for her that kept him coming back after each escapade--that deep down hunger that it seemed could never be altogether assuaged. (pp. 21-22)

When he sees Minette his mouth waters and his mind begins to fantasize. Minette is a desirable object and he spends long hours thinking of ways to seduce her (p. 128). In order to uphold his male role, Papacita must be constantly performing as the insatiable stud. If he is not able to play this role, he has jeopardized his position of superiority and can easily succumb to a woman's attack on his sexual capacity.

He had given her all he had in him to give, had yielded up everything, and she was not satisfied. The thought was like an unseen enemy who lay in ambush for them, to spoil them of their happiness. (p. 35)

He can regain his position only by resorting to brute force, since he knows that in this he will always win. A woman may strike a man with her fists or slash at him with a knife, but a man can always dominate her with his physical strength. When faced with force, a woman is impotent (p. 36).

Girlie's character is drawn from the mistress stereotype; as such, she is on an equal footing with Papacita. She is represented as a strong, determined woman whose aim is to keep her man, but who at the same time will not tolerate any abuse. She is willing to work for and serve her man, as long

as he is faithful to her. This is the only principle on which she will not yield, and it becomes the prime reason why Papacita leaves.

'T'ink Ah don' know you an' Minette was out the other night, t'ink you can two-time me go-long an' Ah would never know, eh? T'ink Ah'm jus' a quashie-gal off de street you can kick around, an' is all right? Ah will show you, though.' (p.113)

Because Girlie is aggressive and daring she faces Papacita on various levels. She begins by nagging, insulting, and attacking his weak spot.

And when she did not answer he grumbled:
'Some women never satisfied, man can never give them enough.' She said, taunting him,
'Some women could find it outside, though.'
(p. 35)

When Papacita responds with physical violence, she is ready to face him with all her strength, and if necessary, an additional aid provided by a knife.

She jumped up from the bed and across the bureau, dragged open a drawer, turned, and sprang at him with a knife in her hand.
'I told you,' she screamed, 'you wouldn't ever get away with that again. I'll chop you up fine. I'll swing fo' you--you--you pimp!' (p. 36)

Yet all this display of energy and determination is a reflection of the frustration she feels when she knows she has been betrayed and is impotent to deal with the situation. Therefore, the moment the man decides to challenge her she views his reaction as a show of affection, for he does care, and the fight becomes a battle of the spirits--who will dominate whom. This destructive energy turns into an erotic, violent act.

And every time they lived again the deep physical satisfaction that was like nothing else on earth, that acted upon them more than an aphrodisiac, that of his forcing her, and that of her suffering being forced by him. It acted upon them both like whips, goading them on to a kind of delirium of sexual indulgence, that to them, of all pleasures, had not its parallel in the world of experience. (p. 28)

The whole act becomes a sadomasochist relationship when Girlie is at last subdued by brute force. This woman is presented as enjoying the violence and abuse that Papacita inflicts on her. This is the reenactment of a man's fantasy--a woman enjoys sex only when she is forced and humiliated. It is the myth of the rape victim who brings unto herself this violent act and draws pleasure from it eventually.

Since her life revolves around Papacita, when he at last decides to leave her, Girlie's world crumbles. She attempts to stop him not with tender words but with physical force, secretly seeking self-destruction. Their fight resembles Nena and Microbio's in Soto's story. However, the violence described in this scene, exceeds anything in the Puerto Rican story. Girlie claws at his face, Papacita bangs her head; she kicks him, he punches her; she buries her teeth on his throat, he chokes her. The scene goes on for several pages, and the violence never diminishes. Girlie realizes that he is abandoning her; she prefers to die at his hands than live without him. This reaction is unimaginable in a character that has been presented throughout the story as extremely strong and independent, but, again, this is Mais' version of the mistress stereotype.

The Hills Were Joyful Together¹¹ was Roger Mais' first novel in which he tried to include all the themes he thought important. Stylistically the novel is guilty of over-simplification. The author feels that it is necessary to present the novel as a play with a list of characters, a definite setting, and authorial comments. On the other hand, passages such as Flitters' chase and murder, are as dramatic and forceful as any Richard Wright narrative. The setting in this novel, a yard in Kingston, Jamaica, serves as a framework in which characters, themes, and political denunciations are contained. The novel opens with a description of the place of action which immediately reveals its poverty.

The yard counted among its ramshackle structures an old shaking-down concrete nog building with the termite-ridden wood frame eating away until only a crustacean shell under the dirty white cracked and blistering paint remained. (p. 9)

The twenty-five characters in this novel are described by N. O. Linton as colorful and amusing, their emotions "usually centre around sex, religion, and politics"¹² in that order of importance. The novel contains all the major elements of Mais' work: "violence, sexuality, socialism, social injustice, wreaked on the innocent, economic hardships heaped on the underprivileged, crime, the misery of the city slums and the tenets of the Rastafarian cult."¹³ The story centers

11 Roger Mais, The Hills Were Joyful Together, included in The Three Novels of Roger Mais (Kingston, Jamaica: Jonathan Cape Limited, 1953; rpt. 1970). All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

12 N. O. Linton, "The Novels: The Hills Were Joyful Together," Kyk-Over-All, VI, no. 20 (mid-year 1955), 158.

13 Winston G. Wright, "Major Elements of Roger Mais' Work," Sunday Gleaner, October 15, 1967.

around the relationship of three couples: Shag and Euphemia, Bedosa and Charlotta, Surjue and Rema. The latter pair is extensively developed, and Surjue's story is central to the novel since in the prison scenes, the strongest political accusations are made.

Karina Williamson has been able to summarize the basic plot of this novel in a few sentences:

...the novel is mainly built round the stories of three groups: Shag, Euphemia, and her lover, Bajun Man; Bedosa and his family; Surjue and Rema. Violence and misery is their common lot. Shag murders Euphemia for her faithlessness; Bedosa is hunted down by a man he has wronged and falls beneath a train while trying to escape; Surjue joins in a robbery, is arrested after being left in the lurch by his partner and finally dies in an attempt to break out of prison; in his absence Rema goes mad and is burnt to death.¹⁴

The relationship of Bedosa and Charlotta is the closest drawn to the stereotype of the submissive wife and the oppressive male figure. The couple have been together for many years, and have come to rely on the inflexibility of their roles. Bedosa works, brings money into the household, and has the right to scream, abuse and demand any amount of service and attention from his wife. Whether he is timid and cowardly on the streets does not matter; in his house he is bold and aggressive.

Charlotta responds by playing the traditional role of wife and never questioning this behavior. She is always ready to satisfy his desires, even if this involves getting

14 Williamson, p. 142.

up at odd hours to prepare dinner for him. Not even his displeasure with her cooking and his rejection of the food she has so laboriously prepared will make her complain about his mistreatment.

'Coming right this minute, Papa, an' I got something you like special, some of that cow-heel you brought me yesterday, with rice-an'-peas, an' a nice cornpone.'
'Cornpone fo' feedin' dawg wid, woman. What! you waan' puff me up wid cornpone?'
'You used to like it, so I thought I'd make it special to please you. Never mind, me an' Tansy will have it for supper.' (pp. 31-32)

Charlotta fears any physical abuse from Bedosa and will speak to him meekly, never raising her voice and trying not to contradict him. Contrary to most women who conform to this role, Charlotta does not turn to imaginative fantasy but instead becomes a religious fanatic. In church she is an equal; she can sing and shout her frustrations and escape into a world Bedosa can never enter (p. 31). It is this blind faith in God that keeps her world from crumbling when Bedosa is killed. She feels empty, alone, and unprotected, but she draws comfort from knowing that God will be with her.

Euphemia's character is very close to the mistress stereotype. Shag is presented as a hard working man who is too innocent and trusting to maintain a balance in his relationship. He is respected because he is not a coward like Bedosa, but he is also pitied because his woman is unfaithful to him, and because he either ignores the situation or chooses to be blind to the truth. According to the macho code, a man should never be cuckolded, and if it ever happens, he should teach that woman a lesson she will never forget. Shag poses this question many times after he surprises Bajun Man in his

house with Euphemia.

He could chop the woman up, yes, but somehow he didn't care that much. He toyed with the idea for a moment, sitting down on the side of the bed, and wondered was it that he was wanting in manhood that he did not care enough to kill her? He saw her standing nude before him, magnificent and nude, and he thought, what a lovely bitch to chop up, but he didn't care that much. To do a thing like that a man had to be dead certain in his mind. And he wasn't. (p. 129)

He wanders aimlessly and after many weeks comes back to the yard and performs the real but symbolic act he had put off doing. He had to be sure that the only way to resurrect himself, to know he was still alive, was to perform this last rite of killing Euphemia.

Shag was pleased with the clear poetic imagery that formed in his mind. A woman, he thought, was like a tree. They were full of sweetness and fruitfulness. And if the tree got out of hand, and did what it ought not to do, like a grapefruit tree bearing sour oranges, you cut it down at the root and made an end of it, and that was a lovely, tantalizing thought. (p. 179)

Whenever Euphemia is described, attention is drawn to her body. She is handsome with full breasts and an enticing figure. Shag dreams of leaning his head on her breasts and finding comfort for his worries and illness. She seems to be only interested in sexual satisfaction; she is attracted to Bajun Man not because of looks, but because he makes her happy in bed (p. 13). She spends most of her day lounging under a mango tree or making herself beautiful in her room. She reacts on purely emotional terms. She loves Bajun Man passionately; she fights Manny with all her physical strength;

she relates to Shag on terms of pity and thankfulness. When Bajun Man leaves after taking her valuables, she is sad and lonely but never reasons that this man is just a pimp. Her fear of what Shag may do to her is so overwhelming that whenever he approaches her she freezes and cannot utter a word (p. 264).

Both Charlotta and Euphemia are flat characters because they follow too closely the stereotype of wife and mistress. In the case of Rema, there is more character development, which allows for a departure from these patterns. Surjue and Rema's relationship parallels that of Papacita and Girlie in several aspects. Surjue is supported by Rema, and again there are no guilt feelings about this apparent abuse. He spends his day resting at home and at night dresses up to hang out with his friends. He expects Rema to also be a housekeeper, servant, and good lover. When she returns home tired from working all day at a cigar factory, he demands attention to his whims.

'What's the matter with you?' he said, without taking his eyes off the race programme.
 'Move over a bit honey, can't you? How's the tips coming?'
 'I didn't know you were getting to bed, how late is it?'
 'Honey, I'm tired. I'm just home from work.'
 'You got any money for cigarettes?'
 'I got a pack of cigarettes in my bag for you.'
 'Get'em, I'm just dyin' for a smoke.' (p. 29)

Surjue feels that their relationship is based on a respect for each other's independence. Rema will not interfere in his affairs, and he will give her a free hand. Yet Rema must work to support both of them which immediately limits her freedom. Although there are hints that their relationship is solid and not solely based on sexual attraction,

whenever Surjue sees Rema lying in bed he has to control himself so as not to jump on her. As in most descriptions of lovemaking, Mais draws a scene of violence where both partners enjoy the aggressiveness and brute force of the scene.

And he bared his teeth and laid them to her throat, and gnashed them against her body, and lifted her clear off the bed, and gnashed his teeth against her flesh and threw her down again, and she laughed and struggled and called his name softly... (p. 62)

There is an abrupt change in Surjue when he is imprisoned. He becomes the loving, tender man who can only dream of one woman and who in the end risks his life to be close to her once more (p. 245).

Unlike Girlie, Rema is closer to the wife stereotype. She is passive, submissive, extremely tolerant and servile with Surjue. The fact that she has a well-paying job does not contribute to make her an independent and strong person. She complies with Surjue's desires and agrees to his propositions on how their relationship should be. Similar to Girlie and to all Mais' female characters, the point which Rema will not yield is the inclusion of a third party. These women will allow a man to be cruel, unjust or abusive so long as he does not seek another woman's company. For this sole reason Rema would take the initiative of ending the relationship (p. 30).

Surjue is the only meaning to Rema's existence, and she fears for her sanity if he ever leaves or if something tragic happened to him. And this is exactly what does happen when Surjue is jailed. His absence brings about her mental collapse, as she loses her grip on reality and es-

capex into the world of insanity. In the description of Rema's loss of control over circumstances, Mais portrays a human being in agony; it is no longer his image of women, but of someone who has received a terrible blow and is blindly grasping for help. To hide her loneliness and fear, Rema resorts first to a memory of her childhood, when there was no darkness and no fear.

She saw a picture of herself suddenly as a little child going to the spring to draw water, and standing there by the edge of the pool she could see the still reflection of the clouds in the water, and at the base of the clouds the dark shadows of the trees. (p. 167)

The illusion vanishes, and she begins to lose control of her emotions. She hears her laughter but feels tears rolling down her cheek.

She started to laugh, softly, inwardly, without mirth, and it came up to her throat and broke there, and it made a queer kind of sound, and before she knew what she was doing the hot tears began to fall. (pp. 167-68)

An inability to move and to turn her desires into action is the last sign of Rema's struggle to cling to reality. Flames become lights that sometimes hurt the body when Rema sets her room on fire. Her laughter is finally silenced by the flames.

Although female characters in Mais' first two novels are sometimes the most developed, they are still rather stereotyped. Nevertheless, these are not the traditional patterns based on middle-class values. There is little if any concern for chastity and marriage. It is assumed that poor girls who come to the city to escape the hardship of

life in the mountains are easily deceived and either seduced or raped on their arrival in the city slums. Most young women are unskilled workers with little opportunity to find a job in a country burdened with unemployment. Prostitution is usually the only way for a woman to survive. Marriage is viewed as an expensive ceremony, seldom necessary in this part of society.

She wanted more than anything in the world that she should be able to give him something in return for all he had done for her, that she should share his life with him, as she shared his home; in short, become his mistress, since she never thought of asking him to marry her. And in her simple way of looking at things there was nothing at all the matter with that; men and women lived like that all over the place, in the country and in the city alike. It didn't matter the least, it was nothing. (Brother Man, p. 32)

Aside from these two elements, woman continues to be represented as a passive but passionate sex object whose only aim in life is to please a man. The ideal companion for a woman is someone who will provide the basic needs of life, including sex. In exchange she will be the perfect housekeeper and maid whose life, like Carpentier's Rosario, is dedicated to serve her man. Parallel to this version of the wife stereotype is the strong, determined and aggressive woman who supports a man, and thus feels it is her right to demand his special attention. A pimp-prostitute relationship develops in which a woman survives on her own in the outside world and is privileged enough to keep a man with her because she can afford it. She deals with her man on an equal basis; however, he will always have the advantage of brutal and sexual force to assert his manliness. Although this behavior is an offshoot of the seductress stereotype, there are many

elements from the wife role: serving her man, keeping house, tolerating his escapades. It appears necessary for a woman to play this role so that she can hold on to him.

Jean D'Costa has made an interesting study of the sexual mores in Roger Mais' novels. She has extracted the patterns from The Hills Were Joyful Together and applied them to his other novels. D'Costa distinguishes two types of women: the old, lonely, exploited and superstitious, of which Charlotta would be an example, and the woman-temptress "wanton-bitch" which would include Euphemia and Girlie. This last type would in turn produce the virile, free-domineering womanizer: Surjue, Papacita and Bajun Man.¹⁵ It is the balance of these pairs that results in Mais' enclosure of women in roles which reduce them to mere stereotypes.

15 Jean D'Costa, The Treatment of Sexuality in the Novels of Roger Mais (Mona, Jamaica: Seminars in West Indian Literature, 1974-75), p. 8.

But what really sickened us was his attitude to women. We were none of us chivalrous, but Nathaniel had a contempt for women which we couldn't like. He would make rude remarks when women passed.

Nathaniel would say, 'Women just like cows. Cows and they is the same thing.'

Miguel Street, V.S. Naipaul

The years I spent abroad fell away and I could not be sure which was the reality in my life: the first eighteen years in Trinidad or the later years in England. I had never wanted to stay in Trinidad. When I was in the fourth form I wrote a vow on the endpaper of my Kennedy's Revised Latin Primer to leave within five years. I left after six; and for many years afterwards in England, falling asleep in bedsitters with the electric fire on, I had been awakened by the night-¹mare that I was back in tropical Trinidad.

Thus wrote Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul when he revisited the country of his birth in 1960. He has already lived in England more years than in Trinidad, but he is considered neither British nor East Indian; he is a West Indian writer aware of the shortcomings of being an artist in countries which are just now beginning to have a sense of history. It is this outspokenness that has reaped Naipaul the bitter attack of other West Indian writers and the reading public in Trinidad. Naipaul does not try to soothe the wounds of the colonized; he believes that only by touching the tender spot will people awake and act.

José Luis González laments the lack of humor in contemporary Puerto Rican writers generally,² while some West Indian writers complain about Naipaul's humor achieved through irony. How, then, should a writer approach his subject? There is a general trend in Caribbean writers to treat all themes related to their history with almost solemn

1 The Middle Passage (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 43.

2 Conversaciones con José Luis González (Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1976), p. 22.

seriousness, as if to say: the fact that we are a part of the Third World is not a joking matter. No one, including Naipaul, would disagree with this statement. This writer can create a character whose life is marked by poverty, ignorance, and alienation, yet is able to laugh, to find happiness in sharing and helping others. This is the case with Laura in "The Maternal Instinct":

I suppose Laura holds a world record.
 Laura had eight children.
 There is nothing surprising in that.
 These eight children had seven fathers.
 Beat that!³

And for the first time I heard Laura crying. It wasn't ordinary crying. She seemed to be crying all the cry she had saved up since she was born; all the cry she had tried to cover up with her laughter.⁴

The Indian critic Prama Nandakumar describes Naipaul as a novelist who employs humor and humanity, irony and satire, who mingles realism and fantasy, manipulates the serious and the absurd, and has the capacity for uncanny observations.⁵

Naipaul's novels are full of descriptions of natural surroundings. Yet, as Kenneth Ramchand observes, he is the "most observant but least metaphysical of West Indian novelists."⁶ Naipaul describes in great detail the exact position

3 Miguel Street (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1959; rpt. 1975), p. 84.

4 Miguel Street, p. 90.

5 "V. S. Naipaul," The Glory and the Good: Essays on Literature (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965), p. 267.

6 The West Indian Novel and Its Background (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 8.

of objects; such precision is overwhelming, but no feeling is conveyed.

Fields, fences; a dirt cross-road with a washed-out signpost; a scattered settlement with concrete and timber the colour of wet adobe; trees and bush. The road began to twist and climb. It narrowed. And then there was no more asphalt, only a rough rock surface.⁷

This detailed description is carried over to the everyday surroundings of his characters. Every minor point is recorded and presented with the utmost objectivity.

In the bathroom the fixtures were old and heavy, the wash-basin minutely cracked, stained where taps had dripped. The brass fittings in the plughole were black. And the water, when Bobby ran it, spat out red-brown with mud: lake water, after rain. It didn't get lighter, but it presently ran hot. Bobby washed.⁸

When the object of his attention is the human body, especially the female, the objectivity remains, but the details pondered upon are presented in a repulsive manner that reflects back to the person described.

She walked with fussy little steps, keeping her head down. Her trousers were baggy below the knee and there was a long blot of perspiration on her shirt between the shoulder blades.⁹

7 In A Free State (London: André Deutsch Ltd., 1972), p. 166.

8 In A Free State, p. 177.

9 In A Free State, p. 153.

With the possible exception of one novel and several short stories, Naipaul's works deal with the Trinidadian society of the forties and fifties. He continues to write about his country nowadays, but his forte is the years of his childhood and adolescence. Family for Naipaul meant a symbolic ritual of a past he never knew, and it also meant a great obstacle for developing as an individual. A House for Mr. Biswas and The Mimic Men are two of the best portrayals of this ordeal. The family as part of his ethnic background set the standards for education, work and the role of men, women and children. Once this barrier has been overcome, Naipaul finds another as difficult to surmount as the previous one: the politics in his country. He sees the government as ruled by corruption, where even the most well-intentioned must play the game or else be destroyed. The Suffrage of Elvira and The Mimic Men present this gloomy picture. Corruption for Naipaul means

sheer indifference towards other human beings coupled with a willingness to treat such human beings as inferior beings or mistreat them for the sake of personal gain, advantage or position.¹⁰

Naipaul's characters are not just men trapped in a dead-end street because they have failed as individuals. Rather they are men trapped by a history of colonization that has created the colonized mind, or in Naipaul's words, mimic men.

For Naipaul, the 'colonial' is not just any oppressed or exploited member of what is frequently called the 'Third World.' Rather, to be a 'colonial' implies that the psychological

¹⁰ Peter Nazareth, "The Mimic Men As a Study of Corruption," East Africa Journal, 7 (July 1970), 22.

loss of identity which is the result of oppression has occurred within a context of spatial displacement.¹¹

I have purposely referred only to male characters because this is Naipaul's sole concern. Women tend to follow the traditional roles, with minor variations, of their ethnic groups, unaffected by time or place.

Naipaul's themes are so close to his life experiences that many critics tend to confuse the novelist with the narrator. Throughout his long literary production, consisting of essays (The Middle Passage, An Area of Darkness, The Loss of El Dorado, The Overcrowded Barracoon), collections of short stories (Miguel Street, A Flag on the Island, In a Free State), and novels (The Mystic Masseur, The Suffrage of Elvira, A House for Mr. Biswas, Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion, The Mimic Men, Guerrillas), life and fiction seem to merge. But Naipaul's ironic style creates the artistic detachment that many critics and writers refuse to acknowledge in his works. John Thieme summarizes Naipaul's ambivalent image:

Naipaul has been disparagingly referred to as 'black Englishman'. Yet how many other contemporary writers have the historical sense and social vision to bring the Third World experience to the printed page with such perceptiveness? To these two qualities, Naipaul has over the past couple of years... acquired the one virtue his detractors claim he has always lacked, compassion for the wretched of the earth.¹²

11 Michael Angrosino, "V. S. Naipaul and the Colonial Image," Caribbean Quarterly, 21, no. 3 (September 1975), 2.

12 "Naipauliana," Caribbean Review, VII, no. 1 (January-March, 1975), 35.

There are, as I have indicated, no women protagonists in V. S. Naipaul's fiction, yet their presence or absence disturbs men's behavior. The author groups his female characters ethnically and geographically rather than by economic class, although this distinction is made within each group.

Naipaul's portrayal of the white, European woman follows the sex-object and mistress stereotypes applied generally to the middle class. These women are aggressive, independent, egoistical and promiscuous. They are a threat to men for they are always demanding sexual performance; the moment a man is not able to fulfill this role, he is humiliated and abandoned for someone else. Women are superficial with no other concern except their own person. In The Mimic Men, most of the women who parade through Ralph Singh's life during his various stays in London conform to this pattern. Closer looks are taken of Sandra in this novel and of Jane in Guerrillas. They strengthen the stereotype and represent characters as repulsive as René Marqués' wife-character in "En la popa hay un cuerpo reclinado". Even in marriage, white European women are never portrayed in the role of wife and mother.

All other women in Naipaul's fiction are East Indians in the West Indies. Their portrayal is based on the Indian tradition of bringing up women. Through the years there have been some changes in these patterns, but woman's and man's behavior is still shaped by these cultural observances. Dr. Promilla Kapur reported to the United Nations in 1975 that sex oppression in India has undergone little change through the centuries despite legislation.¹³ Little girls and the women in a family are the most undernourished, since tradition

¹³ Promilla Kapur, "Mito o realidad," Salud Mundial, enero 1975, p. 8.

dictates that men and boys receive the largest portion of whatever food they may have. It is assumed that boys will go to school and that girls will have this opportunity only if they are not needed in the household. Education is taken seriously only in the case of boys, who are encouraged to pursue higher studies, even if it means great sacrifice for the family. In A House for Mr. Biswas, all the members of the family conform to their role and sacrifice their own future in order to give Anand, the only son, the education he deserves because of his sex.

Whatever happened, Anand would go to college. So Mr. Biswas and Shama decided. It wouldn't be easy, but it would be cruel and foolish to give the boy nothing more than elementary school education. The girls agreed. They had not had any milk and prunes, and their chances of going to high schools were slight; but they did badly in their classes and did not consider themselves worthy.¹⁴

A girl's marriage, which usually takes place between ten and fourteen, is arranged by the parents. Very seldom does she see her future husband before the wedding.¹⁵ In Naipaul's novels, the marrying age is usually sixteen and arrangements are made in the same way.

The Indian wife is obligated not only to her husband but to her family as well. Every member of the family comes before her. She seldom receives a display of affection; sex-

14 V. S. Naipaul, A House for Mr. Biswas (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1961; rpt. 1976), p. 485. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

15 Kapur, p. 10.

ual relations seem to be limited to the husband's satisfaction.¹⁶ In Naipaul's novels there is rarely a love scene between an East Indian couple. The closest to a display of affection is found in The Mystic Masseur. It is a short scene where the absence of a rejection conveys emotion.

Leela had tears in her eyes. 'Man, is the second time in my life you make me feel proud of you.' She leaned on him. He didn't push her away.¹⁷

An Indian woman becomes important in her family when she is pregnant. She is given special treatment and her presence is acknowledged. If she gives birth to a boy, she will continue to hold an important position in the family. But if she bears only girls she will be criticized and regarded as a burden to her husband.¹⁸ This is Mrs. Tulsi's curse in A House for Mr. Biswas when she is left a widow with fourteen daughters to marry off.

If an Indian woman is divorced or becomes a widow, she will have the lowest position in the family structure.¹⁹ She will be ostracized and condemned to live a lonely life even if she is young.

Bipti was bathed. Her hair, still wet, was neatly parted and the parting filled with red henna. Then the henna was scooped out

16 Kapur, p. 11.

17 V. S. Naipaul, The Mystic Masseur (London: Heinemann, 1957, rpt. 1971), p. 197. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

18 Kapur, p. 11.

19 Kapur, p. 11.

and the parting filled with charcoal
dust. She was now a widow forever.
(Biswas, p. 32)

Naipaul maintains a certain distance between the author and his characters, yet one notices a warmth and feeling for nostalgia in his portrayal of East Indian women. On the other hand, his reluctance to present European women as complete characters reveals Naipaul's rejection of and contempt towards them.

There are few scenes in which emotions between men and women are expressed. Among East Indians these are almost absent. One learns of the couple's closeness with the news of a pregnancy. Although sex is more open with white women, the scenes are full of details which stifle any emotion that may exist. At times these scenes can be more violent than in Roger Mais' novels, for Naipaul dwells on details that make the acts grotesque and brutal. One needs only to recall the sodomy scene between Jane and Jimmy in Guerrillas.

The Mystic Masseur is the story of the rise of an unknown East Indian, Ganesh Ramsumair, who becomes a prophet to his people, and later in his life emerges as G. R. Muir, Esq., M.B.E. Through satire and understatement, Naipaul traces this man's life as individual, family member and spiritual and political leader. The image of the successful pundit is presented in opposition to the ignorance and weakness dominant in this character. Ganesh is privileged to receive an education and become a school teacher. When he returns to his town on his father's death, he is regarded by his family and the entire community as a wise young man, forger of his own future. However, because of his weakness and hesitation, his life is in reality forged by Ramlogan, who wants to marry his daughter

Leela. The rest of his life is a battle and a truce between Ganesh and Ramlogan, with Leela as peacemaker.

When Leela is married to Ganesh she is sixteen years old and has not exchanged more than a few words with her husband. All the arrangements are made by the two families, and as is customary, Ramlogan offers possessions to Ganesh as dowry. Leela is privileged not only in marrying an educated man but in having attended the mission school, where she learned how to read and write. Ramlogan sees this as an asset for a good match, but Ganesh's family and friends see it as objectionable.

That is the trouble, giving girls education these days. Leela spend too much of she time reading and writing and not looking after she husband properly. (p.86)

A young wife must be trained for her role, and the husband must tame her so that she obeys him, always answers his call, and never questions his decisions. It is not enough for Ganesh to impose his will and rule Leela; she must be beaten when she persists in having her way. This is not unusual; it is part of the adjustment two people must make when they live together.

It was their first beating, a formal affair done without anger on Ganesh's part or resentment on Leela's; and although it formed no part of the marriage ceremony itself, it meant much to both of them. It meant that they had grown up and become independent. Ganesh had become a man; Leela a wife as privileged as any other big woman. Now she too would have tales to tell of her husband's beatings; and when she went home she would be able to look sad and sullen as every woman should. (p. 55)

Leela's life revolves around Ganesh. She attends to his every desire; she serves him and his friends. Although she might complain, she will carry out his orders and accept his decisions. As a pundit and later "mystic masseur", Ganesh lives the easy life of a rich and holy man. Meanwhile, Leela continues to be the maidservant and unpaid worker.

Leela was still asleep. He shook her up by the shoulder. 'It look all right and it smell all right, girl. Get up and milk the cow. I hear the calf bawling.' He bathed while Leela milked the cow and cleaned out the cow-pen; did his puja while Leela made tea and roti; and when Leela started to clean the house, he went for a walk. (p. 128)

Leela constantly reminds her husband that he must engage in a practical profession so that they can always depend on a salary that will bring them economic security. Every time that Ganesh conceives a new plan to become famous, Leela bursts his illusion balloon with her reminders of the needs in a real world. Leela is allowed by Indian customs to leave her husband and return to her family's house if she is mistreated or her husband cannot provide for her. As a result, Leela periodically abandons Ganesh when he insists on pursuing his fantasies, and returns only when he has accomplished something.

Leela is not able to fulfill her role entirely, for she cannot bear children. There is never a question about who is sterile--it must be the woman. This is a hard blow for Ganesh.

There was another disappointment in his life. After a year it was clear that Leela couldn't have children. He lost interest in her as a wife and stopped

beating her. Leela took it well, but he expected no less of a good Hindu wife. (p.69)

Thus Leela dedicates all her energy in being a wife to Ganesh. She becomes an efficient housekeeper, and since there are no children to divert her attention, she grows closer to Ganesh.

Soon she was ruler in the house. She could order Ganesh about and he didn't object. She gave him advice and he listened. He began to consult her on nearly everything. In time, though they would never have admitted it, they had grown to love each other. (p. 69)

Her inability to assume the role of mother gives Leela the opportunity to become a real companion to her husband, and not remain as a stranger who merely feeds him and sleeps with him.

A House for Mr. Biswas is considered Naipaul's best novel to date. It is the East Indian saga in the West Indies. Going from Biswas' birth to his death, the trail of the indentured Indian servant is traced with its modifications and progressions. The conflict between traditional values and modern aspirations is ever present in Biswas' family. Gerald Guinness has described the novel as the portrayal of Trinidad life:

The book not only describes Trinidad life but in a sense positively enacts it, so that we feel by the end that we have made our own long journey through the tunnel which is Mr. Biswas's life, having been spared no detail of its monotony, dependence and claustrophobia--all occasionally enlivened by bouts of manic gaiety.²⁰

²⁰ "Naipaul's Four Early Trinidad Novels," Revista/Review Interamericana VI, no. 4 (Winter 1976-77), 569.

Biswas struggles against family, poverty, nature and even himself to acquire his own house--a space he can claim as his own.

All of Naipaul's female characters in this novel are East Indian. The distinctions made among them are based on social class, age and education. Mrs. Tulsi, because of age and caste, is the head of Hanuman House. She assumes this position when her husband dies; however, her rule is shared with Seth, her brother-in-law. She is the queen-mother figure who makes the rules, while Seth enforces them. He takes care of the family business, and she keeps order in the household. Although Mrs. Tulsi is the center of the family, she is thus more a figure-head than the seat of power.

Mrs. Tulsi is the guardian of the family's moral values. As such, she is the person who will uphold the traditional roles for a man and a woman in their culture. She sees her duty to her daughters reduced to a marriage arrangement, yet for her sons she must provide education, independence, and power. She sees education in women as an obstacle to marriage; however, for men it is the sign of power and wealth. For this reason all her attention and concern are for her two sons. As the head of Hanuman house it is her moral obligation to bestow upon her children and grandchildren these cultural beliefs, and to punish whoever does not conform to the pattern. Mrs. Tulsi will be powerless on her own, but within an extended family structure she is respected by all members and in turn exercises power upon most of them--at least to her daughters she is the sole authority, surpassing even the husbands.

The husbands either rebel or passively accept this patriarchy in exchange for some basic securities, Mr. Biswas rebels, and his defense becomes mockery, "but it is a mockery undermined by impotence and dependence".²¹ Mrs. Tulsi is presented as a strong person who imposes her will on her children

²¹ Guinness, p. 570.

by direct authority, and on her sons-in-law by the traditional female manipulation: appealing to emotions and presenting herself as a poor, lonely woman who has had to struggle all her life with sixteen children. By appealing to their compassion and playing the role of martyr and mother, Mrs. Tulsi's decisions are upheld, and order continues to exist in Hanuman House.

'That is what a mother has to put up with,' Mrs. Tulsi said, 'I don't mind. I have lived long enough to know that you can't expect anything from anybody. I give you five hundred dollars. Do you think I want you to bow and scrape and touch my feet whenever you see me? No. I expect you to spit on me. I expect that.' (pp. 200-201)

Shama, Mrs. Tulsi's daughter and Mr. Biswas' wife, had an upbringing similar to Leela's. However, because the sole parent in this case is the mother, Shama is over-protected and her marriage arranged as soon as Biswas shows an interest in the sixteen-year-old girl. Biswas has not exchanged more than a few words with Shama before he is persuaded to marry. The fact that Shama can read and write is seen by the family and future husband as a minus point in the marriage bargain.

'What about her?' Seth said. 'She is a good child. A little bit of reading and writing even.'
'A little bit of reading and writing-'
Mr. Biswas echoed, trying to gain time. Seth, chewing, his right hand working dexterously with roti and beans, made a dismissing gesture with his left hand. 'Just a little bit. So much. Nothing to worry about. In two or three years she might even forget. (p. 90)

Perhaps because Mr. Biswas always wanted to maintain his independence from the Tulsi household, he did not take advantage of all the privileges granted to a husband in marriage. He never beat Shama; rather he let her nag him in her special way--by sighing at all hours--and in this way convince him of her wishes.

Living in a wife-beating society, he couldn't understand why women were even allowed to nag or how nagging could have any effect. He saw that there were exceptional women, Mrs. Tulsi and Tara, for example, who could never be beaten. But most of the women he knew were like Sushila, the widowed Tulsi daughter. She talked with pride of the beatings she had received from her short-lived husband. She regarded them as a necessary part of her training and often attributed the decay of Hindu society in Trinidad to the rise of the timorous, weak, nonbeating class of husband. (p. 148)

The only times Biswas hit Shama were during his derelict periods and whenever his anger got out of control. But this was not the traditional beating, only "human weakness".

Shama's happiness lies in following the wife and mother stereotype as close as possible. Her ambition is to be like her mother and sisters; she must fill the mold created by former generations. Sadness and distress come only when she is unable to fulfill her role because of Mr. Biswas rebellious spirit.

For there was no doubt that this was what Shama expected from life: to be taken through every stage, to fulfill every function, to have her share of the established emotions: joy at birth or marriage, distress during illness and hardship, grief at a death. Life, to be full, had to be this established

pattern of sensation. Grief and joy, both equally awaited, were one. For Shama and her sisters and women like them, ambition, if the word could be used, was a series of negatives: not to be unmarried, not to be childless, not to be an undutiful daughter, sister, wife, mother, widow. (p. 160)

Just like Leela, Shama is always reminding her husband that his priority must be to provide for his family. He should abandon any illusions of becoming a famous person, and get a job that would at least bring food and shelter. She constantly awakes him from his dreams and forces on him the reality he wishes to forget--he is poor, unskilled, with a wife and four children dependent on him. Every time he learns Shama is pregnant, his sense of entrapment increases.

At Easter he learned that Shama was pregnant for the fourth time.
One child claimed; one still hostile; one unknown. And now another.
Trap! (p. 227)

Shama can only cry, for she sees herself as having no control over her body. She realizes that another child means less food for the rest of the family, but it is inconceivable for her to think of avoiding a pregnancy. Neither the man nor the woman in this union (and apparently in most East Indian couples) ever feels an impending need to control birth. They are overburdened, frustrated, yet the question of avoiding fertility is never raised.

Shama is not a flat character sketched entirely as a stereotype. She also plays roles behaving differently when she is with her husband and when surrounded by the Tulsis. With Mr. Biswas she is nagging, aggressive and nasty. However, the moment any of the sisters is present, she becomes

passive, submissive, and adopts a martyr-like attitude (p.112).

There is little if any communication between Shama and Mr. Biswas. They argue about family matters but neither knows one another. Intimacy is feared, and when the opportunity arises to be alone and grow close together, it is rejected and substituted by role playing.

During these weeks the strangeness of their solitude lessened. But they were as yet unused to their new relationship and though they never quarrelled their talk remained impersonal and constrained. The solitude embarrassed Mr. Biswas by the intimacy it imposed. (p. 147)

Marriage between these two people has been a mere relationship between two strangers who ate, quarrelled and slept together, but who remained unknown to each other. After more than fifteen years of marriage, of having conceived and raised four children, of sharing the frustration of lacking a place of their own, Biswas is amazed at listening to Shama speak to another woman about her ideas on life. He feels as if he had just discovered a new person.

She was throwing off opinions about the new constitution, federation, immigration, India, the future of Hinduism, the education of women. Mr. Biswas listened to the flow with surprise and acute anxiety. He had never imagined that Shama was so well-informed and had such violent prejudices. (p. 504)

Two other women are presented as modern East Indians who have been educated to be professionals and who have not turned into castrators of men-which is the expected behavior, in men's eyes, whenever women break away from the cultural pattern. Miss Logie is described by Biswas as:

not pompous or aggressive, as he had found women in authority inclined to be. She had the graces, and even before there was talk of the job he had found himself attempting to please. She also had the attraction of novelty. He had known no Indian woman of her age as alert and intelligent and inquiring. (p. 496)

Savi, Shama's eldest child, turns out to be not only the most responsible and concerned about the family, but the provider for her parents and sisters, once Biswas is unable to support them. She has been educated abroad, is able to find a job with a good salary, learns how to drive a car, and never grows distant from her family. Meanwhile Anand, on whom Biswas had placed all his hopes, stays away during his father's illness and does not even attend Biswas' funeral.

²²
Guerrillas was published in 1976 by a North American publishing company and distributed nationwide. It has an exotic setting full of violence and sex relations between different races. The author's technique of using the familiar to project the universal has apparently been abandoned in this novel. The violence, mostly concentrated in sexual scenes, seems unnecessary, and solely for sensationalist purposes. For the most part, characters are flat or caricatured. Commenting on this book, Consuelo López points out that

in Guerrillas his [Naipaul's] lack of compassion for man is disturbing. Intimacy is depicted as violation, as a stained bed; and just as the land is violated by its

²² V. S. Naipaul, Guerrillas (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975). All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

neglect and misuse, the basest form of violation, a sadistic sexual attack, is the climax of the novel.²³

Two Europeans, Jane and Roche, and a "native", Jimmy Ahmed, are the main characters in a story dealing with the possibility of a political struggle between the forces of a neo-colonial government and the organized uprising of guerrillas. Although this possibility is real for the upholders of the status quo, the pulse of the oppressed mass is seldom felt. Jimmy Ahmed is the furthest thing from a revolutionary leader. He has no followers; he is a degenerate and maintains business relations with private enterprises on the island. Yet Roche and most of the European expatriates see in Jimmy the leader who could turn the people's growing dissatisfaction and opposition to the government into a possibility for change. Within this climate the three main characters face or avoid dealing with their particular anxieties.

Jane had envisioned a tropical paradise when she decided to join Roche on this island. She soon grows weary of the climate, the people, and even Roche. She has been in this place for four months when she meets Jimmy, who is presented as a sexual challenge for her. Having already decided she would leave Roche and return to England, Jane sleeps with Jimmy, and although not terribly impressed by his sexual prowess, she returns once more. This decision results in the most violent scene in the book, when she is sodomized and eventually murdered by one of Jimmy's boys.

This twenty-nine-year-old European woman is presented in Guerrillas through three different points of view: Roche,

²³ "V.S. Naipaul: Guerrillas", Revista/Review Interamericana V, no. 3 (Fall 1976), 502.

Jimmy, and her own. Roche sees her as a secure, independent woman, able to make decisions and take necessary risks to follow her plans. On the other hand, she tends to assimilate many ideas from the men she lives with periodically, and is unaware of how her security is built on borrowed values.

It was what he had taught her, what she had picked up from him and incorporated, as words, as a passing attitude, into the chaos of words and attitudes she possessed: words that she might shed at any time, as easily as she had picked them up, and forget she had ever spoken them. (p. 20)

Roche appraises her opinions of people and situations as simple and elementary. She does not go beyond the obvious; to analyze in depth would be alien to her.

Everything about Jane was simple, exaggerated and, oddly for a woman of twenty-nine, schoolgirlish. Of the simplicity of her views and her girlishness she seemed unaware. (p. 103)

Jane speaks openly about her sexual problems with other men, her abortions, her procession of lovers, and even in her approach to Roche she is bold as a child would be (p. 106).

Jimmy, a black Chinese, sees Jane as a sex object. She is the white, middle-class woman who loves to flirt and tempt men and whose only concern is to have a satisfying sexual experience. After their first meeting, he begins to fantasize about her--Jane as an admirer of his talents as political leader and great lover. On their second meeting, Jimmy flirts with Jane and she responds, assuming the aggressive role he thought only belonged to men. When he is not able to perform sexually, he apologizes and feels humiliated by her security and apparent invulnerability (p. 87). His

moment of revenge comes on their third meeting when by sheer violence he subdues her sexually and later disposes of her body by reducing her to shreds.

The passages written from Jane's point of view must be considered the author's personal presentation of this character. Describing Jane in this novel and Linda in In A Free State, Kerry McSweeney correctly sees them as "promiscuous, insincere, utterly without commitment, less liberal than the men they are associated with, and usually more accurate in their assessments of events."²⁴

As soon as Jane sees Jimmy, she forgets the discomfort of the heat and the long trip. She sees the man as a possible candidate to have an affair with (p. 16). She is impressed with men who apparently know where they are going, and who can forge their future because they are sure of their own resources. The moment that image begins to change, Jane loses interest. This is exactly what happened with Roche, and before him with all the men she had dealt with intimately. Although she acts aggressively with men, even sexually, she enjoys being overpowered. She takes the initiative in love-making, but will relinquish this position to a man who appears strong and secure. However, if a man does not sexually perform to her expectations, she will calmly dismiss him as a toy that did not work (p. 48).

Jane sees herself as a privileged person, for she possesses security and freedom. Perhaps the ability to move from place to place, from man to man, has given her a secure feeling, since she does not need to rely on anyone to make decisions. Jane's sole consideration in life is herself. She

²⁴ "Sensibility and Schemata," Critical Quarterly, 18 (autumn 1976), 76.

might become interested in a man, a cause or a country, but ultimately everything and everyone has to relate to her. Situations are attractive only when they concern important or pleasing personalities.

The point of view used by Naipaul in The Mimic Men²⁵ seems to disturb most critics who have reviewed this novel. They make little distinction between author and narrator and feel that this is the novel's weakest point.²⁶ On the other hand, Simon Gray²⁷ and Kenneth Ramchand²⁸ agree that the balance between Ralph Singh, the autobiographer, and V. S. Naipaul, the novelist, is maintained for the most part and contributes to the reader's involvement with a narrator who is "egotistical, selfishly introverted and detached."²⁹ It is important to remember that all characters are portrayed from this limited point of view.

Like A House for Mr. Biswas, this novel is invaded by female characters. Whether in his childhood or adult life, Ralph Singh seems to revolve around women. His rebellion against this situation takes the form of complete isolation

²⁵ V. S. Naipaul, The Mimic Men (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1967; rpt. 1975). All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

²⁶ Karl Miller, "V. S. Naipaul and the New Order," The Kenyon Review, 29, no. 5 (November 1967), 691.

²⁷ "A Man of Style," New Statesman, May 5, 1967, p. 622.

²⁸ "The Theatre of Politics," Twentieth Century Studies, X (December 1973), 29.

²⁹ Robert Hamner, V. S. Naipaul (New York: Twayne, 1973), p. 58.

and detachment at the age of forty from carnal contact with women. The novel traces Ralph's school years and his life in Isabella, moving then to London, and after some higher learning and marriage, returning to his country. At this moment in his life, he becomes a prominent businessman and enters politics. He never knew how high the stakes were and how difficult it was to play this political game. He realizes that he and all others who deceive themselves into thinking that they act on their own are simply mimic men.

We, here on our island, handling books printed in this world, and using its goods, had been abandoned and forgotten. We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all its reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new. (p. 146)

He betrays his people, his party and himself. He runs from Isabella and decides to retire permanently in a country he can never become part of, and so remain a stranger in no-man's land.

In The Mimic Men Naipaul presents his two groups of women--the European and the East Indian. In the last group, female characters behave according to their socio-economic class. Ralph's cousins are part of the nouveau riche who made their fortune when North Americans began to invest in Isabella. The more involved this group becomes in the country's economy, the further away they grow from traditional religious and cultural beliefs. Ralph's adolescent cousins are portrayed as vain, emotional and impractical girls. They are mostly concerned with their appearance and place great importance on superficial matters. The leisure and freedom

they enjoy is very attractive to Ralph's sisters, who depend on these rich relatives to escape their economic reality. Vacations are treasured by Ralph's sisters, for they can then pretend to be wealthy and imitate their cousins without being reproved by their father. Their aspirations are marriage to wealthy men who will protect and care for them. The cousins will perhaps have the privilege of studying abroad, probably in the United States, where they will definitely find a good match.

Ralph's mother belongs to Leela's and Shama's social class and follows the pattern appropriate for these women. Her marriage to an educated man is arranged, and in turn is coaxed into marriage, as were Ganesh and Biswas. Like Shama, Ralph's mother manages to remain loyal to her family and husband at the expense of leading an unfulfilled life with a man she was never intimate with.

Her old-fashioned upbringing which prescribed acceptance without complaint, was a help to her. She accepted my father's abuse; she accepted her family's tacit... disapproval of my father. By a display of perpetual guilt she continued to show loyalty to both sides, even after my father had stopped going to her parents' house. (p. 89)

She takes on the role of martyr when her husband turns into the prophet and political leader Gurudeva. Ralph's mother never abandons the home, but neither does she make any attempt to contact her husband again. She accepts the disgrace brought on her family because of her husband's deeds. When Gurudeva is killed, it is simply the closing chapter to her life as suffering wife.

No distinctions are made between European women; they all

follow the seductress stereotype of Jane in Guerrillas. Ralph seems fixed on finding out about foreign women by going to bed with them but avoiding any social involvement.

He is candid about his motive. He desires a sexual relationship, nothing more. And to guarantee briefness and anonymity he chooses women whose language he cannot speak.

At one time he decides that only beautiful faces matter and goes to bed with a woman whose body was so large as to invoke disgust in him. His description of her disrobing and exposing all that flesh arouses a nauseating feeling.

Now, with a sigh from my companion that turned into a laugh, these breasts were released. They cascaded heavily down. They were enormous, they were grotesque, empty starved sacks which yet contained some substance at their tips, where alone they had some shape. She unbound, untied, released herself. Flesh, striped, indented, corrugated, fell helplessly about her. Below those breasts, wide flabby scabbards which hung down to her middle, her dimpled, loosed belly collapsed; flesh hung in liquid folds about her legs which quivered like risen dough. (p. 236)

His relationship with Stella lasts a bit longer, but he is asked to perform on cue, which is impossible for him.

Our love-making was standardized. It followed the pattern of that afternoon. It was divided into two parts. The first was dedicated to me; the second Stella

claimed for herself. For the first part she lay on her side and was passive. For the second she straddled me, leaning back, resting her hands on the bed or on my shins; she was all motion; her eyes were closed; her skin went moist. (p. 231)

Whether with foreigners, one-nighters or an acquaintance, the narrator seeks only the pleasure of intercourse where no demands are made on him to perform or extend a relationship. Women are seen as sex objects, and for the most part bodies are repulsive to him. When he is not able to find sexual fulfillment, he blames his partner, never himself.

Sandra is the only woman Ralph allows to get close to him. He is drawn to her by her beauty and because she possesses many qualities he lacks.

Sandra is decisive; marriage was her idea, and when the parting comes it is she who goes away....Singh was attracted to Sandra for a number of reasons: she was beautiful and appeared to be strong, he admired her confident way of speaking, her ambition to eradicate her past.³¹

However, aside from her beautiful face, what captures Ralph's attention are her breasts. He loses himself in that tender flesh where he finds affection, comfort and safety. His detailed description of this part of Sandra's body reveals his fondness (p. 43). It is Sandra who manages to convince Ralph to propose. After complaining once again about the limited future a woman has in today's world, she turns to Ralph as her only salvation--he must redeem her from this dark pit she is doomed for by offering to share his life

³¹ Theroux, p. 73.

with her, taking her away from family, friends and country (p. 46).

Similar to Mouche in Los pasos perdidos, Sandra is not able to make the change from the metropolitan city life she knows so well to the peculiarities and customs of a small island. She becomes less secure and more dependent on Ralph. Unable to adapt to her new environment, Sandra withdraws into a small, selective group where she can act as the London woman she has never ceased being. There is never an attempt nor a possibility of ever bridging the gap between the European and the East Indian culture. Sandra and Ralph's mother never communicate; with time they drift farther apart.

Perhaps the only female character in Naipaul's books who is not East Indian and wins the author's sympathy is Lieni, a working-class Maltese woman. She has many of the qualities admired by Naipaul's protagonists: she is sentimental, emotional, overly concerned about children and men, and always ready to help the needy even if she must in turn sacrifice herself. In London she shares with Ralph the inconveniences of living in a boarding house and tries to make his stay as pleasant and comfortable as possible. She encourages him to dress well and to go out and conquer the ladies. In return, she expects him to give her the details of his experiences. Ralph can sleep with Lieni without feeling threatened, and can always find the warmth he seems to be constantly seeking. Lieni does not expect him to impress her sexually, nor does she have any illusions of making this a lasting relationship. Ralph and Lieni come together at moments when they are in need of companionship--when no roles are required.

Ralph Singh believes that the art of physical love

depends mostly on the position of women in society--"As the position improves, so the art of love declines" (p. 49). Lieni does not have to pretend or keep up appearances; she expresses her emotions sincerely, and accepts exactly what she is granted, making no demands. Ralph seems to be pursuing an unknown goal in his sex-relations. Every time he makes love to a woman, he feels unclean and unfulfilled. Yet, he continues to court women with the sole purpose of sleeping with them, avoiding at all times any involvement.

We seek sex, and are left with two private bodies on a stained bed. The larger erotic dream, the god, has eluded us. It is so whenever, moving out of ourselves, we look for extensions of ourselves. (p. 18)

Ralph wants the pleasure of sex, but abhors the body which provides the feeling. He is attracted and repulsed by a woman's body. He sees it as ugly, imperfect and capable of suffocating him. He ponders constantly on how a man can obtain sensual delight without becoming intimate.

Intimacy: the word holds the horror. I could have stayed for ever at a woman's breasts, if they were full and had a hint of a weight that required support. But there was the skin, there was the smell of skin. There were bumps and scratches, there were a dozen little things that could positively enrage me. I was capable of the act required, but frequently it was in the way that I was capable of getting drunk or eating two dinners. Intimacy: it was violation and self-violation. (p. 25)

After searching for an answer in London and Isabella, the narrator retreats from the realm of the senses, and takes on

the role of the secluded, celibate monk who perseveringly writes about his life.

Naipaul not only portrays women in the stifling roles Indian tradition has reserved for them, but also creates a mold into which to fit European women. The first pattern is more compassionate since women are limited in their functions, and thus allow men to develop themselves. Nevertheless, Naipaul does point out that these traditional and cultural ties many times suffocate even men. The respect and pity this author endows Indian women with for their capacity to suffer and endure is evident in his novels.

In a manner similar to René Marqués, Naipaul concentrates his most violent attacks on a particular group--European middle-class women. They are portrayed as beings incapable of sharing; men must revolve around them if they wish to be granted any favors. They threaten a man not only in the outside world, but also in intimate relationships. These women take advantage of a man's vulnerability, never caring about his feelings. As in Marqués' stories, a reader's reaction is to despise these selfish and destructive creatures and to sympathize with the weaker position of male characters.

Naipaul's fictional world is as fixed as many West Indian societies. Ethnic groups continue to uphold traditional values, disregarding to a certain degree the economic, political and social changes the country is undergoing. The Anglos and the blacks are still part of an alien world for the East Indian; these groups are looked on with suspicion and animosity. Women are mistrusted even more for their cultural and sexual mores.

...she had many things to forget, and he had instantly diagnosed an unhappy love affair. He had not encouraged her to give details for all unhappy love affairs are alike and he had heard the history of so many. He thought that women were all the same; they complicated things in the most idiotic fashion.

Sleep It Off Lady, Jean Rhys

One can say there are two writers named Jean Rhys. There is the young, talented woman, part of the lost generation in Paris, who wrote in the twenties and thirties. And there is also the White Creole writing about the West Indies in the sixties. Hence Jean Rhys is both a British and a West Indian writer. Though the settings may differ, the characters created by Rhys stem from the same anguish and love of nature and warmth that their current environments lack. To deny a place to this writer in West Indian literature would be to exclude V. S. Naipaul also. Neither is now living in the West Indies, but the experiences they write about are drawn from the reminiscences of their West Indian childhood and adolescence, which is one of the sources of their creativity.

Jean Rhys was born in Dominica, part of the Windward Islands (the largest of the lesser Antilles), in 1894. Her father was a Welsh doctor who had settled there and her mother a Creole. When she was sixteen she went to live with an aunt in England, and attended the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. However, she could only study one term, because her father died when she was seventeen and she had to start earning a living. She became a chorus girl in a theatrical touring group. When the war ended, she married a Dutch poet and for ten years led a bohemian life in Paris and Vienna. At this time she met Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce and Ford Madox Ford.¹ In 1927 her first collection of short stories, The

1 Francis Wyndham, Introd., Art and Literature, I (March 1964), 173-77. Arthur Mizener in The Saddest Story: A Biography of Ford Madox Ford (New York: World Pub. Co., 1971) and Stella Bowen in Drawn from Life: Reminiscences (London: Collins Pub. Co., 1941) write extensively on Ford Madox Ford's involvement with Jean Rhys which resulted in her dedication to writing and her pessimistic outlook on life after the affair was over.

Left Bank, was published with an introduction by Ford Madox Ford. A year later her first novel came out under the title of Postures in England and Quartet in the United States. The story depicts the cruel relationship that develops between a couple of the Parisian lost generation and an insecure and confused young woman, Marya Hughes. At this time Rhys returned to England and re-married. With the publication of her second novel, After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie, in 1930, Rhys entered her mature stage. Four years later, she published Voyage in the Dark, which is the first of her novels to recall a West Indian setting. In 1939 she published Good Morning, Midnight, perhaps the best of her four novels.

With the exception of a few short stories collected in Tigers Are Better-Looking, the first stage in Jean Rhys' literary production ended in 1940. Twenty-seven years later, a new Jean Rhys appears, the West Indian novelist of Wide Sargasso Sea. Even though a number of years separate these two writing stages in Jean Rhys' life, her themes, characters and style are basically the same. Wide Sargasso Sea is the culmination of her previous experiments in the form and structure of the novel.

Her prose is reticent, unemphatic, precise, and yet supple, alive with feeling, as though the whole world she so coolly describes were shimmering with foreboding, with a lifetime's knowledge of unease and pain.²

The creation of female characters is Jean Rhys' forte. These women "create" themselves by narrating their own stories,

2 A. Alvarez, "The Best Living English Novelist," New York Times, March 17, 1974, p. 7.

as Ernest Hemingway does in The Sun Also Rises.³ In experimenting with point of view, the author found that her best creations were achieved by writing in the first person. In this way, she is able to control her own wandering mind.

Anna Morgan and Sacha Jansen (Rhys' protagonists) know only that they suffer and that therefore they exist; anything outside themselves exists only because they happen to think about it, or because it impinges upon their consciousness. The controlled point of view which holds to the consciousness of the central character is not only a functional way of telling her story, but also expresses her solipsistic philosophy. The aesthetic value of both Voyage in the Dark and Good Morning, Midnight is raised because the first person point of view is the technical correlative of Jean Rhys' understanding of life.⁴

The themes treated by Jean Rhys are many, and all are part of her female characters. She is concerned with loneliness, shyness, misunderstandings,⁵ and as Naipaul points out, "themes that engage us today: isolation, an absence of society or community, the sense of things falling apart, dependence, loss."⁶

3 Elgin W. Mellow, "Character and Themes in the Novels of Jean Rhys," Contemporary Literature, XIII (autumn 1972), 470.

4 Mellow, p. 467.

5 Graham Norton, "Sleep It Off Lady by Jean Rhys," West Indies Chronicle, April-May 1977, p. 17.

6 "Without a Dog's Chance," New York Review of Books, XVIII, no. 9 (May 18, 1972), 31.

The themes that run through all of Jean Rhys' novels and short stories, whether their setting is Paris, London or Spanish Town, Jamaica, present a vision of the world in which

free will is a myth and the individual has no power to control his destiny.... Jean Rhys does not salve our pride, but aims through her various technical devices to make us experience the degradation and humiliation of her characters. In the Rhys world there is no superior vantage point for anyone.⁷

Jean Rhys has created a female character all of her own. As early as 1930, she rebelled against the female stereotype prevalent in literature and wove a literary world around women who are lost in a society in which male values predominate. It is not a happy world. Rhys' women are trapped in a web from which they are unable or unwilling to escape because they have not learned to use the practical tools to deal with such a harsh world. Their stories never really end, making them even more depressing; and so the women continue to exist, lost in a faceless crowd in a society that simply does not care.

Critics agree that Rhys' female protagonists possess similar characteristics. It might even be stated that all her novels are the story of one woman at different stages of her life. However, the varieties and differences among her protagonists make them independent characters and far more than mere stereotypes.

In the novels written in the thirties, Rhys always chose a definite setting: Paris or London, between World Wars. Although the time could be ignored, placing these characters in

7 Mellow, p. 474.

a huge metropolis increases their sense of loss and helps them maintain their anonymity. All face similar problems which stem from the lack of money, abandonment by husband or lover, and the passing of time, and with it youth and beauty. Their ages range from the eighteen-year-old Anna Morgan to the middle-aged Sasha. These women have little formal education, though they are avid readers. Whenever they decide to work, their jobs range from chorus girl to language teacher. These last only a short time and produce an income too scant to solve their economic problems.

The men these women become involved with are either bohemians or bourgeois. With the first group, composed of young foreigners, they travel, live from day to day and are loved passionately. But these women also endure poverty and hardships which end in abandonment and pain. The bourgeois, on the other hand, offer the security that money and leisure time can bring. These men are usually in their forties, unattractive, but easy to get attached to since they offer the things the women starve for. But women are only caprices to them, lasting but a short time. Rhys' women must then go back to a life of insecurity where they "recount the single, persistent, disconnected disaster of a life in which only three things can be relied on: fear, loneliness and the lack of money".⁸ To these characters man is the center of their lives; their incessant search is therefore geared to finding the person who will love and care for them. When they become involved with a man, they will fight, crawl, and humiliate themselves to save the relationship. When they lose the struggle, which eventually happens, their center no

8 A. Alvarez, p. 7.

culminating in the creation of her most moving and intimate character, can be better appreciated. It is her excellent use of point of view, shifts in time, and stream-of-consciousness techniques which make Wide Sargasso Sea one of the best novels in the English-speaking world. This novel will be discussed last in this study since its historical setting is essential to understanding not only the entire work, but its main character, Antoinette Cosway, as well.

In Voyage in the Dark,¹¹ Jean Rhys has discovered the multiple uses of the first person point of view. She now draws closer to the protagonist and creates a pathetic human being whose story seems more tragic because she is only eighteen. Anna Morgan is not only lost in a big city but is culturally alienated, for she comes from the West Indies. The novel covers a year in her life when Anna is plunged into a society that denies her existence as a complete human being. By nineteen she is doomed to be an outcast, and to be exploited as a sex object.

Anna is cut off from family and country in England. She cannot identify herself with this strange, cold city she has been brought to. She always recollects her childhood in a land where everything was warm and green and blue, where the sun always shone and there was no need to rush. She cannot help comparing those recent memories with her present abode. Her only family link is her stepmother, Hester, who was a stranger in the West Indies but is now at home. Since

¹¹ Jean Rhys, Voyage in the Dark (London: Andre Deutsch; 1934; rpt. 1967). Originally published in 1934. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

longer holds, and they become lost and without direction.

V. S. Naipaul describes Rhys' characters as bohemians:

The Jean Rhys heroine of the first four books is a woman of mystery, inexplicably bohemian, in the toughest sense of that word, appearing to come from no society, having roots in no society, having memories only of places, a woman who has 'lost the way to England' and is adrift in the metropolis.⁹

Rhys' 1966 novel Wide Sargasso Sea contains many of the elements of the early works. However, the emphasis has changed so that the focus is no longer on individual acts, but on a society based on economic interests and on asphyxiating moral values that repress and destroy the spontaneity and openness of human beings. Rhys' women in Paris or London have the same relationship to their society as Antoinette in the West Indies in the nineteenth century.

Jean Rhys' women belong to an in-between world. In whatever European capital they find themselves, they are flotsam floating between the rich and the poor, just as, in the West Indies, the Creole belongs to neither white nor black.¹⁰

Since the focus of this study is on women characters, the protagonists of Rhys' early novels will be analyzed beginning with the youngest, Anna Morgan, and ending with Sasha in her forties. In this way four stages in a woman's life will be covered. If the novels are studied in the order of publication date, the development of this writer's artistry,

9 V. S. Naipaul, p. 29.

10 Neville Braybrooke, "The Return of Jean Rhys," Caribbean Quarterly, XVI, no. 4 (December 1970), 45.

Anna is eighteen, she needs no guidance or financial support from Hester.

Her life in the West Indies was always outdoors, never sheltered or isolated as in London. She misses being close to black people, who represented to her the natural elements of life. She remembers how Francine, a black servant, reacted the day she reached puberty, a natural stage in a woman's life, and how Hester fussed about concealing the news as if it were a disgrace. Anna also associates warmth and happiness with blacks, and coldness and sadness with whites like Hester and all English people. All senses are affected by the beauty of the West Indian landscape; in England everything seems dull.

Sometimes the earth trembles; sometimes you can feel it breathe. The colours are red, purple, blue, gold, all shades of green. The colours here are black, brown, grey, dim-green, pale blue, the white of people's faces--like woodlice. (p. 54)

Feeling like a foreigner in a strange land, Anna finds a job as a chorus girl and begins to learn the ways of women her age in this country. The friends she makes are shallow, silly, and interested only in getting a man who will give them money. Anna learns how money determines everything in a woman's life. Money gives her freedom to go any place, to work or rest, to live where she wants and to acquire the things she considers important. Without money she is nothing, and is always at the mercy of disparaging employers and abusive landladies. Since working as a chorus girl will not bring her the money she needs, Anna must also search for a man rich enough to provide for her.

Walter Jeffries becomes for Anna the one who will rescue her from the dullness she foresees in her life, and who will

love and protect her forever. She becomes deeply attached to Jeffries and when the affair is over, she is not prepared to handle his rejection. She begs and crawls to him, which only makes him drift further away. The fact that Jeffries was Anna's first sexual experience contributes to her idea that with this man she will find the happiness she seeks. She is seduced by him, but no violence is sensed, only pain.

I thought that it had been just like
the girls said, except that I hadn't
known it would hurt so much. (p. 38)

Anna grows extremely dependent on Jeffries and becomes a burden for a man who only sought pleasure and no attachments. Letters are exchanged, money is provided, and Anna must begin a new life alone and marred by a painful experience. She has no one to rely on, only friends who are in the same position and can offer little advice. She begins to drift from one man to another, seeking happiness but at the same time unconsciously punishing herself and her body, and blaming her misfortunes on her weak character.

Her carelessness leads to pregnancy. Again she has nowhere to go to find a kind word from a friend. She lets the days pass by as if not thinking about a problem would make it vanish. At last she decides to contact her former lover and seek his help. Perhaps trying to punish herself further, she undergoes an abortion in an advanced stage of pregnancy and almost dies from a hemorrhage. A doctor is called just in time to save her life. He announces with a mixture of cynicism and comicality that she will soon be all right, ready to pursue her previous life once again.

At nineteen Anna Morgan has fallen into a pattern of dependency and self-destruction that will be very hard to

break. She will be another pretty woman searching in vain for a man to give meaning to her existence while she wanders the streets of the big cities.

In Quartet,¹² the first novel Jean Rhys published, the use of the third person omniscient point of view tends to weaken characterization and acts as a detriment to the development of the female protagonist. The story ends with Stephan Zelli's thoughts on women after he has been deceived and abused by his wife. He wins the readers' sympathy and compassion, and his wife is dismissed as another bitch out to destroy the goodness in men. This is clearly not the writer's intention, but Rhys is too close to her subject to maintain the distance and objectivity needed in fiction.

The girl was a really tragic person. She had written an unpublishably sordid novel of great sensitiveness and persuasiveness, but her gift for prose and her personal attractiveness were not enough to ensure her any reasonable life, for on the other side of the balance were bad health, destitution, shattered nerves, an undesirable husband, lack of nationality, and a complete absence of any desire for independence. When we met her she possessed nothing but a cardboard suitcase and the astonishing manuscript. She was down to her last three francs and she was sick.¹³

12 Jean Rhys, Quartet (New York: Vintage Books, 1974). Originally published in 1928. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

13 Drawn from Life: Reminiscences (London: Collins Publishers, 1941), p. 166.

This is not a description of Marya Hughes, the protagonist of Quartet, rather it is Stella Bowen's impression of Jean Rhys when the latter met Ford Madox Ford. This closeness to the fictional material will also be detrimental to the success of this first novel.

The original title of this work was Postures, later changed by Rhys for the North American edition. However, the first title is more appropriate to the underlying idea in the novel. People pose; they act out roles imposed by tradition and society. The challenging of these postures only brings legal sanctions, scorn and isolation from the people who spend their lives posing and pretending.

The novel deals with Marya's involvement with three people whom she loves and hates at different stages in her life: Stephen Zelli, the foreigner she marries in London and with whom she travels and lives in Paris for four years; and Lois and Hugh Heidler, the couple she meets in a moment of great distress when her husband is imprisoned.

Marya Hughes, like Anna Morgan, was also a chorus girl. She comes from a poor family and has had to exploit her youth and beauty at an early age. But after a while even moving from place to place becomes boring and hopelessly suffocating.

A vague procession of towns all exactly alike, a vague procession of men also exactly alike. One can drift like that for a long time, she found, carefully hiding the fact that this wasn't what one had expected of life. Not in the very least.

At twenty-four she imagined with dread that she was growing old. (pp. 16-17)

She meets Stephan on one of these performing tours and is immediately attracted to him by his sense of security and self-

reliance. Even if she thinks that he is not as stable as he pretends, she cannot pass by this opportunity to bring change into her life. Marya ignores how Stephan makes a living, and prefers not to inquire so as not to upset him. She chooses to live the lively and happy moments he offers her rather than anger him. As long as he loves and cares for her, she will play any role he wishes.

Stephan was secretive and a liar, but he was a very gentle and expert lover. She was the petted, cherished child, the desired mistress, the worshipped, the perfumed goddess. She was all these things to Stephan--or so he made her believe. Marya hadn't known that a man could be as nice as all that to a woman--so gentle in little ways. (p. 22)

When Stephan is imprisoned and Marya is left on her own without money, she is full of anxiety. She is not so much concerned about why Stephan is in this predicament but how she will manage without him. He was her life-center, and now there is no one to hold on to. In order to appease Stephan, when she visits him in jail, she plays the role of a strong, self-reliant person. This role will be used against her when Marya attempts to explain her liaison with Hugh.

The reasons Marya stays with Stephan when he is released instead of playing the role of Hugh's mistress and returning to her hotel room are not clear to her. She knows that by siding with Stephan she has angered and perhaps lost the man she believes she loves. Perhaps in a small way she is trying to rebel against the role she had been forced to play by Hugh. Or perhaps she really felt pity and even love for the man she had lived with. She reacts rather than initiate an action. If Stephan would take her with him, she

would gladly go and forget Paris and Hugh. But there is not enough money for both of them, so she withdraws and does not cling to a man who needs support from her.

In the taxi she turned to him to say: 'Stephan, don't leave me here. For God's sake, take me with you.' But before she could speak, he was talking to her: 'Yes, only just the money for the fare and a very little over.' He spoke as if he had half forgotten her, as if his mind had leaped forward and was already in Amsterdam. 'Oh, I expect I'll be able to manage something,' he said. 'I expect you will,' answered Marya mechanically. (p. 144)

H. J., as Hugh Heidler is called by his friends, is a paternal figure to Marya: he will provide her with the security she has never enjoyed. He is older than Marya and quite unattractive to her. Yet, the power his figure displays makes Marya yield to a man who obviously is going to use her for his advantage.

Her need is both psychic and physical (Rhys was one of the first women writers to express an unabashed, direct acceptance of women's desire for sexual love); and when Stephan is imprisoned for a year she must allow herself to be taken by another man who is, as always, older and, as always, a brute.¹⁴

In exchange for food and shelter she agrees to play the game with Lois and H. J. She is reduced to the role of sex object --a doll to play with whenever H. J. decides. All her acts have already been decided for her; she only needs to follow the rules of the game.

14 Mellown, p. 464.

What mattered was that, despising, almost disliking love, he was forcing her to be nothing but the little woman who lived in the Hôtel du Bosphore for the express purpose of being made love to. A petite femme. It was, of course, part of his mania for classification. But he did it with such conviction that she, miserable weakling that she was, found herself trying to live up to his idea of her. '...You pretty thing--you pretty, pretty thing.' (p. 118)

Aware of how she is being manipulated, Marya never rebels; on the contrary, she becomes involved with H. J. to the point of depending on him for her mere existence. These are the types of relationships that Rhys' women seem to fall into and which eventually account for their abandonment.

Instinctively knowing that her man will desert her, the woman increasingly debases herself in a desperate attempt to hold on to him, the inevitable result being that her abandoned position increases his revulsion. The Rhys woman may be a mistress in name, but in fact she is always a victim of love because she is at the mercy of her uncontrollable desires.¹⁵

In the case of women relating to women, as long as their man is not coveted, they will be friends, sharing their fears and helping each other overcome emotional and economic crises. Marya immediately relates to Lois Heidler when she offers her help, although she is a stranger. Lois appears as a humanitarian who is ready to take under her wing a defenseless creature like Marya. However, she begins to see Lois as a rival ready to attack when she becomes H. J.'s mistress. She can no longer

see Lois as an attractive and agreeable woman; everything connected to her becomes ugly and malicious. Marya even tells Stephen it was Lois' fault she yielded to H. J.'s advances.

When I'd been there with them...a little time, Heidler started making love to me. And so I went to her, to Lois, and I told her what was happening and I asked her to let me have the money to go away. And she said...that what was the matter with me was that I was too virtuous and that she didn't mind. And that I was a fool not to trust Heidler. And that night she went out somewhere and left me alone with him. (p. 179)

The quartet has dissolved and only Marya remains--alone and bewildered, facing a frightening future for which she lacks the tools necessary for survival.

Julia Martin is the protagonist of Rhys' second novel After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie.¹⁶ This time the action is not set in one city alone; it begins in Paris, continues in London and ends back in Paris. Julia is thirty-six years old and has been pensioned by her last lover for the past six months. On the day the story opens Julia has received notice that this will be Mr. Mackenzie's last check. Threatened by lack of money, her world appears to disintegrate. Determined not to be intimidated by Mackenzie, Julia searches for him, returns his last check and in a symbolic gesture, slaps his cheek with her glove. It is

16 Jean Rhys, After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie (New York: Vintage Books, 1974). Originally published in 1931. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

a brave act to refuse to be treated as an object to dispose of when no longer needed. Nevertheless, by returning the money, she is left without the resources to survive a lengthy period.

Very little is revealed of her childhood and her family, yet there is an invalid mother, a resentful sister and a successful uncle in her past. She seems to have been forsaken by these people, and her presence only brings hostility and rejection. Julia's clearest memory is her first sexual experience at age nineteen.

This was the affair which has ended quietly and decently, without fuss or scenes or hysteria. When you were nineteen, and it was the first time you had been let down, you did not make scenes. You felt as if your back was broken, as if you would never move again. But you did not make a scene. That started later on, when the same thing had happened five or six times over, and you were supposed to be getting used to it. (p. 109)

There seems to have been a baby in her life, but this is only mentioned once, and the thought ends with: "'Look here, I don't believe that; you're making it up.' All right, don't believe it then." (p. 112) However, the possibility does exist, and the experience adds another dimension to her character. Like Marya, Julia left London with a foreign husband who offered love but little else. This experience is vaguely recalled by Julia's family; they seem to think that since she was once married and never divorced, she belongs next to her husband, wherever he may be. For Julia, that man has no part in her life, except perhaps when she recalls the baby that died because there was no money to feed him.

When you've just had a baby, and it dies for the simple reason that you haven't enough money to keep it alive, it leaves you with a sort of hunger. Not sentimental--oh, no. Just a funny feeling, like hunger....

'And then you rush round trying to raise money enough to bury him. You don't want to leave him lying in the hospital with a card tied around his wrist, (pp. 11-112)

Whether with a husband or a lover, Julia battles alone and takes care of avoiding self-pity.

Mr. Mackenzie responds to the type of man Julia has in her mind. Middle-aged, wealthy, unattractive--meaning that he must pay to get an attractive woman's attention--this man can offer her the security that only money can bring. Whether they are sexually compatible or not does not matter; Julia will adjust her desires in exchange for a comfortable living. In order to lure Julia, Mr. Mackenzie offers her not only money but promises of everlasting love and long-term financial security. Once the prize is won and the passion subsides, Mr. Mackenzie sees Julia as an easy woman not worth all the trouble (p. 25).

After the affair is over, Julia is content to receive a fixed amount from Mr. Mackenzie's lawyer, even if she misses many other favors. There is no longing for his company, only for the comfort he gave her. However, when she is informed that her stipend will be terminated she is angered, for she holds him responsible for her life. Mixed with this vexation there is fear at again having nothing and no one to rely on. Aware that he wants to avoid her sight, Julia imposes herself on Mr. Mackenzie and takes advantage of his sense of guilt to ask him for money. Perhaps this is all that this man signified for Julia--her source of income.

Although Mr. Horsefield, an Englishman Julia meets in Paris, does not fall into either group of men Rhys' women get involved with, he shares characteristics with both of them. He is wealthy but refuses to be directed by social status or economic conditions. He is a man used to being alone and who fears and rejects intimacy.

He watched her anxiously, feeling all at once very intimate with her. And he hated the feeling of intimacy. It made something in him shrink back and long to escape. (p. 90)

He is relatively young and handsome, and is unwilling to follow an imposed lifestyle. He is fascinated by the mystery of a wandering woman like Julia; he longs to tear away the veil which makes her a stranger but fears the intimacy this may bring. These feelings remain, for he never dares to reveal himself to Julia.

For her part, Julia is attracted to Mr. Horsefield for his physical appearance and, perhaps more important, because he seems to possess the qualities of someone who could give her the security she seeks. She makes no special effort to know him intimately, rather she approaches him as she would another Mr. Mackenzie. Both Horsefield and Julia play their roles well and in the interim lose each other. Neither voices his feelings; in this way no decisions or commitments are made. After their first sexual encounter, Julia simply lies in bed, showing no signs of bliss or sadness.

Outside of a family that wishes she would go away, Julia has no one to speak to except Mr. Horsefield. Yet when her mother dies and she is haunted by the ghost of death, she cannot communicate this to him. This results in an absurd scene when Horsefield is about to go to Julia's room, and she

awakens everyone by screaming. Horsefield is embarrassed to be caught in this situation and decides to separate from a woman too enigmatic for human comprehension. Unable to communicate with a man, Julia destroys her chance to share her life with someone who truly cared for her.

On her return to Paris, Julia seems determined to break her dependency and inertia. She begins to rely on herself by placing an advertisement in the newspaper offering her services as a lady companion. She even becomes indifferent to pain whether her own or of the people she encounters on the streets:

She saw a thin man, so thin that he was like a clothed skeleton, drooping in a doorway. And the horses, standing like statues of patient misery. She felt no pity at all.

It used to be as if someone had put out a hand and touched her heart when she saw things like that, but now she felt nothing. Now she felt indifferent and cold, like a stone. (p. 188)

Although she keeps the harshness, she succumbs once again to being an object to men and a parasite to society when she receives money from Horsefield. Her plans for independence through a job are forgotten, and her thoughts and acts turn to the acquisition of a new dress and the pleasure of an expensive dinner. The pattern has been followed too long; it would require all of Julia's efforts to break it. She is unwilling to take the risk.

Sasha Jansen in Good Morning, Midnight¹⁷ completes the

¹⁷ Jean Rhys, Good Morning, Midnight (New York: Vintage Books, 1974). Originally published in 1939. All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

last stage of Rhys' protagonists. There is very little present time action in this novel. Sasha spends most of her time recollecting moments which scarred her, and in her return to Paris all those ghosts come to life.

We see Sasha Jansen revisiting Paris in 1937, over forty, mistrustful of the men she tries to attract, expecting insults but unarmed against them, trying, as she says, to drink herself to death. Some restaurants may not be entered, because of the memories they inspire; the atmosphere of others is subtly hostile; the effort needed to buy a hat she cannot afford, to dye her hair, to follow up a promising encounter, is almost too much for her.¹⁸

She lives in a room she dislikes, but is not free to choose another one because she cannot afford it. She has been given a fixed amount of money by a friend who thought that Paris would cure her sadness.. She must now watch every franc she spends, so her world grows smaller every day.

I have been here five days. I have decided on a place to eat in at midday, a place to eat in at night, a place to have my drink in after dinner. I have arranged my little life. (p. 9)

Sasha tries to avoid places that remind her of a past life she can recapture only through memories. She is defenseless so far as the past is concerned, and a stare or a harsh word immediately brings tears. Overconcerned about her age, she tries constantly to hide herself behind clothes, hats or hair dyes. Francis Whyndham has summarized Sasha's tragedy not as

18 Francis Wyndham, "Introduction," Wide Sargasso Sea (New York: Popular Library, 1966), p. 9.

the downfall of one individual, but as the story of a victim in an apathetic world.

For her suffering transcends its cause.
This is not only a study of a lonely,
ageing woman, who has been deserted by
husbands and lovers and has taken to
drink; it is the tragedy of a distin-
guished mind and generous nature that
have gone unappreciated in a conven-
tional, unimaginative world.¹⁹

On her own, Sasha is unable to manage. Whenever she secures a job, she very soon loses it because of her inability to deal with an ambience of constant pressure and competition. She grows nervous under supervision and performs her assigned role poorly. As a salesgirl she cannot sell; as a guide she gets lost.

I try, but they always see through me,
the passages will never lead anywhere,
the doors will always be shut. I know....
(p. 31)

In circumstances similar to Marya's and Julia's, Sasha also escapes London's suffocating society by marrying a foreigner with little money but with promises of everlasting love and care. Enno and Sasha travel through Europe, sometimes having dinner at expensive places and other times fasting for days in a cheap hotel room. There is never any certainty; every day is an adventure that may bring a pleasant surprise or plunge them into great sadness. However, this economic insecurity is compensated for by the emotional protection Enno offers.

In time, money pressures affect their relationship and

19 *Introd., Art and Literature*, 1 (March 1964), 175-6.

Enno begins to give vent to his frustration by attacking and degrading Sasha.

'You don't know how to make love,' he said. That was about a month after we got to Paris. 'You're too passive, you're lazy, you bore me. I've had enough of this. Good-bye' He walked out and left me alone--that night and the next day, and the next night and the next day. With twenty francs on the table. And I'm sure now that I'm going to have a baby, though I haven't said a word about it. (p. 128)

She reacts passively, sitting for days in the hotel room wondering if she should pine away or get something to eat. She has the opportunity to put a stop to Enno's manipulation of her feelings when he returns, acting as if he had never offended or abandoned her. But her love for Enno and her fear of being alone take over, and she succumbs once more to his words and promises.

Now is the time to say 'Peel it yourself', now is the time to say 'Go to hell', now is the time to say 'I won't be treated like this'. But much too strong--the room, the street, the thing in myself, oh, much too strong....I peel the orange, put it on a plate and give it to him. (p. 129)

When the time for the baby's birth arrives, Sasha must rely on herself once more. There is no money, as usual, and so she must deliver her baby in a poorhouse with no medical supervision. Sasha's newborn grows pale and quiet and dies after five weeks. She reflects bitterly on the loss of her child, side by side with the preservation of her own body.

And five weeks afterwards there I am, with not one line, not one wrinkle, not

one crease.

And there he is, lying with a ticket tied round his wrist because he died in a hospital. And there I am looking down at him, without one line, without one wrinkle, without one crease.... (p. 61)

Having lost a husband and a child, the emptiness in Sasha's life is overwhelming. She goes nowhere, becoming an automaton who recognizes places only out of habit.

Eat. Drink. Walk. March. Back to the hotel. To the Hotel of Arrival, the Hotel of Departure, the Hotel of the Future, the Hotel of Martinique and the Universe.... Back to the hotel without a name in the street without a name. You press a button and the door opens. This is the Hotel Without-a-Name in the Street Without-a-Name, and the clients have no names, no faces. You go up the stairs. Always the same stairs, always the same room. (pp. 144-45)

During this second stay in Paris, Sasha meets a handsome young foreigner who approaches her not only as a confidant but as a sexual partner. She dismisses his advances by explaining that she has no money and that he should not waste his gigolo role on her. Although his name is René, Sasha always refers to him as the gigolo, perhaps to avoid any emotional involvement. She likes his compliments, for he makes her feel an attractive woman again.

After many meetings and glasses of wine, René expresses for the hundredth time his desire for her, and with a feeble dismissal she consents. By the time they reach her room, Sasha is not sure of her decision. Instead of relaxing and enjoying a moment of shared pleasure, she grows more insecure and suspicious and forgets René, seeing only the frightening image of a gigolo. She feels her body responding to René's

caresses and realizes how dead and numb she had become through the years.

I feel his hard knee between my knees.
My mouth hurts, my breasts hurt, because
it hurts, when you have been dead, to come
alive.... (p. 182)

Judging René as another man waiting to humiliate and hurt a woman, Sasha rejects him and wounds him by offering him money, which she feels is all he wants. She could never see herself as a desirable woman to René; she downgrades herself and humiliates him as she had herself been humiliated so many times before. By refusing to express her feelings, Sasha has passed by a moment that might have brought her the happiness she thought lost forever.

When she discovers she has misjudged René, Sasha's reaction is to laugh at her foolishness and allow the mysterious man living next door to enter her room. This is the same man she always feared and avoided. He is very much like her--alone, insecure, past his youth, with little money and begging for affection.

Some critics see this scene as an act of pity.²⁰ Unlike Julia, who turns indifferent to the pain of others, Sasha sacrifices herself for the needs of another human being who is more starved for love than she. However, if the ending is considered as part of the overall aura of defeatism in this novel, the scene becomes Sasha's final degradation. She gives herself to a man she fears and despises, but she also realizes that he is the only one for her because he truly wants her. She does not have to deal with role-playing anymore.

²⁰ Mellow, p. 462, and Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Introd., Contemporary Women Writers* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977), p. 17.

Jean Rhys has searched into Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre for all the details about the mysterious and imprisoned Mrs. Rochester. Information on her West Indian background becomes the focus of Rhys' investigation. Brontë mentions once Mrs. Rochester's maiden name--Bertha Antoinette Mason. She is the daughter of James Mason, a merchant, and his wife, a Creole. She was married in Spanish Town, Jamaica, in an arrangement made between Mr. Mason and Rochester's father. All the information concerning this secondary character is contained in approximately ten pages of Brontë's novel. Rhys has rescued this mysterious woman and made her the protagonist of her first novel set in the West Indies--Wide Sargasso Sea.²¹

Rhys has used once more the first person point of view, but this time she has moved closer to the main character in order to capture the sensations and misunderstandings of a reality which is often seen as fantasy. The use of interior monologue adds to the intimacy achieved in the character of Antoinette Cosway, the protagonist.

Wide Sargasso Sea provides the historical past absent from Rhys' early novels. Thus Anna Morgan, Marya Hughes, Julia Martin and Sasha Jansen are not only individuals who suffer because their particular situation, but become exploited beings who are destroyed by a society that cares only about the value of money. By using the West Indian background as a historical framework, the author creates a novel in which the setting and the existing political situation are directly responsible for the characters' behavior. It is not just the

21 Jean Rhys, Wide Sargasso Sea (New York: Popular Library, 1966). All subsequent references to this text will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

story of a rejected woman going mad, but of a family whose position in West Indian society leads a particular character to be rejected by all social groups and thus be forced to escape into madness.

The West Indian setting, far from being incidental, is central to the novel: it is not that it provides a mere background to the theme of rejected womanhood, but rather that the theme of rejected womanhood is utilized symbolically in order to make an artistic statement about West Indian society, and about an aspect of the West Indian experience.²²

A knowledge of class structure in the West Indies in the 1830's is necessary if one is to accept and understand Antoinette's identity dilemma and her eventual madness. She belongs to the Creole class which lost their place in this society when, with emancipation the reason for their stay in the islands vanished. Slavery had enriched them, and emancipation impoverished them. The Creoles were displaced by English merchants, who could now make their fortune under a different economic system. Antoinette is rejected by this group, to whom she is not an equal, and she is excluded by the blacks, for whom she is only a former slavemaster's daughter. This displacement is the cause of Antoinette's dilemma.

'It was a song about a white cockroach. That's me. That's what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've heard English women call us white niggers. So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born.' (p. 103)

²² Wally Look Lai, "The Road to Thornfield Hall," New Beacon Reviews: Collection One (London: New Beacon Books, 1969), p. 40.

The novel is divided into three parts: Antoinette's childhood and adolescence; her marriage to Rochester; and her confinement in England. As a young girl the protagonist is rejected by her mother, neighbors and other children. Whether with white grown-ups or black children, Antoinette is ridiculed and ostracized. When the only place she felt at home in is burned down, her displacement is total. From her aunt's house she enters convent school, which she leaves only when her stepfather makes a successful marriage arrangement for her with an Englishman. Although immediately accepted as a bride-to-be by a stranger, Antoinette later encounters rejection of her behavior, which is so different from the Englishman's. Instead of growing closer by understanding the ways of one another, after the honeymoon communication ceases as Rochester's resentment of the arrangement grows. No attempt is made to accept or understand her Creole ways. She is rejected as part of a social group he despises and as a woman, which turns into the final blow for Antoinette. She is once more removed from her environs, her only touch with reality, and is taken to England like a disturbed woman to be hidden and if possible forgotten. Seeking the warmth of her islands, she grows fond of fire and in time burns the walls which surround her and launches herself into a mirage reflecting the beauty of her home, Coulibri.

Elgin W. Mellow has correctly summarized the characteristics Antoinette shares with other Rhys' protagonists, which consequently make her an embodiment of all these women.

Here, then, spelled out clearer than in any of the previous novels, are the details of the life of the now familiar Rhys' heroine: a happy childhood in a tropical state of nature, growth into adolescence

without the presence of a father, a complete submission to physical love, the inevitable loss of that love, and the consequent misery.²³

For Antoinette also, beauty is a woman's most important feature. Beauty and youth lure men and preserve their love. However, in Wide Sargasso Sea, beauty is identified with nature and childhood, not necessarily with objects or masks.

A Creole narcissus, she sees the world in terms of its beauty, but the only beauty she understands derives from the experiences and fantasies of her own childhood; and above all from the exotic landscape. It is that which gives a sense of herself and of her own beauty; and with it belongs safety and happiness.²⁴

Nancy J. Casey has pointed out that the helplessness of these women stems from having been raised to be sexual objects. As such they are unable to confront "a world that demands intelligence, cunning, and emotional stamina."²⁵ The first part of Wide Sargasso Sea dramatizes Antoinette's upbringing, a childhood in which she is never given the tools to deal with the world she will become part of.

Antoinette's parents, because of their involvement with their own selves, never provided the security and affection their daughter greatly needed. Antoinette remembers her dead

23 Mellow, p. 472.

24 "A Fairy-Tale Neurotic," The Times Literary Supplement, November 17, 1966, p. 1039.

25 "Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea: Exterminating the White Cockroach," Revista/Review Interamericana, IV, no. 3 (Fall, 1974), 341.

father as a strong and protective man. She admires him and sees his absence as the cause of the family's downfall. Annette, Antoinette's mother, a beautiful woman from Martinique, is rejected by the Creoles in Jamaica. She makes her life in Coulibri, shutting out the jeers of a society which refuses to accept her ways and who see her as an intruder. Instead of looking for companionship, Annette confines herself to her estate. Her isolation, the later betrayal of her emotions, and the loss of everything familiar will eventually drive her to madness. The same pattern will be repeated in Antoinette's life.

During her childhood Antoinette tries to be close to her mother, seeking her affection, yet most of the time she is kept aloof.

Once I would have gone back quietly to watch her asleep on the blue sofa--once I made excuses to be near her when she brushed her hair, a soft black cloak to cover me, keep me safe. But not any longer. Not any more. (pp. 22-23)

When Annette becomes a widow, she begins to withdraw from people and to hold on to places and things where she can find peace and tranquility. With time, even these animals and objects are lost (her horse is killed, ending her lonely rides through the woods) and Coulibri resembles more and more unkept wilderness. Annette continues to withdraw and separate herself even further from her daughter.

But she pushed me away, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her. She wanted to sit with Pierre or walk where she pleased without being pestered, she wanted peace and quiet. (p. 20)

Her mother's life is rekindled when an Englishman begins courting her. Mr. Mason is impressed by Annette's beauty and by the long-term investments he could make with the property she still owns. But her bliss lasts only a short time. Coulibri is burned down, her son Pierre dies, and when she turns her anger and frustration on Mr. Mason, she is confined and ostracized from her family. Years later the same story would be repeated, for, like Mr. Mason, Rochester belongs to a society unable to understand and accept the people from these islands, and in his attempt to change this reality he destroys them.

Antoinette's isolation from family and friends throughout her childhood makes her turn to nature. When she meets Tia through Christophine, the black woman who always offered her warmth and affection, Antoinette experiences the happiness felt when one is able to share adventures with another child. Nature is no longer beauty to be admired but an experience to share and participate in. Tia and Antoinette are left on their own to discover the mysteries of Coulibri; they become friends, alike in feelings and interests. However, even in this relationship the values of society are reflected. Antoinette displays some new pennies that to her are shiny pebbles, but to Tia are money. They bet with the pennies and each one deceives the other to possess the money. Antoinette feels cheated and in a fashion imitative of white people says:

'Keep them then, you cheating nigger,'
I said, for I was tired, and the water
I had swallowed made me feel sick. 'I
can get more if I want to.' (p. 24)

Tia forgets their friendship and strikes back with the gossip she hears her grown-ups delight in:

That's not what she hear, she said. She hear all we poor like beggar. We ate salt fish--no money for fresh fish. That old house so leaky, you run with calabash to catch water when it rain. Plenty white people in Jamaica. Real white people, they got gold money. They didn't look at us. Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger. (pp. 24-25)

They turn their backs on each other. No attempt is ever made to rekindle their friendship--social prejudice has triumphed over pathos.

With no one else to turn to, Antoinette resumes her lonely walks through Coulibri, trying to find laughter and happiness in the trees and the sky. Not able to deal with people who reject and despise her, Antoinette deliberately shuns people and immerses herself in a make-believe world in which there is no need to communicate with or depend on other human beings.

So I too left it and stayed away till dark. I was never long at the bathing pool, I never met Tia. I took another road, past the old sugar works and the water wheel that had not turned for years. I went to parts of Coulibri that I had not seen, where there was no road, no path, no track. And if the razor grass cut my legs and arms I would think 'It's better than people.' Black ants or red ones, tall nests swarming with white ants, rain that soaked me to the skin--once I saw a snake. All better than people. Better. Better, better than people. (p. 28)

This plight is not necessarily linked to Antoinette's sex. Whether male or female she is an outcast from a social class. Yet her ability to leave this place and seek a new life elsewhere is impeded by her being female.

In her loneliness Antoinette gradually forgets Tia's hostility and sees her as her only friend, and it is to her that Antoinette turns when Coulibri is destroyed and Tia becomes the only familiar face in her desolation.

Then not so far off, I saw Tia and her mother and I ran to her, for she was all that was left of my life as it had been. We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river. As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. Not to leave Coulibri. Not to go. Not. (p. 46)

But between these two girls there is more than a road separating them--there is a history of class exploitation that cannot be erased by reaching out to the heart. Antoinette's dream is shattered when Tia hits her with a stone. Everything is arrested--the ugliness of a reality full of hatred and misunderstanding takes over.

When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass. (p. 46)

During her childhood she was pampered and loved by the older black servants. However, she encountered only hostility from black children her own age. This same situation exists in Granbois, her new residence when she marries. She is respected and loved by Christophine and Baptiste and by the very young, Hilda and the "nameless boy". With Amélie, same age as Antoinette, there is such animosity that physical violence results, ending in the customary derisive chant: "white cock-

roach". Amélie refuses to see Antoinette as her mistress; she is just a woman like herself, and separated only by money. By going to bed with Amélie, Rochester joins her in mocking Antoinette and degrading her as a woman. Nevertheless, Amélie changes her attitude towards Antoinette after this incident. Both women share feelings of rejection and oppression by a man who is an alien in these islands.

As she was going I could not resist saying, half longing, half triumphant, 'Well, Amélie, are you still sorry for me?' 'Yes,' she said, 'I'm sorry for you. But I find it in my heart to be sorry for her too.' (p. 142)

Although there might be a procession of men in a woman's life, she will always cling to the memory of one particular person with whom momentary happiness was reached. But for many different reasons, the person drifted and became a recollection. In Wide Sargasso Sea, Sandi Cosway, Antoinette's cousin, becomes such a person. He is alluded to several times, but he appears with Antoinette only twice. Sandi is the son of one of Mr. Cosway's bastards who was always received at Coulibri and regarded as a relative. He is presented as Antoinette's protector when on her way to convent school she is abused by two black children. Sandi scares them away and helps her with her books. She responds coldly and with aloofness.

'You dropped this,' he said, and smiled. I knew who he was, his name was Sandi, Alexander Cosway's son. Once I would have said 'my cousin Sandi' but Mr. Mason's lectures had made me shy about my coloured relatives. I muttered, 'Thank you.' (p. 51)

From Daniel Cosway's letters and Amélie's gossip it is clear that as adolescents Sandi and Antoinette spent time with each other, but concealing their friendship since Mr. Mason had forbidden any closeness between white and black Cosways. It is in Thornfield Hall that Antoinette relives their second encounter. Sandi asks her to go away with him. They would leave Jamaica and break with the social ties that defined their roles. Antoinette has not developed a strong independent mind that would force her to make a decision which would mean a completely new life away from everything familiar. A woman is not prepared to break with the patterns imposed on her by society. On the other hand, Sandi is free, as a man, to leave and seek a life of adventure wherever he chooses. Sandi leaves and Antoinette becomes the prey of European fortune hunters like Rochester.

...I was wearing a dress of that colour when Sandi came to see me for the last time. 'Will you come with me?' he said. 'No,' I said, 'I can not.' 'So this is good-bye?' Yes, this is good-bye. 'But I can't leave you like this,' he said, 'you are unhappy.' 'You are wasting time,' I said, 'and we have so little.' (p. 185)

Elgin W. Mellown points out the different outlooks on life that Rhys' characters have and which is especially evident in the case of Rochester and Antoinette.

The man considers himself to be a free agent in the present moment, not fearing the future and not completely at the mercy of the past. But the woman knows instinctively that she must act out a preordained role and that, no matter what present events may indicate, her end is inevitable.²⁶

The point of view in the second part of the novel shifts from Rochester to Antoinette, although it is he who begins and ends this stage in her life. Rochester is the active agent--he marries her, and he decides to leave Granbois and isolate his wife.

Once Rochester and Antoinette are married and the doors to communication opened, the differences between these two people become evident. Neither can understand each other's background. England for Antoinette is a dream, and the West Indies to Rochester is unreal.

'Is it true,' she said, 'that England is like a dream? Because one of my friends who married an Englishman wrote and told me so. She said this place London is like a cold dark dream sometimes. I want to wake up.'

'Well,' I answered annoyed, 'that is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me, quite unreal and like a dream.'

'But how can rivers and mountains and the sea be unreal?'

'And how can millions of people, their houses and their streets be unreal?' (pp. 80-81)

Despite their differences, Antoinette believes that Rochester will give her the love she has yearned for all her life. She is willing to sublimate her inclinations and submit to his desires to preserve his love for her. If Antoinette had been able to renounce her will and permit Rochester to mold her, he would have probably accepted her and offer her protection and care.

If she too says it, or weeps, I'll take her in my arms, my lunatic. She's mad but mine, mine. What will I care for gods or devils or for Fate itself. If she smiles or weeps or both. For me. Antoinette--I can be gentle too. Hide

your face. Hide yourself but in my arms.
 You'll soon see how gentle. My lunatic.
 My mad girl. (pp. 166-67)

But, unconsciously, Antoinette refuses to submit to this man by continuing to be herself--the lover of nature, the emotional being capable of loving anyone, black or white, who will reciprocate her feelings. She will not relinquish the free spirit that has allowed her to preserve her sanity amidst loss of family, social rejection and fear of annihilation.

Death to Antoinette meant not being happy, and her happiness now depended on Rochester's love. For him, dying was making love to her. Everytime he slept with her, a part of him died, for he only desired her--there was no love.

As for the happiness I gave her, that was worse than nothing. I did not love her. I was thirsty for her, but that is not love. I felt very little tenderness for her, she was a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think or feel as I did. (p. 93)

She interprets this passion as a sign of true affection, and for this reason she cannot understand why he drifts from her while she surrenders more of herself.

Unable to understand Rochester's rejection, Antoinette appeals to Christophine. However, she rejects her advice to leave Rochester. Years before she had lost Sandi because she could not decide to sever ties with this society. Now she cannot face the risks involved in abandoning a husband who legally owns her and can force her to return at any time. But even more, Antoinette has grown emotionally dependent on Rochester and can never leave him. She feels that if she can make love to him again, he will grow closer to her. But neither obeah nor confrontation makes Rochester accept An-

toinette on her own terms. He will not allow her to leave, rather he will force her to change and become the woman he wants at his side. If this fails, he will isolate her from her environs and from himself, knowing that these are Antoinette's only sources of love.

I tell you she loves no one, anyone. I could not touch her. Excepting as the hurricane will touch that tree--and break it. You say I did: No. That was love's fierce play. Now I'll do it....
Vain, silly creature. Made for loving?
Yes, but she'll have no lover, for I don't want her and she'll see no other. (p. 166)

Rochester is not satisfied with imposing his moral views and lifestyle on Antoinette, but attempts to usurp her personality by changing her name and calling her Bertha--a cold, harsh contrast to the warmth and exotism found in Antoinette.

Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name. I know, that's obeah too.
(p. 148)

Gradually Rochester dispossesses Antoinette of everything. Her land, her loving black people, and her memories of Annette and Coulibri are overcrowded by Rochester's insistence that she behave and live in the proper English manner. By the time they leave Granbois, Antoinette has withdrawn from reality and presents a doll-like figure to Rochester's wishes of submission.

She had followed me and she answered. I scarcely recognized her voice. No warmth, no sweetness. The doll had a doll's voice, a breathless but curiously indifferent voice. (pp. 171-2)

Isolated from everything familiar, Antoinette is surrounded by the coldness and indifference of England and its people. To balance this frigidity that threatens to numb her

senses, she must find warmth not in people or nature, but in the element of fire. Her final act of refusal to be destroyed is to surround herself with fire and recall her childhood with images of Tia and Coulibri.

Then I turned round and saw the sky.
It was red and all my life was in it.
I saw the grandfather clock and Aunt
Cora's patchwork, all colours. I saw
the orchids and the stephanotis and
the jasmine and the tree of life in
flames. I saw the chandelier and the
red carpet downstairs and the bamboos
and the tree ferns, the gold ferns and
the silver, and the soft green velvet
of the moss on the garden wall. I saw
my doll's house and the books and the
picture of the Miller's Daughter. I
heard the parrot call as he did when
he saw a stranger. Qui est là? Qui
est là? (p. 189-90)

She must escape her imprisonment and try once more to recapture her essence by returning to the setting where she was Antoinette Cosway. She had been a wild orchid, beautiful and eager to please; Rochester had trampled on it and destroyed her by removing her from her place in history.

Then I passed an orchid with long sprays
of golden-brown flowers. One of them
touched my cheek and I remembered picking
some for her one day. 'They are like you,'
I told her. Now I stopped, broke a spray
off and trampled it into the mud. (pp. 99-100)

Whether writing in the thirties or sixties, Jean Rhys presents her characters as part of a society with fixed rules. It may be a European society or the colonial model in the West Indies, but a woman is always bound to a fixed behavior. The moment that the imposed roles are challenged, these women are

ostracized and left alone to wander or to escape in madness. Rhys' protagonists live their agony, and although at times they may not understand their oppression, they all know that men hold the power to make them suffer or to bring them happiness. The society presented in these novels does not allow a woman to function as a productive member--her jobs are limited to her role as a woman: she can teach, serve, entertain or pose. None of these positions will bring financial security; these menial jobs will keep women at the bottom of the economic scale. In the West Indies they are further confined to the unpaid household labor. Every attempt to rebel against their role is met by hostility and violence from a society which refuses to hear their voices. What then is left?

Women can always be wives and mothers. However, when they marry, Rhys' women choose bohemian foreigners who hover on the outskirts of society and, although they offer emotional safety, lead lives which bring insecurity, penury and eventual abandonment. So women keep searching for a man who will bring them protection and security. To accomplish this, they must always appear young and beautiful. There is no time to have a child or to establish a lasting relationship with other women or to hold on to family ties. Money is always on their mind; they must provide for their food and shelter, and when money runs out they panic and run to friends, family or ex-lovers to acquire the necessary amount until the next crisis.²⁷

There is no communication between Rhys' men and women characters; their feelings are guessed at, nothing verbal is expressed. Men see these women as mysterious, dangerous and as a threat. Women see men as deceivers whose sole interest lies in making love or being seen with a pretty face. Because

of this, signals are misinterpreted, and relationships with the potential to develop into lasting friendship are destroyed by the inability of women to trust, for a single moment, a man.

Hence their lives are spent in preserving what is left of youth and beauty, and in constantly searching for someone who will take care of them. Antoinette Cosway is the only Rhys protagonist who possesses a wealth that would in other circumstances allow her to forge her own future. But her money is never her own. Men are the only ones capable of handling her finances; first her father, then her stepfather, and finally Rochester, who marries her for her wealth. Not even money, then, releases a woman from the roles imposed by a male-oriented society. Yet Antoinette in Wide Sargasso Sea has the courage to stand on her own and to rebel against a society which forces women into roles that strip them of their personality and bars them from developing into productive human beings. Her rebellion ends in madness; however, it was a cry against the submission and passivity the previous Rhys women had followed.

West Indies: Mais, Naipaul, Rhys

Radical economic changes that have affected the social structure of West Indian societies are relatively recent compared to the movements in Cuba and Puerto Rico. This closeness to traditional society is perhaps partly responsible for the portrayal of women as stereotypes in West Indian literature. The continuance of ethnic groups in the West Indies in the practice of endogamy has also been a factor in the reluctance of these societies to integrate women into the labor force. Men writers in the West Indies may deal with different social classes or ethnic groups, but female roles continue to be fixed and unchallenged.

Roger Mais has become the spokesman of the poor masses in Jamaica, presenting everyday exploitation faced by these forgotten people. The position reserved for women in these slums conforms to the traditional role of follower and shadow of man. Mais' women are strong since they must survive this hostile environment, but their resolution and strength weaken when a man approaches them. Men are always their life-center, and they kill or die for them. Women might not be legal wives, but they are still submissive and passive sex objects. When they nag they are bitches and are at fault for driving their men away. Regarding sex, Mais' women are violent and sado-masochists mixing pain and pleasure as the ultimate climax. The place reserved for women in this social group is as limited as in other classes.

Although there has always been violence in the sexual attacks presented in other works, the pairing of the elements of sex with violence found in Mais' novels has not been seen before. Even when two people love each other and are willing to share this act of love, violence becomes an erotic addendum from which both partners draw pleasure. Again, as in Soto's

stories, women are portrayed as beings with a sexual need which must be satisfied.

Women as mother figures seem to be the model that V. S. Naipaul admires and writes about with compassion and understanding. His portrayal of women as companions and lovers, whether European or East Indian, are negatively drawn. Mothers are affectionate and tolerant, even if they disagree or do not understand the situations their sons are involved in. As companions, East Indian wives are servile, suppliant and, at times, bitches. They follow the wife stereotype which has previously been applied to middle-class women. They cling to their husbands and destroy their chances for progress and to carry out their idealistic projects. Their dependence, their reluctance to alter traditional ways, and their attachment to familial ties bring men's life to a standstill.

Even when married, European women conform to the mistress stereotype. The element constantly emphasized by Naipaul is the promiscuity of these women. They are never satisfied; they demand continual sexual performance from their men. They are ready to toss them aside and take on a new lover the moment men do not meet their standards. Mais intertwines characteristics of the wife and mistress stereotype, but Naipaul rigorously maintains an unbreachable separation. Because East Indian women continue to be attached to their family and customs after their marriage, the center of their lives is not men. But in the case of European women, their lives are shaped by the men they are living with at that moment. These words spoken by Meredith, a character in Guerrillas, summarize a man's idea about how women can never be independent or liberated, but must always live through their men:

A woman can't visualize too well because she has too many possibilities. She can be anything. Anything can happen to her. But it's out of her hands. It all depends on this man who's going to find her. That's a terrible thing, if you think about it. I often think that if I were a woman I would be very frightened. (pp. 166-67)

Aware of the stereotypes writers have always fitted women into, Jean Rhys rescues her characters from these roles, and gradually begins to break away from the traditional pattern. The bewildered, submissive Marya becomes the strong Julia who has learned to manipulate men as she has been before. Sasha embodies the woman who has become class-conscious after being exploited as sex object and as unskilled worker. However, these women are immediately suppressed when they attempt to voice their protest, and are lost in the crowd of the poverty-ridden. The character of Antoinette Cosway is related to most of Rosario Ferré's women. Aware of their role as wives in their social group, whether in English or Spanish-speaking societies, these women gradually reject the world they are caged in and escape their reality either through fantasy or madness. Dora Alonso's Lola is able to liberate her being from age and social rejection by creating a personal, imaginary world. The world of men, whether Rochester's or Ferré's money-minded characters, will term these women mad and attempt to ostracize them. However, freedom and fulfillment in life have already been achieved in the world of fantasy created by these women.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUDING REMARKS

We...accept this award in the name of all the women whose voices have gone and still go unheard in a patriarchal world, and in the name of those who, like us, have been tolerated as token women in this culture, often at great cost and in great pain....We dedicate this occasion to the struggle for self-determination of all women, of every color, identification or derived class: the poet, the housewife, the lesbian, the mathematician, the mother, the dishwasher, the pregnant teen-ager, the teacher, the grandmother, the prostitute, the philosopher, the waitress, the women who will understand what we are doing here and those who will not understand yet; the silent women whose voices have been denied us, the articulate women who have given us strength to do our work.

Audre Lord, Adrienne Rich, Alice Walker

The roles assigned to women in Caribbean prose fiction have been shaped by the history of the islands in this region and by the social divisions created within each society. Although literature is not necessarily an accurate reflection of reality, writers, nevertheless, live their particular time in history and, therefore, must reflect, in one way or another, the problems that beset their society. Thus, through their works, these writers attempt to present reality as they perceive it and to distort it according to their own beliefs.

Events in the history of the three regions studied have influenced the position held by women in this society and the way writers portray this image in their writings. Upholding the traditional values of a male-oriented society, many contemporary writers persist in seeing the participation of women in society as secondary. At other times, women come to the fore as harmful beings who destroy the ambitions of male protagonists, or who contribute to the destruction of a society's identity. Still others attempt to liberate women from these shackles by creating female characters who are participants in a growing and changing world.

Since the islands in this region were colonized by European countries, their cultural patterns (including the position women held in their own society) were imposed upon and generally assimilated by the Caribbean. These stereotypes were formed by considering women firstly and solely as emotional sexual beings whose importance relied on their relationship to men. Thus six stereotypes emerge: first, the young, pretty desirable girl/woman; second, the submissive wife whose sole function is to take care of house, man and children; third, the dominating, undesirable and repulsive mate or bitch; fourth, the tender and loving mother; fifth, the independent, passionate

mistress-seductress; sixth, the prudish, bitter old maid, ridiculed as ugly and afraid of sex.

The economic impact of the United States on Puerto Rican society has affected the family structure and has created a growing middle class whose values clash with the reality of the poverty-stricken in a society that has undergone a radical economic change. The domineering mate is used by René Marqués for his portrayal of middle-class women, and the sex object and submissive wife patterns for the poor. Pedro Juan Soto's concern is with poor women who have become part of the labor force in the United States or are affected by a feeling of alienation in a strange city. He works with the mistress-seductress and martyr-mother roles though he adds dimensions to both by giving importance to a woman's sexual needs. Rosario Ferré commences with the submissive wife and the mistress stereotypes and merges both to expose the hypocrisy and falseness involved in these roles.

The dichotomy preserved during the twentieth century between the countryside and the city in Cuba shaped the position of women in this society up to 1959. With the Revolution, the gigantic task of destroying this division and changing the image of women began and remains a priority. Alejo Carpentier in Los pasos perdidos presents the dominating mate in Ruth, the mistress in Mouche, and the submissive wife in Rosario. Urban, middle-class women are portrayed as independent beings who encounter no barriers in their material and emotional advancement. Country women are romanticized, and although portrayed as hard workers, their lack of education is seen as a merit. Women care only about their small world in which they are the center; they remain unaware of the historical process surrounding them. Although Sofía's liason with Victor Hugues

is romanticized in El siglo de las luces, she does not follow any pattern. Sex is presented as a natural stage in her growth and her awareness and participation in the events in her country as normal behavior. Severo Sarduy works with the mistress stereotype and, like Soto, adds dimensions to it. Women are portrayed as part of the labor force or of the underground. There is no family structure to preserve; women are basically on their own. He adds political awareness to their characterization channelling their energetic passion to other activities, for example, placing bombs. The mother image is recurrent in Dora Alonso's fiction; she also works with the old maid stereotype. Her women are part of the strict family pattern in the countryside. When poor women move to the city they remain isolated and separated from any progressive movements.

Perhaps because the British did not attempt to merge with the black population or the indentured servants, or to impose their cultural patterns on everyone, ethnic differences are continuously stressed in West Indian literature. Roger Mais' world consists strictly of the poor urban black. Within this group, differences are established: the religious, the lazy, the vagabonds, the hard workers, the prostitutes. He presents his female characters in a mixture of the submissive wife and the mistress stereotypes. Women are presented as docile with their men, yet apparently keeping their independence. The energetic passion of the mistress is expressed in physical and sexual violence. V. S. Naipaul focuses on the East Indian community. Blacks and Europeans seldom burst into this world (which is consciously closed to other ethnic groups), and when they do, they are seen as intruders. Naipaul's submissive wife and mother is always East Indian, while the seductress role is reserved for the European. Sex is seen as ugly

and disgusting since body contact does not arouse passion but repulsion. In Jean Rhys' world there is an awareness of other ethnic groups since the Creole's privileged position in the islands rested on the enslavement of blacks. There might be affinity between blacks and whites, but intimacy is seldom reached. Rhys explores the sex object role as a woman's only means to acquire a secured place in society. The submissive wife is merged with the mistress role for a woman is passionate and independent, but becomes passive when men display aggressiveness and power.

Although the history of these Caribbean islands has influenced West Indian, Cuban and Puerto Rican writers, it seems that women writers perceive their reality somewhat differently. There are, of course, similarities in both female and male Caribbean writers' portrayal of women as part of a social class. As Patricia Meyer Spacks has pointed out, "Women's needs...are identical with men's. Perhaps the balance may be different, but the substance is the same: for work and love, for independence and dependency, solitude and relationship, to enjoy community and value one's specialness."¹ However, men portray women as emotional, dependent, craving for stable relationships at the expense of individuality, and preferring the traditional rather than the adventurous. Women, on the other hand, participants in the same colonial society, portray women with similar characteristics, but who also become aware of the disadvantages and injustices in the role they have been forced to play, and who begin to consider

1 Patricia Meyer Spacks, The Female Imagination (New York: Avon Books, 1972), p. 411.

rebellion as a possible alternative. Even when importance is placed on the denunciation of the conditions of the poor or the greediness of the middle class, women characters share the same importance or their problems are given priority. These female characters tend to recognize reality and feel its closeness, yet are able to put these problems aside and be more concerned about sentiments of loneliness, abandonment, and an inability to express love or feel loved in return.

Rosario Ferré portrays women as exploited human beings whether wives, daughters or servants. All rebel against their condition and in so doing they denounce the system which places them in this position. It is a losing battle where they are either crushed or forced into madness or fantasy. Dora Alonso denounces the conditions of the poor and blame is placed on ignorance and on the political structure that maintains them in such a position. Protagonists of her later short stories are portrayed as lonely women, full of love for children, who never find reciprocation in passionate love. Whether in a European city or in the West Indies, the center of Jean Rhys' fiction is always her female protagonist who is a victim of a society that is run by men and for men, and where a woman is powerless to determine her course in life.

Even though these differences exist in the way women are characterized, if this portrayal is focused on social classes, little difference will be found in prose fiction written by men or women writers whether in the English or Spanish-speaking islands.

The criollo or Creole is presented by René Marqués and Alejo Carpentier as a progressive force in a society corrupted

by the greed of colonial power. Even in Jean Rhys' stories, where the Creole opposed emancipation, this social class is presented as humane and as a guardian of the moral values which the British, representatives of the mercantile class, seem to lack. There is a nostalgia surrounding this social class and a tendency to romanticize its role in history.

The bourgeoisie or colonial middle class is presented by all Caribbean writers in negative terms. They are a reactionary group whose only interest is the accumulation of material wealth. Women's independence and security are presented by some writers as having been gained at the expense of sacrificing those qualities in men. Women as breadwinners are looked down on, and the picture of female castrator is drawn. Ferré portrays her bourgeois women, since most are descendants of the criollo class, as innocent bystanders to the growing materialistic turn taken by society. Although their husbands or fathers may be participants and initiators of this movement, women remain at the sidelines, powerless to participate or to oppose it. Marqués, on the other hand, makes men the passive partners instead of women.

Whether from Puerto Rico, Cuba or the West Indies, these writers portray working women in compassionate terms. Even when they are sex objects (Mais' women), they are still pitied because of their poverty, ignorance and inability to break away from this pattern. Abuse and oppression are denounced, but despair is dissolved in habit and the outlets allowed by the system: religion, sex relations, government welfare. Ferré's Armantina is one of the few poor women who rebel and act to end this oppression. However, it is an individual act; the society which upholds these patterns is left untouched. Sarduy's ella is a woman rebelling not only

against social oppression, but more importantly political oppression. By becoming part of the urban guerrillas, she threatens the apparently fixed structure of a reactionary and oppressive society.

As these Caribbean societies continue to evolve politically, the position of women must change accordingly. Puerto Rico and Cuba in this century have undergone radical changes in their socio-political and economic structure. The accepted roles of women have been challenged in view of the exigencies of an economic system in need of workers. Consequently, the family structure has been affected and male-female relations altered. The impact of the incorporation of women into the labor force in Puerto Rico has been felt in literature where, as René Marqués bleakly points out, women have become the center of the family and thus of literary expression.² Resentment and a reluctance to accept this change is partly responsible for the image of women in Puerto Rican literature.

In the West Indies, ethnic divisions have kept women from becoming a determining factor in its economy. Women are still expected to follow traditional roles in their ethnic culture, even if poverty is a burden overwhelming men. With the exception of Sylvia Wynter from Jamaica, and the white Creoles, Jean Rhys and Phyllis Shand Allfrey, women are absent from the narrative genre. Male writers continue to limit their characterization of women by relying on stereotypes and/or focusing their stories on male characters.

2 "El puertorriqueño dócil," Ensayos (1953-1966) (Río Piedras: Editorial Antillana, 1966), p. 171.

Cuba has been the only country in the Caribbean to have undergone a revolution at all levels. Even male-female relations, always considered as a private area, have become the concern of the state in its drive for economic development. Nevertheless, literature, so far, has not reflected these changes. Male writers continue to portray women in stereotypes, incorporating them, perhaps, to some revolutionary task, but limiting their role to followers and service workers. Severo Sarduy, who wrote Gestos at the beginning of the Revolution, is one of the few writers who treat women as capable human beings struggling side by side with men, being both leader and follower, depending on the needs of the Revolution. The women writers who have emerged during these years have for the most part concerned themselves with thesis writing rather than prose fiction. Perhaps Cuban society is changing too rapidly to allow a literary production to capture these changes and portray women in the different roles they are presently creating.

Whether in a colonial society or a European setting, women have been depicted in literature as appendants of men--they are the mothers, mistresses, wives or daughters of heroes. Even Sophocles' Antigone and García Lorca's Mariana Pineda define their existence and become tragic figures in relation to the men in their lives. These characters are heroic not only because of their acts but for being women who dared to challenge the laws of society. Even recognized writers like Virginia Woolf portray women in the accepted roles of mother (Mrs. Ramsay in To the Lighthouse) and wife (Mrs. Dalloway).

Similar patterns are found in Latin American literature. The ideal woman is María in Jorge Isaac's Romantic novel.

The one who breaks this image is Rómulo Gallegos' *Doña Bárbara* (1929). Between these two poles women are presented as suffering beings unable to change their roles (la mujer in Juan Carlos Onetti's El astillero) to women who sell themselves for money and pleasure (Onetti's Juntacadáveres). It is perhaps in Gabriel García Márquez' Cien años de soledad where women are portrayed in a multiplicity of roles: Ursula, the realist and eternal struggler; Fernanda, the bourgeois image of womanhood; Remedios la Bella, the spiritual non-earthly one; Pilar Ternera, the embodiment of sensualism and eroticism. But even this variety of characters conveys a man's idea of what a woman's role in society should be. These women would never undertake a "man's role" unless they are forced by circumstances. Women are still portrayed as practical, destroying men's illusions and dreams. Jorge Amado is one of the few Latin American writers who has created female protagonists (Gabriela, Doña Flor, Tereza Batista) who engage in similar activities as men and are heroic not for being outstanding women, but for rejecting the fixed roles imposed on them by a colonial society.

It may take a long time for all members of a society to question and eventually disregard beliefs that have persisted for so long, as is evinced by the new society in Revolutionary Cuba. Nevertheless, writers, as the most aware members of a society, will acknowledge the importance of this change, will discard the stereotypes so often found in literature, and will then portray human beings, men and women alike, engaged in a struggle for life.

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