

THE CONTEMPORARY SPANISH AMERICAN NOVELISTS' THEORY
OF THE NOVEL

By

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FOREWORD

This dissertation represents an attempt to give substance and unity to the disparate theoretical ideas on the novel expressed in the writings of contemporary Spanish American novelists. These concepts are contained in books, essays, interviews, magazine articles, and, in several cases, in the author's fictional works. We will structure these theoretical positions to form meaningful similar or divergent ideas.

The term "contemporary novel" is not used in this study to denote any single specific esthetic or ideological concept of the novel, but rather to embrace the numerous forms of the novel of the last three decades, beginning with Agustín Yáñez's Al filo del agua (1947), generally recognized as the beginning of a new direction in the Spanish American novel. The authors dealt with in our study are all alive and still writing, with the exceptions of José María Arguedas and Miguel Angel Asturias, the latter of whom died during the period of the preparation of this dissertation, in June 1974.

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This dissertation provides a cohesive overview of the theory of the contemporary novel as expressed by today's novelists of Spanish America. By "contemporary," we do not intend to indicate any rigid esthetic definition, but simply to restrict our study to the novels which have appeared since 1947, the publication date of Agustín Yáñez's Al filo del agua. This work is generally considered to signal a new direction in the Spanish American novel, and so it provides us with a convenient starting date.

The sources for our study are multiple. Much of the material is drawn from interviews with the various novelists, published in periodicals and in book form. Some of the novelists have written theoretical studies on the novel. In certain cases, novelists have included theoretical material within the texts of their novels. We have arranged the material by themes, in order to present a logical development of such highly diversified material.

In the introductory chapter, we look at the decline of the realistic, bourgeois novel. The difficulty of the contemporary writer's role in a developing society is examined, particularly the problem of authors living outside their country. The related problem of universality versus nationalism in the novel is examined. Then we define in general terms both the novel as a genre and the contemporary novel of Spanish America.

The second chapter deals with language. The "linguistic insurrection" is at the core of the contemporary novel of Spanish America. The need for a new language as expressed by the novelists is examined first, followed by a brief study of forerunners of the linguistic insurrection. The characteristics of the new language are studied, along with the opposing tendencies toward the baroque and a simple, straightforward style. The chapter ends with a section on experimentation with language.

Chapter III deals with form in the contemporary novel. Such concepts as the total novel, the open novel and the epic novel are seen as goals, along with the many techniques employed by the novelists to attain those goals. The tendency toward the blurring of genres, ambiguity and a study of novelistic styles are also included.

In Chapter IV, the nature of reality is defined by the novelists as going beyond the everyday, tangible reality to a comprehensive, "marvelous" view of reality, leading to magic realism. The social and psychological aspects of the novel are examined as manifestations of this subjective reality. The novelist's role as a witness to his society and his commitment to social and political points of view are studied. The chapter also looks at the urban novel and its accompanying theme of man's

alienation, the tendency toward a difficult and complex novel, and the novel as a vehicle for metaphysical investigation.

The fifth chapter investigates time and myth in the novel. Although these are very important elements in the contemporary novel, they consume surprisingly little space in the novelists' theoretical writings.

Chapter VI deals with humor and sex—two topics which several novelists feel should play greater roles in today's novels than they presently do. Both are gaining ground today, but still seem to be taboo with many novelists.

Our final chapter points toward possible future directions the Spanish American novel may take—directions hinted at by the novelists themselves. We come to no broad conclusions, since the novelistic theory we deal with is highly diversified in content, subject and major thrust. It is open-ended like the concept of the open novel itself, and is sure to continue evolving as new novels appear and as the novelists rethink their positions.

CHAPTER I

ASPECTS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRADITIONAL AND THE CONTEMPORARY NOVEL

The Decline of the Realistic, Bourgeois Novel and the Epic Narrative

It has been widely stated that the novel is in a state of crisis, or alternately, that the novel is dead as an art form. This is allegedly true for Spanish America as well as the rest of the Western world. The Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes, in developing his ideas on the novel, summarizes one such thesis—that of Alberto Moravia. The Italian critic contends that the novel's themes, characters, techniques and situations, of bourgeois origins, have been superseded in terms of their mass appeal, by television, the movies, the press, psychoanalysis and sociology. The two great types of novels—those dealing with customs and those dealing with human psychology—have already been exhausted, the former by Flaubert, and the latter by Proust and Joyce. The bourgeoisie, whose dominant life-style nurtured the novel, is in decline according to this theory, and thus, the novel as well. The novelist can only be a witness to this process of decadence leading to noia, tedium, boredom and indifference.¹

Fuentes rejects Moravia's thesis, first, because the Mexican novelist believes such early prototypical narratives as those of Boccaccio, the Thousand and One Nights or the medieval novels of chivalry disprove the theory of the novel's bourgeois beginnings (although Fuentes concedes that

the novel's major development has coincided with the rise and triumph of the middle class and its dialectic of individual enterprise). In countering Moravia's arguments, Fuentes insists that what is dead is not the novel, but the bourgeois form of the novel, i.e., a descriptive, psychological, critical form of observing personal and social relations in the Flaubertian style. But Fuentes insists that the death of this realism in no way means that the raw material of literary reality has died with it. In fact, he sees new trends in literature as opening a wider, a more all-inclusive window on reality, redefining the nature of reality (as we shall see in Chapter IV). Realism as Flaubert, Pérez Galdós or Manuel Gálvez knew it may be dead or exhausted, but the novel remains a viable genre.²

Let us look briefly at the "traditional" Spanish American novel,³ in order to better understand the background out of which today's contemporary novel has arisen. The traditional novel of Spanish America followed very closely the prevailing European literary styles, but generally with one salient difference: geography and nature tended to be not so much the background for this literature as the foreground—the theme and even the protagonist. Every student of the novel knows that the traditional novel of these countries tended to be an epic depiction of the struggle between man and nature, a struggle immortalized in Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's classic depiction of the urban forces of civilization versus the rural forces of ignorance and barbarism, Civilización y barbarie (Facundo). In these novels, man and nature were generally prototypes, symbolic representations of an idea or a point of view, and not well-developed, "rounded" characters whose life experience

was revealed as the novel progressed. Thus, in Rómulo Gallegos' classic novel of antithesis, Doña Bárbara, Santos Luzardo is the symbolic embodiment of the city, its civilization, its education and the enlightenment the landholders could create in Venezuela if they would dedicate themselves to the principles and ideals represented by Santos Luzardo. Doña Bárbara, Luzardo's antithesis, is the embodiment of the primitive, rural Venezuela—passionate, vindictive, uneducated, strong-willed, unprincipled, a symbol of the ignorance and feudalism which, together with the forces of right and reason, constitute an antagonistic and syncretic culture.

The first hundred years of the novel constitute a Spanish American geographical epic, involving the process of self-discovery and cultural identification. The novel, following European literary modes, incorporated Hispanic costumbrismo, regionalism, realism and naturalism in its classic, traditional works: José Eustasio Rivera's La Vorágine (1924), Ricardo Güiraldes' Don Segundo Sombra (1926), Rómulo Gallegos' Doña Bárbara (1929), Jorge Icaza's Huasipungo (1934), Ciro Alegría's El mundo es ancho y ajeno (1941). While social and psychological problems also appear in these novels, character portrayal remains a secondary concern and fundamentally symbolic in nature.⁴ Thus, the traditional novel has given us many memorable types, but few multidimensional characters.

In this regard, as Carlos Fuentes notes, the traditional Spanish American novel was more concerned with the relation between the physical environment and man than with man himself.⁵ Amazed at and intimidated by the splendor and majesty of the continent's immense jungles, rivers, plains and mountains, the novelist tended to become a chronicler,

transfixed like the first cronistas by the natural wonders around him, and too preoccupied by pressing social and economic issues to portray the human elements of this New World in any other than a symbolic formulation tied to a geographic or socio-political thesis. While considerable attention was given to the depiction of regional or national customs, the portrayal of the psychological aspects of characters remained relatively superficial. Fuentes states that Spanish America achieved political independence without achieving any true human identity.⁶ This is certainly true in the novel. The individual simply did not offer the same attraction as collective man within his geographic context.

This schematic overview of the traditional Spanish American novel will serve to place the contemporary novel in Spanish America in a contrastive perspective.

The Transformation of Latin American Society

The breakdown of the novel's old realistic approach is directly related to the breakdown of the old reality. Carlos Fuentes attributes the major restructuring of twentieth-century Latin American society to one basic cause (while admitting others): United States capitalism. Large investments in both industry (urban) and agriculture (rural) brought about a precipitous breakdown of the traditional Latin American social and economic patterns—mechanization, modern agricultural methods, agrarian reform, a massive flight to the cities and subsequent explosive growth in the urban areas. Latin America has taken one giant leap from the simplicity and order of a neo-feudalistic society to the nerve-jangling

complexity and chaos of urban twentieth-century life. The novel, in its constant endeavor to depict man, has understandably undergone drastic changes. Sarmiento's simplistic antithesis "civilization versus barbarism" has scant applicability to contemporary society. Today's social order is in a constant state of flux, one in which the choices and directions are not clear. Latin American man, like his contemporaries around the world, must grope to find his way out of his quandary. To portray this new and complex society, the novelist finds old literary forms insufficient. As Roa Bastos states, the novelist finds it necessary to seek his expression through new technical, esthetic, linguistic and even ideological modes in order to achieve a more universal view of Latin America.⁷ As the Mexican poet Octavio Paz declares, the essence of the Latin American experience today is that at last, Latin American man is the contemporary of all men.⁸ This statement coincides precisely with Fuentes' idea that Europe is no longer the only center of occidental culture. Formerly, to be read and applauded in Paris was the dream of every Latin American writer. But today, with the emergence of the so-called Third World and the political and military power of the United States and Russia, Europe has lost its stranglehold as the center of "civilization," and that center has been spread out diffusely to many points, no longer easy to pinpoint (just as the concept of "civilization" is no longer as easy to define as it was for Sarmiento). Latin America, formerly relegated to the periphery of world affairs and world culture, suddenly finds that it has as much right to be a "center" of civilization as any other cultural center.⁹ The old hierarchy is gone. The Latin American novelist is no longer automatically labeled inferior if he does

not follow the latest literary trends of Paris or Madrid. Thus, a new freedom of experimentation and originality is open to the Spanish American author. The resultant expression is the "new novel" or "contemporary novel" of the last three decades. Fuentes goes on to state that one of the principle tenets of the new novel is the destruction of the old black-and-white polarities and false polemics: realism versus fantasy; "committed" art versus "pure" art; "national" literature versus "universal" or "cosmopolitan" literature; "social" versus "psychological" novel; as well as the eternal question of civilization versus barbarism.¹⁰ The introduction of imagination, a thorough house-cleaning of language, and numerous other aspects of the new novel (themes, problems and techniques which we will examine in subsequent chapters) are the tools the novelists use to achieve their goal of expressing a new experience. This experience, as we have stated, is largely urban and typically complex. As Fuentes points out, the easily grasped right-versus-wrong view of justice depicted in Doña Bárbara is far removed from the complex, ambiguous and uncertain view of justice presented in Mario Vargas Llosa's La ciudad y los perros.¹¹ We might add the illustrations of Rivera's La Vorágine and Gabriel García Márquez's Cien años de soledad. Both are by Colombian authors and deal with life in the jungles of Colombia, but there is an enormous gulf between them in style, interpretation and intent. The old vision was based on less complex formulations; the reader felt surer, safer, on more solid moral ground. But the new vision (in García Márquez's book), though often perplexing, is a more complete vision of today's conflictive, ambiguous world, and thus more honest and more representative.

The increasing urbanization of Latin America has produced an increasingly urban-oriented novel. The pampa has given way to Buenos Aires, the Andes and jungle to Lima and Bogotá. As Vargas Llosa points out, the old-style novels dealing with the jungles, the plains and the mountains, were just as exotic to the residents of Latin America's cities as a French novel about Paris, a Spanish novel about Madrid or an American novel about New York. The Latin American born and raised in a city generally knew nothing of the rural areas of his nation, and his poor, slum-dwelling neighbors, immigrants from the countryside, were generally illiterate and did not read these novels which dealt with their native environment. Thus, the traditional novelist, knowingly or not, was writing a novel exotic in nature to the audience for which it was intended.¹² Hence, the contemporary novelist turns more and more to the cities of Latin America for settings, characters and situations. But this should not lead one to think that nature and geography have been discarded. Far from it. Vargas Llosa, whose first novel La ciudad y los perros is a totally urban novel, turns back to the Peruvian hinterland and provincial towns for his second novel, La casa verde. And as he points out, rural areas are also the settings for Juan Rulfo's Pedro Páramo, Augusto Roa Bastos' Hijo de hombre and Gabriel García Márquez's entire novelistic production, particularly his masterpiece Cien años de soledad. Vargas Llosa points out that while the locale and the characters in the novels appear to be the same as in the traditional novels, nature has now become the backdrop (rather than the actual protagonist of the novel) and has been assimilated through mythification, as a ritualistic, integral component of the characters'

lives.¹³ Nature also plays an integral part in the works of two other contemporary novelists—José María Arguedas of Peru and Miguel Angel Asturias of Guatemala—whose novels delve into the mentality of the large Indian populations of their respective countries. The Indian, with his animistic beliefs in human relationships with flowers, trees, rocks, animals and rivers, naturally leads these two novelists into the countryside and away from the cities which are so foreign to the Indian. But this attempt to portray the Indian mentality constitutes an atypical departure within the contemporary Spanish American novel, and does not negate the general movement toward urban settings. We should point out, however, that overtones of the old "civilization versus barbarism" polemic remain (archetypes die hard) even in sophisticated contemporary novels—one thinks of Asturias' El señor presidente and Alejo Carpentier's Los pasos perdidos, in which, at least to some extent, the city embodies corruption, tedium and death, and the countryside promises personal freedom, release and utopia. Yet even El señor presidente and Los pasos perdidos are essentially "urban" novels in terms of their perspective: their protagonists portray a contemporary, urban viewpoint.¹⁴

The Difficulty of the Contemporary Novelist's Role

Although the problems of writing do not constitute one of the dominant themes in the theoretical works of Spanish America's novelists, some have commented on the subject, specifically the question of an author's position in an underdeveloped country, where literature often seems an unnecessary, if not frivolous, profession. Also, many of our novelists speak of the impossibility, or at least the extreme difficulty, of trying

to earn a living from writing. Such extraliterary concerns certainly affect the literary works of the novelists.

Carlos Fuentes discusses the situation of the traditional Spanish American novelist in nations with notorious political instability, lacking a free press, a responsible Congress, or strong labor unions. In such a society, the novelist felt compelled to simultaneously play the roles of legislator, reporter, revolutionist and thinker.¹⁵ He served as the nation's political and social conscience, as official protester of injustices perpetrated against the poor and the oppressed. While such crusading has not disappeared, it plays a secondary role today, perhaps because there are other (and larger) groups of people in Latin America who have taken up the banners of social justice. Ernesto Sábato states that to be a Spanish American writer is to be doubly tormented—not only does one bear the torment of the writer, but additionally the torment of being a Latin American.¹⁶ Sábato goes on to warn that, due to the conditions to which Carlos Fuentes referred (above), the Spanish American novelist's greatest problem is earning a living from literature without prostituting the art, without "instrumentalizing" it. For Sábato, literature is a sacred act, and to defile it is to defile oneself as an author.¹⁷

Exile

This dilemma of the contemporary novelist's perspective brings us to one of the thorniest problems and one of the most controversial aspects of the situation of today's writers—their frequent "exile" (even the word "exile" is controversial and is generally rejected by those who live

outside their nation). A simple fact of life is that many of today's leading Spanish American novelists live outside their native country, most of them in Europe. The great majority of these have freely chosen to live elsewhere. The problem is that their countrymen criticize this self-imposed "exile," labeling it as "running away," as cosmopolitanism (in a negative sense), and even as something closely akin to literary desertion. The fact that such criticism rankles (and that it perhaps does, to some extent, zero in on a point about which these novelists feel at least a small amount of guilt or discomfort) is evidenced by the extensive rebuttals these writers have given to justifying their exile, both in their theoretical expositions and in interviews.

Julio Cortázar for example rejects the label "exile," stating that he chose to move from Argentina to France, and that he does not feel at all like an exile. He states that the confusion or misunderstanding boils down to a distinction between the author's physical presence in his own nation and his presence as an author there. As an illustration he offers the hypothetical case of an Argentine author who writes a novel in Spanish in Tokyo, and has it published in Argentina. That author, he states, has not left Argentina nor abandoned the best that he has to offer, which is his quality as a writer. Spiritually, that author is not an exile. And that, continues Cortázar, is his case. He does not need the physical presence of Argentina in order to be able to write. Yet he states that he feels, lives and thinks "in Argentine," and is very pleased when the critics say that his novels are profoundly Argentine. He concludes by affirming that with him, there has been no spiritual uprooting (desarraigo), and that his moving to France was a mere "corporeal displacement."¹⁸

Cortázar bitterly attacks those Argentines who insist that a writer must reside in Argentina in order to be able to write "in Argentine." He refers to their attitude ironically as demanding "required class attendance." His rebuttal goes to the following argument: if his novels have met with success and wide reader acceptance both in Argentina and abroad (as indeed they have), it is in great part due to the fact that his work is both broad and complex. It takes as a point of departure that which is uniquely his, that which arises out of his own inspiration and imagination, and goes on from there to open itself to experiences and influences of the most disparate nature, rejecting nothing as being "foreign" or "extraneous." Assimilation through a type of literary osmosis is what Cortázar believes gives his novels the panoramic scope which fascinates the reader. Yet he assimilates this diversity through his own personal (and therefore Argentine) perspective. And he claims, furthermore, that his overview would not be as easy to achieve in Argentina as in France. Thus, he feels that if he has brought some degree of excellence and originality to the Argentine novel, it has been at least indirectly as a result of his residence abroad. And so, Cortázar remains, and is prepared to remain, a "Latin American writer in France." In this he sees no paradox nor betrayal of his country, but merely an exercise of personal choice.¹⁹

Cortázar, furthermore, raises the question of the literary freedom he enjoys in France, a freedom which he and other Latin American writers might not have in their native countries, with their periodic governmental upheavals and repressive regimes. Cortázar escapes all these disruptive circumstances by residing outside the reach of his government's

influence.²⁰ (Other writers who have fled from hostile regimes are Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Augusto Roa Bastos.)

A different point of view on exile is expressed by Guatemala's Miguel Angel Asturias. He observes that artists who are particularly sensitive and aware of nature, sights and sounds, colors, beauty, feelings, etc., have a natural tendency to lose their appreciation of their natural surroundings through constant exposure to them. On the other hand, distance gives perspective and sharpens perception. Then the writer "...appreciates the landscape better, sees characters and hears sounds more clearly.... When one returns after a time one finds a new world...."²¹ Asturias points to a specific example from his own works; he believes that the view of Guatemala he produced in Hombres de maiz and Mulata de tal is a far deeper, more complete, more essential view of the country than the impressionistic beauty of his earlier Leyendas de Guatemala. This difference he attributes to his absence from Guatemala for ten or twelve years before returning to write his more mature works.²²

Carlos Fuentes draws an interesting comparison between Latin America's major writers living in Europe today and the writers of the United States' "lost generation" who lived in Europe between the two World Wars—Henry James, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald. Fuentes points out that these North American writers, in exile, were working a literary revolution which would change forever the course of American letters. No less so are today's Spanish American exiles revolutionizing the course of Spanish American letters. Fuentes suggests that if the United States had not had its generation of "authors in exile," its literature might have developed within the confines of an intranscend-

ental "naturalistic" style at one extreme or an "esthetic" style at the other. In the light of Fuentes' remarks, it is significant to note that no one today accuses Hemingway or Fitzgerald of being "un-American" or "cosmopolitan" writers in a pejorative sense. The same should and will be the case in Spanish America if Fuentes has his way. In fact, he claims that Spanish American literature, if it is not to stagnate through cultural isolation, must have authors live abroad and write about more than their own country. The novelist thus opens his vision to a wider range of possibilities, more variety, which leads to the experimentation which is at the heart of the contemporary novel.²³ Fuentes concludes that the true ideal of Latin American culture and identity should be, once again, Octavio Paz's affirmation that now Latin American men are the contemporaries of all men.²⁴

The contemporary novelists' discussion of exile is not developed as a defense, however. They do admit physical exile has drawbacks, though they consider them minor. Cortázar admits that he fears a gradual erosion of his feel for conversational Spanish. He feels a loss of contact with the Spanish language on a constant daily basis.²⁵

Asturias similarly concedes that by going away from his country, the author loses the "pristine inspiration of its auditive, olfactive elements, and even the gustative ones, as every country has its own dishes...."²⁶ But he maintains that the temporary loss of contact with his nation's sights, sounds, smells and tastes is more than compensated by the writer's gain in perspective. Both Asturias²⁷ and Colombia's Gabriel García Márquez²⁸ affirm that for them, the ideal solution would be to be able to shuttle back and forth at will between Europe and Latin America, thus maintaining

contact with the spiritual source but at the same time gaining a critical perspective.

Universality Versus Nationalism

This question of exile among Spanish America's novelists is very directly related to a problem which has plagued Latin American letters from the beginning and has become more prominent in the contemporary period—the problem of "universal" literature versus "national" literature. That is, should the writer look outward, toward the situations and problems of some theoretical "universal man," or should he concentrate his vision within his own nation, writing about the people who live there, their social and cultural problems. This thematic conflict has always placed the Spanish American novelist in a traditionally uncomfortable position of having to opt for one or the other pole. Carlos Fuentes points out the consequences which the novelist faces, torn between these two poles: if he takes the "nationalist" path, he in fact straps himself into the outmoded literary forms of realism-naturalism, in addition to automatically limiting his audience almost exclusively to his fellow countrymen, the only public likely to be familiar with and interested in regional or national themes. If, on the other hand, the novelist prefers the "international" or "universal" trend, his recourse is to turn to the European literary vanguard of his day for style and theme (for as we have noted before, Europe, and particularly Paris, have traditionally been looked upon as the principal source of artistic inspiration). This invariably leads to the would-be "universal" author's being totally ignored by the

reading public, both at home and abroad—the former because his novels do not deal with "national" subjects, and the latter because readers abroad see in his works only an unoriginal and slavish imitation of European models. Latin America's much-discussed "cultural lag" only serves to exacerbate the dilemma of nationalism versus universality.²⁹

Our discussion of this classic dichotomy is complicated somewhat by the lack of a clear-cut definition of exactly what constitutes a "national" literature. Is there really a "national" literature in each of Spanish America's twenty nations? Vargas Llosa, for example, denies the existence of twenty coherent, well-formed national literatures in the twenty Spanish-speaking republics of America. He believes that there is sufficient basis for considering all of Spanish American literature as a whole—a coherent, cohesive body. He bases this opinion on what he considers a common denominator of historical, cultural and social experiences which give the Spanish American region a definable, though highly diverse, literary personality.³⁰ Gabriel García Márquez goes even further, advocating no division between Spanish (peninsular) and Spanish American literatures. He bases his suggestion on the fact that, due to a common language and cultural heritage, Don Quixote and the medieval novels of chivalry (for example) are as much a part of the literary heritage of Spanish America as they are of Spain. Likewise, Rubén Darfo is as much a part of the poetic heritage of Spain as of Spanish America.³¹ However, despite this evident ambiguity in the definition of what constitutes a "national" literature, normally, one would understand the term to signify a literature that springs from and deals with the social, political, moral and psychological problems, and

the common cultural heritage of a given geographical region or a clearly defined national territory.

On the nationalist-universalist polemic, the novelists defend a broad spectrum of ideas with many blends and shades of distinction. There is a tendency to regard the conflict as foolish and improperly stated. For such novelists the terms should not be mutually exclusive, but rather a synthesis of two desirable positions.

Attacking the old idea of national literature, Ernesto Sábato sounds a call that is echoed by many of today's novelists: in order for a literature to be national, it does not have to be a realistic or pseudo-realistic portrayal of life in one's country. Nor does it have to be a "picturesque" literature, depicting in colorful, charming vignettes domestic tranquillity and happiness in the manner of the nineteenth-century costumbristas. Nor does it have the obligation of being clear, concise, simple, and easily grasped by the average reader. Literature can be "national" if it is subjective, difficult, complicated, introspective, gloomy, and critical of its own country, even seemingly antinationalistic. A nation is infinitely complex and impossible to understand in clear and easy terms and categories, so why, insists Sábato, should a literature that aspires to capture the essences of that nation not be equally complex and varied? Sábato believes that, taking Argentina for example, many novels and many novelists will be necessary before anything approaching a complete view of Argentina's chaotic, entangled, contradictory reality can be achieved through literature—that is, before Argentina can lay claim to a true "national" literature.³² And this interpretation of "national" literature not only must be open to all the disparate, con-

tradictory realities, both pleasant and unpleasant, which go into making up the total reality of the nation,³³ but it must also be prepared to recognize as "national" literature that which fiercely attacks and tears the nation apart.³⁴

The Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier is far less accommodating on this subject. He rejects outright the old-fashioned tipicista novels—those which attempted to depict that which is "typical" and unique in Spanish American societies, the novel otherwise termed criollista. The Mexican Indian, the Venezuelan plainsman, the Argentine gaucho—all these and more became the novelistic material of idealized, folkloric, often picturesque portraits of Spanish American life with exotic tropical birds, trees, plants, flowers and animals, whose names were almost as foreign to the Latin American reader as they were to his European or North American counterpart. Thus, many of these novels were accompanied by a glossary of American flora and fauna. Carpentier echoes the sentiments of his contemporaries when he characterizes these attempts at self-identification as early manifestations of literary nationalism and as elements of the tipicista novel which no longer hold any attraction for the contemporary novelist. For it is not through pointing out objects and human types which somehow are unique to a given time and place that a novelist should approach the task of creating a national literature. Rather, it is by looking beyond the superficial differences of Spanish American man to discover the universal experience of all men, everywhere, in Spanish America. Having established Spanish American man as a universally recognizable human being, the "typical" traits which distinguish him on the surface take on their proper perspective. Thus, for Carpentier,

Spanish American man's universality is the dominant factor in literature today.³⁵

Cortázar finds the question of a writer's cultural authenticity vague and inconclusive. Just what is understood by "autochthonous" America, he asks. Certainly not much in Argentina. The term, strictly interpreted, is far too limiting for literature. In support of this view, he recalls that Borges once asked an intransigent indigenista why instead of having his books printed he did not have them published in the form of quipus. For Cortázar, all writers are autochthonous, even if the subjects of their work seem unrelated to those themes which folklorists regard as the identifying elements of their cultures. For the essence of being "autochthonous" ("indigenous" or "national") is to write works which the nation to which the author belongs will recognize as a direct offshoot of its culture, whether or not that nation and its traditions play a part in the work. Furthermore, national identity must be an outlet, an opening, and not a limitation. That is why Cortázar regards Gabriel García Márquez's Cien años de soledad as one of the most admirable novels ever written in Spanish America—the book is incredibly Colombian, he says, simply because it is so much more besides. García Márquez goes beyond the autochthonous, making room for an all-encompassing view of the people who inhabit the novel. It is this wider view that gives the particular view (the local or national identity) credibility and authenticity. Autochthony, Cortázar concludes, underlies national, regional or local identities; providing the author is a truly "national" writer, that identity will show through no matter what his work deals with or where it takes place.³⁶

Sábato agrees with Cortázar that autochthony is more difficult for an Argentine or Uruguayan than it is for Peruvians or Mexicans, who have a long indigenous past.³⁷ Argentina is a rootless nation, a melting pot whose identity is more European than American ("Una vieja boutade dice que los mexicanos descienden de los aztecas, los peruanos de los incas y los rioplatenses de los barcos "³⁸). So for the Argentine, autochthony lacks a clearly definable national identity. Cortázar says that this must be taken as a positive rather than a negative asset—as the signal to move unencumbered into new territory to search for modern Argentina's identity, untrammelled by traditional nationalistic pre-occupations about gauchos, the pampa or the Indians.³⁹

In the polemic of national versus universal literature, Sábato sees an inherent sense of cultural inferiority among Spanish Americans. He believes that Spanish America has for so long been under the literary influence of Europe, imitating whatever literary styles emanated from the European capitals, that now, in their attempt to establish their own identity, some Spanish American authors seek an originality devoid of European influence. That says Sábato, is a sign of literary immaturity and naïveté. For in literature there can be no absolute originality, simply because it is impossible to write in a vacuum. Literature, like all other human endeavors, grows and develops predicated on what preceded it. He points out that all great writers of all cultures have "influences" that can be traced to other writers and other nations. The mark of maturity in Spanish American writers will be achieved when they can accept their European heritage without embarrassment or feelings of inferiority, and go on from there to build a literature which will be

uniquely Spanish American.⁴⁰ For the Cuban novelist José Lezama Lima, Sábato's evaluation of this inferiority complex is entirely valid. Lezama notes that the crux of this cultural quandary stems from the vague impression which somehow plagues the Latin American artist that he is incapable of achieving the artistic level of perfection of his European counterpart. The Spanish American writer views his art form not as a "forma alcanzada, sino [como] problematismo, cosa a resolver"—not an accomplished art form but a problem to be solved. And the Spanish American artist seeks to hide what he perceives as inadequate formal expression under the umbrella of autochthony.⁴¹

Ernesto Sábato, whose chief preoccupation in his novels is existential, regards man—the individual—and his human condition as the link between the national and universal levels. Loneliness, the ultimate meaning of man's existence, death—these are things which haunt all men, not just Argentines, Mexicans or Venezuelans.⁴² And although they are universal problems, recognizable to readers all over the world, they are problems which begin with one man, and can be studied by focusing the novel's attention on one man in a given time and place. The "here and now," as Sábato says, is the key to investigating the human condition. The only possibility that an author has of achieving universality in his works is by digging deeply into that which is closest to him.⁴³ Miguel Angel Asturias⁴⁴ and Colombia's Eduardo Caballero Calderón⁴⁵ both echo Sábato's position: the novelist must move from the particular to the universal. Asturias thinks the writer's literary vision and scope should be constantly expanding, but that he should always begin with that which he knows best. In such a synthesis lies the solution to the whole problem.

Cortázar, who, as we have seen, is often accused in Argentina of being a "non-Argentine" writer, of turning his back on his native country, regards himself as very Argentine. He attributes the disagreement to a confusion (common to all Latin American nations) between national literature and literary nationalism. The latter is what the "patrioters" demand—a literature which constantly has Argentina as its theme. The former is literature produced by Argentines, which, whether or not it has Argentina as its explicit theme and setting, will always bear the mark of the author's Argentinian spiritual and cultural values. This is a far deeper and more meaningful literary "Argentinism" than that demanded by literary nationalists.⁴⁶ As examples, Cortázar points to the novels of Rulfo, Asturias and Vargas Llosa. Their works, though set very firmly in Mexico, Guatemala and Peru, deal with questions which transcend the frontiers of their particular nations. Cortázar refers to their "potenciación creadora de su medio ambiente"—the creative energizing or giving vitality to their environment. The key word here is creative. Taking the landscapes and people familiar to them, these writers infuse them with the creative genius or inspiration which is the mark of the gifted novelist. It is this "potenciación creadora"—this fusing of the artist's vitality and personal experiences and perceptions with reality which creates a truly "national" literature.⁴⁷

In synthesis, then, the novelists almost unanimously proclaim that the solution to the national-universal dilemma is to be found by going to the individual—the Spanish American individual to be sure—and writing about him in such a way that a Japanese, a Norwegian or an Ethiopian would be capable of identifying with his situations, problems and emotions.

The Latin American author's view today must reach out beyond his national borders, for, returning to Octavio Paz's dictum, Latin American man is today the contemporary of all men. And that, says Fuentes, is the essence of being a Latin American today.⁴⁸ It is the depth of the author's view that matters, not the surface area he covers. In this context, one remembers Ernesto Sábato's assertion that there is only one valid literary dilemma: profound literature versus superficial literature.⁴⁹ If literature is deep, it will be automatically "national," for it will go to the heart of the nation and its people. Or, as Alejo Carpentier put it: "...the view the Latin American intellectual has over the world is one of the vastest, most complete and universal man has ever had. For me the American continent is the most extraordinary world of the century, because of its all-embracing cultural scope. Our view of it must be ecumenic."⁵⁰ In conclusion, we may cite Carlos Fuentes, who chose as the editorial principle of the Revista Mexicana de Literatura, which he founded, the legend "a culture can be profitably national only when it is generously universal."⁵¹

Models and Forerunners of the Contemporary Spanish American Novel

The last major section of our introductory chapter deals with the characteristics and elements which make up the new novel in Spanish America—an attempt to generalize certain tendencies which will be seen repeatedly in many of the contemporary authors' works, plus some of the novelists' general observations and thoughts on the novel. In this connection, it seems useful to us to discuss some models or forerunners

of the contemporary novel. We have purposely omitted the word "influences," for tracing literary influences does not fall within the scope of our study. Thus, what follows are simply several literary trends which will receive more detailed attention in later chapters. It should be pointed out that the contemporary Spanish American novelists have relatively little to say in their theoretical writings about literary "influences" or models.

Carlos Fuentes, in his discussion of the death of the realistic, bourgeois novel,⁵² states that trends in twentieth-century literature and art have helped the old realism along on this road to its extinction and ushered in the new, experimental forms of artistic expression which eventually led to the contemporary Spanish American novel. The modern artist's views of reality have been wider, more all-encompassing and more subjective. Fuentes mentions Kafka, Picasso, Joyce, Brecht, Artaud, Eisenstein and Pirandello as major contemporary innovators in Europe. In Latin America, the transition from the descriptive novel to the more open, more innovative novel was first taken by the novelists who recorded the epic of the Mexican Revolution.⁵³ However, Fuentes credits two Uruguayan and two Argentine short-story writers—Horacio Quiroga, Felisberto Hernández, Macedonio Fernández and Roberto Arlt—with a more significant innovation, without stating precisely what their contributions were. However, he discusses in detail the contributions of two writers whom he considers have truly turned the Spanish American novel around and headed it in a new direction—Argentina's Jorge Luis Borges and Guatemala's Miguel Angel Asturias. Asturias, while retaining as subject matter the same worn-out themes of social oppression and political protest,

changed the social document into an artistic creation through the addition and skillful use of myth and language. Borges, in Fuentes' opinion, is the first Spanish American prose-writer to claim the right to write in a deeply personal style, creating an entirely independent, intellectualized, private, mythical world, not dependent on external reality (although the poets Vicente Huidobro, Pablo Neruda and Octavio Paz had done the same previously in poetry). And, the Argentinian is also the first fully urban narrative writer in Spanish America.⁵⁴

The Borgian idea of constructing an imaginary world is echoed by Peru's Mario Vargas Llosa, who names the four novelists whom he considers to be the foremost initiators of the new novel in Europe and the United States: James Joyce, Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka and William Faulkner. Vargas Llosa is particularly attracted to Faulkner's imaginary Yoknapatawpha County, a fictional world which could be located in Peru or Colombia as easily as in Mississippi.⁵⁵

Perhaps the most interesting literary "model" which any of the novelists recognizes is discussed by Vargas Llosa, who says that the closest parallel to what the contemporary novelists of Spanish America are trying to do today is to be found in the medieval chivalric novels of Europe. These novels of chivalry were "total" works, in the sense they attempted a total depiction of society. Vargas Llosa traces the contemporary novelists' goal of the "total novel" (see Chapter III) to these medieval chivalric novels, and credits the chivalric novel with providing him with the "total" approach for his first two novels, La ciudad y los perros and La casa verde.⁵⁶

This brief account of sources or models and forerunners leads us to characterize briefly the contemporary novel. If we examine the novelists' statements on these characteristics and elements, the ideals and self-imposed guides of the novelists will be clarified.

Elements and Characteristics of the Contemporary
Spanish American Novel

To begin with, Sábato defines the novel as a genre in the following schematic form:⁵⁷

(1) It is a partially fictional story, but may contain elements of true history.

(2) It is a type of spiritual creation in which, unlike a scientific or philosophical creation, ideas do not appear in their pure state but are instead mixed with the feelings and passions of the characters.

(3) It is a type of creation in which, unlike science and philosophy, there is no attempt to prove anything: the novel does not demonstrate, it shows ("la novela no demuestra, sino muestra").

(4) It is a (partially) invented story in which human beings called "characters" appear. According to the era, the taste and mentality of the times, these characters range from solid, corporeal beings who closely resemble those we see daily in the streets, to transparent individuals sometimes designated only by mysterious initials (as in Kafka's The Trial) who seem to be merely the bearers of certain ideas or psychological states.

(5) It is a description, an investigation, an examination of the drama of man, his condition and his existence. For there are no novels about objects or animals but invariably about men.

Sábato concludes that he believes that anything more specific than these general statements would pin down the novel too closely, limit its wide-ranging artistic potential and force it to conform to artificially imposed standards or characteristics.

Alejo Carpentier analyzes the problem of novel-writing in terms of what he calls the contextos of Latin American reality.⁵⁸ Carpentier believes the writer should simply create the characters and then let them loose to act and react within these contexts. The result, he affirms, will yield a truthful portrayal in artistic terms of Latin American reality. We should point out that Carpentier is the only contemporary novelist who employs the concept of contexts in his theoretical statements on the novel. The contexts which form the basis for Carpentier's novels are:⁵⁹

(1) racial contexts: men of one nationality but of different races—white, Indian, black—live together in Latin America, sometimes ages apart in cultural development; intermarriage of these races has produced a large multiracial population.

(2) economic contexts: chronic instability of national economies, due to one or two natural resources in great abundance (usually in foreign hands), which leads to boom-and-bust cycles.

(3) "ctonic" contexts ("contextos ctónicos"): survival of animism, ancient beliefs and practices, often from very respectable cultural sources, which help link certain present realities with remote cultural essences, the existence of which links us with "lo universal-sin-tiempo." For example, the appearance, in numerous churches in Latin America, of ornate baroque angels playing the maracas; or Heitor Villa-Lobos'

Bachianas Brasileiras—cases of synthesis of long-existent Latin American cultural manifestations with contemporary practices. Or perhaps a better example: the survival of melodic elements of the Romance de Gerineldo in the popular Cuban song "La Guantanamera." In other words, elements of the (sometimes subconscious) past surfacing to mix with or to help explain the present.

(4) political contexts: Latin American nations are historically unstable (with few exceptions), and have large and influential military sectors whose only reason for being is not to fight wars but to meddle in running the nation's affairs.

(5) bourgeois contexts: within the growing middle class of Latin America, there is a good bit of mobility, but there is downward as well as upward mobility, and the middle-class citizen is therefore constantly at the mercy of the country's uncertain economy.

(6) contexts of distance and proportion: the American continent is huge and violent—distances are immense, everything is oversized (the Andes, the Amazon, the pampas, etc.) and the continent is subject to periodic natural cataclysms, such as volcanoes, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, tidal waves, landslides and floods. Unlike Europe, nature in America is untamed (hence the "novel of the land" that dominated Spanish American literature for nearly a century).

(7) contexts of chronological disorientation ("desajuste cronológico"): a cultural "lag" has always plagued Latin America, particularly in literature and the arts. For example, Cubism began to be understood and practiced by artists in Spanish America at a time when it was already passé in Europe. Literary movements have historically come to Latin America many years after their initiation abroad.

(8) cultural contexts: Charles Péguy once bragged that he never read a book by anyone other than French authors. Carpentier states that for a Frenchman, that is quite possible, for French culture is universal. But a Spanish American cannot limit his knowledge to Hispanic culture, for it has glaring shortcomings and lacks universality. Spanish and Spanish American literature are simply not as representative of universal literary movements as French literature. So the Latin American intellectual must of necessity acquaint himself with other cultures and other literatures, in order not to leave gaps in his erudition. For this reason, Carpentier believes (as we have previously seen) that today's novelist in Spanish America has the widest, most universal view of man that any writer in the world can claim.

(9) culinary contexts: important due to their particular historical contexts—the blending of Spanish cooking with local Spanish American cooking resulted in the criollo cuisine in many regions of Spanish America.

(10) contexts of illumination: light and shadow modify perspective, and the great variety of Latin American geography produces an infinite variety of light, from the diaphanous mountain atmosphere of Mexico City to the shimmering tropical light of Rio de Janeiro and Havana.

(11) ideological contexts: these are powerful and ever-present, but must never be allowed to become the focus of the novel, for then the novel becomes a sermon. An economist or sociologist's report, with photographs and statistics, on the deplorable conditions in the tin mines of Bolivia is far more useful than a novel about those same conditions.⁶⁰

These, then, are the "contexts" (or basic elements) which the Spanish American novelist must keep in mind as he creates his novel.

With these contexts and Ernesto Sábato's general characteristics of the novel in mind, we turn again to Sábato, who outlines nine general characteristics which distinguish the contemporary Spanish American novel:⁶¹

(1) descent into the "I" ("descenso al yo"): unlike the writers of the nineteenth century, who attempted to objectively describe the physical world outside man, today's novelist turns his vision inward to the primordial mystery of his own existence.

(2) interior time: traditional narrative fiction was based on a fixed concept of time—chronological, astronomical time which is measurable by a clock. Today's writer, as he takes the plunge into his own inner self, must abandon chronological time, because the "I" (el yo) operates on a concept of time which is measured not in hours and minutes but rather in anguished periods of waiting, in chronologically unmeasurable experiences of happiness, grief or ecstasy.

(3) the subconscious: in his descent to the "I," the novelist not only must face the subjectivity already known in literature since the romantic period, but the depths of man's subconscious and unconscious mind. The author's submersion into these shadowy zones often produces a ghost-like quality which resembles dreams and nightmares. The characters often are poorly defined, imprecise, and unreal. In this area, the law of light and reason is supplanted by the law of the shadows.

(4) illogicality: logic, cause-and-effect, coherence, clarity, and reason—the bases of the natural sciences, which were in turn the basis of nineteenth-century realism-naturalism in literature—all lose their validity in the nocturnal world of man's subconscious.

(5) the world seen through the "I": the old division between subject and object disappears. With it goes the old-style novelist's concept of the world and "scenery," which was the idea that they, like the theatrical scenery in a stage production, existed independently from the characters. In the contemporary novel, the scene (scenery) arises out of the subject along with his state of mind, his visions, feelings and ideas.

(6) the Other ("el Otro"): as modern man has plunged into his own psyche, he has discovered the Other, the double, the reverse side of himself, difficult to describe or define, but always present in the back of the character's mind.

(7) communion: the modern novelist, unlike his nineteenth-century predecessor, lacks a superhuman point of view (the novelist as omniscient, omnipresent demi-god) and is faced with characters who experience life from their very limited, subjective inner consciences. Thus today's novel comes face to face with one of man's most anguishing problems—loneliness and human communication.

(8) sacred sense ("sentido") of the body: since man's conscious and subconscious—the "I"—do not exist in a pure state but rather are unavoidably contained in man's body, the attempt at communion between souls is often disastrous or frustrated. Thus, for the first time in the history of literature, sex acquires a metaphysical dimension. Sexual love, unlike either sentimental or pornographic love in the traditional novel, becomes a sacred act as a consequence of its attempt to establish a bridge of communication between individuals.

(9) knowledge: today's novel has acquired the new dignity of being a vehicle of knowledge. As long as pure science was considered the only vehicle adequate for obtaining knowledge, literature was relegated to the secondary status of entertainment, artifice, or an object of ideal beauty. But when contemporary man began to realize that reality was not restricted to the physical world, that it included man's feelings and emotions as well, then literature became as valid an epistemological instrument as any other. In fact, today it is perhaps the best instrument for probing into the deeper recesses of man's mind.

Sábato concludes by stating that the contemporary novel not only gives a more complete account of today's complex world, but has also taken on a metaphysical dimension it did not have before. It explores territory which the traditional novelist did not even suspect, and it has acquired philosophical and cognitive dignity. For these reasons, the novel is certainly not dead or in decline, but entering one of its most vigorous, productive eras. Paraguay's Augusto Roa Bastos agrees, stating that the prime characteristic of today's novel is precisely the annexation of man's interior world, as described by Sábato. This opening up of man's inner self in the novel is important because it is dealt with on the esthetic level, and because the investigation into a character's inner existence does not cut him off or isolate him from his social context or milieu. Even those literary forms which seem farthest removed from the surrounding reality, such as the so-called "fantastic" literature, are really only a metaphorical restatement of reality.⁶²

Other novelists offer less schematically organized characterizations of the "new novel." Fuentes, for example, sees the new novel in terms of its expansion into territories that it had never known before, specifically: myth and prophecy; the alliance of imagination and criticism; ambiguity, humor, and parody, in addition to a major restructuring of language.⁶³

It is interesting to contrast the characteristics listed by Sábato and Fuentes with those of Miguel Angel Asturias, one of the early contemporary novelists. Asturias lists as characteristics of the new novel the use of conversational language based on popular speech patterns, creativity based on primitive beliefs and practices, the introduction of personified nature, "telluric impulse" (impulso telúrico), and a type of verbal magic unknown before.⁶⁴ As one of the first innovators of Spanish American fiction, it is not surprising that Asturias' list is less in the vanguard, less revolutionary than that of other writers. (It is also interesting—and predictable—that each novelist lists as "characteristics" of the new novel those which reflect the qualities of his own works.)

Speaking of the novel as a metaphysical investigation of man, Sábato calls to mind John Donne's statement that no man sleeps in the cart which carries him from the jail to the scaffold where he is to be executed, yet we all sleep from the womb to the grave, or we are not entirely awake. One of the principal missions of great literature, Sábato says, is to awaken man as he travels to the scaffold—to shock him into awareness of his condition as a finite human being.⁶⁵

Julio Cortázar agrees. Early in the history of the narrative, the novel sought to show us man as he was; the nineteenth-century novel sought to show us what he was like; the contemporary novel asks the why and the wherefore (el por qué y el para qué) of man's existence. The novel is the most adequate literary vehicle for the artistic realization of man as a person, as an individual (el hombre como persona), and this in-depth human focus is the reason for the wide popularity and readership that have greeted the new novel.⁶⁶ Cortázar also points out as one of the salient features of the new novel that (as we have already seen) when writers such as Rulfo, Asturias, Vargas Llosa and García Márquez return to the geographical reality of their native countries for the setting of their novels, what results is not the old descriptive realism but a "potenciación creadora de su medio ambiente"—a subjective, inner-oriented interpretation (as opposed to description) of the natural surroundings.⁶⁷

Two final characteristics of the contemporary novel in Spanish America are the concepts of the total novel and the open novel. According to these concepts, the novel should give as complete a view as possible of the multiple planes of reality of a very complex world. In order to do so, the novel must be open to all sorts of innovations, including many aspects which heretofore had been considered non-literary. But in the view of today's novelists, if something is within the realm of human experience, then it is, by definition, narrative material, for the novel must be open to the expression of all human experience and not just selective portions of it. The Cuban novelist José Lezama Lima typifies today's writers when he says: "La novela americana significa para

nosotros algo que ni es novela ni es americana, sino el relato supravocabo de lo entrevisto, la fiesta del nacimiento de nuevos sentidos. Si no es novela, qué es esto, exclaman. Hacer una obra que fuerce la aceptación, que obligue a que se la traguen como novela."⁶⁸

In connection with Lezama's remark, we shall examine in detail in Chapter II the linguistic revolution of the new novel. The problem of language is at the center of just about every contemporary Spanish American novelist's novelistic concerns. This linguistic revolution, along with most of the other characteristics which help delineate the contours of the contemporary novel, has its roots in Modernism. As Ivan A. Schulman has pointed out,⁶⁹ the contemporary mood of disorientation in a confusing and complicated society; introspection and a turning inside oneself; the acute realization of man's solitude; a profound metaphysical concern often leading to existential anguish; a feeling of futility and pessimism; and the linguistic and stylistic innovations leading to new forms of expression—these are all key elements of the new novel which had their beginnings in the Modernist movement at the turn of the twentieth century. Thus, today's "new" novel is really a stage in the continuing evolution begun by the Modernist renovation in the Hispanic world.

NOTES

¹Carlos Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, 2nd ed. (Mexico: Joaquín Mortiz, 1969), pp. 16-17.

²Ibid., pp. 17-18.

³We are defining the traditional novel as that which appeared between 1816, the date of publication of José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi's El periquillo sarniento, the first Spanish American novel, and 1947, the date of appearance of Agustín Yáñez's Al filo del agua.

⁴Alejo Carpentier illustrates the point by his early novel iEcue-Yambo-O!, in which he attempted to portray the life and plight of the poor Negro population of Cuba. Years later, Carpentier regretfully realized that his book was mere costumbrismo, superficial at best, for he had not penetrated into the characters in enough detail to make them live as people. They were mere symbols of their class and race. Alejo Carpentier, Tientos y diferencias (Montevideo: ARCA, 1967), pp. 11-12.

⁵Carlos Fuentes, op. cit., pp. 9-10.

⁶Ibid., p. 11.

⁷Augusto Roa Bastos, "Imagen y perspectivas de la narrativa latinoamericana actual," Temas (Montevideo), June-July 1965, pp. 3-12.

⁸"Somos, por primera vez en nuestra historia, contemporáneos de todos los hombres." Octavio Paz, Laberinto de la soledad (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1964), p. 150.

⁹Fuentes, op. cit., pp. 34-35.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 67.

¹¹Luis Harss and Barbara Dohmann, Into the Mainstream (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 307.

¹²Mario Vargas Llosa et al., Antología mínima de M. Vargas Llosa (Buenos Aires: Tiempo Contemporáneo, 1969), pp. 125-126.

¹³Fuentes, op. cit., p. 36.

¹⁴We will return to the urban aspect of the novel in Chapter IV.

¹⁵Harss, op. cit., p. 306.

¹⁶Ernesto Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 1964), p. 8.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 12. See Chapter IV for a more detailed discussion of the writer's obligation to his society.

¹⁸Joaquín A. Santana, "La vuelta a Cortázar en 80 rounds," Bohemia (Cuba), Feb. 26, 1971, pp. 7-8.

¹⁹Julio Cortázar, Ultimo round (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1969), pp. 210-212, "planta baja."

²⁰Ibid., p. 212, "planta baja."

²¹Rita Guibert, Seven Voices, trans: Frances Partridge (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 137.

²²Ibid., pp. 137-138.

²³Carlos Fuentes, "Hopscotch," Commentary, Oct. 1966, p. 142.

²⁴Carlos Fuentes, "Situación del escritor en América Latina," Mundo Nuevo, July 1966, pp. 8-9.

²⁵Santana, op. cit., p. 7.

²⁶Guibert, op. cit., p. 137.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 334-335.

²⁹Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, p. 23.

³⁰Ernesto González Bermejo, Cosas de escritores (Montevideo: Marcha 1971), p. 60.

³¹José Domingo, "Entrevistas: Gabriel García Márquez," Insula, June 1968, p. 6.

³²Sábato, op. cit., pp. 37-38.

³³Ibid., pp. 39-40.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 176-177.

³⁵Carpentier, op. cit., pp. 10-11, 37.

³⁶Guibert, op. cit., pp. 300-301.

³⁷Sábato, op. cit., pp. 37-38.

³⁸Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, p. 25.

- ³⁹González Bermejo, op. cit., pp. 101-102.
- ⁴⁰Sábato, op. cit., pp. 31-32.
- ⁴¹José Lezama Lima, La expresión americana (Havana: Instituto Nacional de Cultura, 1957), p. 18.
- ⁴²Ernesto Sábato, "Por una novela novelesca y metafísica," Mundo Nuevo, Nov. 1966, p. 10.
- ⁴³César Tiempo, "41 preguntas a Ernesto Sábato," Índice, 21, No. 206, p. 16.
- ⁴⁴Guibert, op. cit., pp. 137-138.
- ⁴⁵Various, "Encuesta: La novela en América Latina," Cuadernos, Sept. 1964, p. 6.
- ⁴⁶Harss, op. cit., pp. 237-238.
- ⁴⁷Edelmiro S. Castellanos, "Cortázar habla sobre Cortázar y otros temas," El Mundo del Domingo (Suplemento), Jan. 15, 1967, p. 7.
- ⁴⁸Fuentes, "Situación del escritor en América Latina," p. 9.
- ⁴⁹Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, p. 38.
- ⁵⁰Harss, op. cit., p. 44.
- ⁵¹Quoted in Harss, op. cit., p. 281.
- ⁵²Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, pp. 16-19.
- ⁵³We shall discuss this aspect at length in Chapter III under the section titled "ambiguity."
- ⁵⁴Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, pp. 24-26. Both of these trends will be examined in greater detail in subsequent chapters.
- ⁵⁵"Mario Vargas Llosa," (interview by Kal Wagenheim), Caribbean Review, Spring 1969, p. 4.
- ⁵⁶Vargas Llosa et al., Antología mínima de M. Vargas Llosa, pp. 140-143.
- ⁵⁷Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, pp. 151-152.
- ⁵⁸The term "context" is borrowed by Carpentier from Jean-Paul Sartre.

⁵⁹Carpentier, op. cit., pp. 19-34.

⁶⁰The authors' social and political commitment will be further discussed in Chapter IV.

⁶¹Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, pp. 86-89.

⁶²Roa Bastos, op. cit., p. 11.

⁶³Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, p. 24.

⁶⁴José Corrales Egea, "Una charla con Miguel Angel Asturias," Insula, Sept. 15, 1953, p. 4.

⁶⁵Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, p. 90.

⁶⁶Julio Cortázar, "Situación de la novela," Cuadernos Americanos. July-August 1950, pp. 227-228..

⁶⁷Castellanos, op. cit., p. 7.

⁶⁸Reynaldo González, "Un pulpo en una jarra minoana," (interview with José Lezama Lima), La Gaceta de Cuba, Sept. 1969, p. 15.

⁶⁹Ivan A. Schulman, "Pervivencias del modernismo en la novela contemporánea: exposición de una teoría epocal," in Variaciones interpretativas en torno a la nueva narrativa hispanoamericana, ed. Donald W. Bleznick (Santiago de Chile: Universitaria, 1972), pp. 32-33.

CHAPTER II
LANGUAGE AND THE CONTEMPORARY NOVEL

One of the most evident characteristics of the contemporary Spanish American novel is its linguistic experimentation. The language of the new novel is at the base of and the direct consequence of the novelists' search for new directions. The traditionally structured forms of the Spanish language have given way in the works of many authors to unorthodox forms of language, often disconcerting to the uninitiated reader—which is sometimes the author's objective in such experimentation. In this chapter, we will investigate the language the novelists use and the rationale they develop for their new linguistic forms.

The Need for a New Language

Carlos Fuentes' contention is that Spanish America lacks a language of its own.¹ The Spanish spoken in Spanish America is an imported language, not a native product. It is the end result of the "breach" of the Spanish conquest and colonization and the imposition of an oppressive, hierarchical social and political order. The Counter-Reformation destroyed the one great chance for modernization of Spanish society and its language, not only in Spain but also in its American colonies. Stunted in its modern evolution, the Spanish language for Fuentes is a false language which conceals reality. The Spanish which first came to America was that of the Renaissance. It was a language which hid the medieval nature of this great colonial undertaking, just as it hid the

shame of the encomienda system under the guise of the Laws of the Indies. The "enlightened" language of the Independence movement concealed the fact that Spanish America's feudal structure remained intact. Only the leadership changed. The positivistic language of nineteenth-century liberalism added neo-colonialism in the form of economic dependency as Spanish America fell into foreign hands. And the liberal language of the recently demised Alliance for Progress disguised the continuing economic servitude of Latin America to the developed capitalist countries. In his own Mexico, Fuentes sees the language of the Mexican Revolution hiding the present-day realities of the counter-revolution. And ultimately, the presence, particularly in the large cities of Latin America, of the beginnings of a consumer society is fed by the mass media, whose interests are divorced from the realities of Latin American society. Thus, from its birth to the present day, Spanish America has lacked a truly authentic, non-dependent language—one which reflects the deep, untainted structures of Spanish American life and experience.² Hence, the basic need of today's Spanish American novelist is to invent a language capable of expressing what has been left unsaid or deformed in more than four centuries of existence since the "breach" of the conquest. Latin America is a continent of "sacred texts"; it cries out for a profanation which can give voice to her complexities—a language of her own. A vertically structured, hierarchical, even feudal language cannot speak adequately except for a small segment of Latin American society today.³ Thus, the contemporary novelist's role as a linguist is at bottom a revolutionary one; he must of necessity go against the grain of the established order. To go against the established order creates

a crisis situation, one which Fuentes finds not only fitting but necessary.⁴

Ernesto Sábato deals more directly with American Spanish's subservience to its Castilian prototype. Sábato, in discussing the question of originality in the Spanish American novel, insists that the Spanish language is a formidable cultural heritage which not only should not be denied but treasured. But to treasure it does not mean to lock it inside an air-tight glass case and shield it from change. Like all cultural inheritances, language is broadened and enriched by its inheritors, and to seek to freeze it or petrify it is to kill it. Just as Sarmiento and Martí, in the nineteenth century, and Rubén Darfo at the beginning of the twentieth century, were instrumental in reshaping the language, so must today's writers be free to do the same.⁵

Sábato points to Spain's continuing dominance over American Spanish. In Spain, he states, the Royal Spanish Academy of the Language exercises its dictatorial sway. But in Spanish America, the ordinary citizen is often more self-conscious linguistically and grammatically than his Spanish counterpart, falling victim to a centuries-old cultural prestige.⁶ Spain continues to exercise her linguistic tyranny over her former colonies.⁷

This desire to adhere to a fixed form in language arises from a naïve belief in that particular language's insuperable perfection. Such supposed perfection naturally carries with it enormous cultural prestige. The idea of the language's perfection arises in great measure from the works of the classic writers who have helped shape the language. Spain has a rich literary heritage that includes, among others, Garcilaso de

la Vega, Quevedo, Lope de Vega, Calderón de la Barca, Tirso de Molina, and ultimately, the incomparable Cervantes. In light of such an impressive list, "classical" peninsular Spanish's prestige in Spanish America is understandable. But Sábato insists that the "good usage" inspired by such writers is questionable. He cites as an example a classical text which reads: "...hoy hacen, señor, según mi cuenta, un mes y cuatro días..." Sábato confirms, by searching in Spanish grammars, his suspicion that this phrase contains a basic mistake—an inadmissible error in agreement, showing a grievous lack of grammatical knowledge on the part of the author. But since the phrase comes from Cervantes, the grammatical norms are put in question. Grammarians would no doubt find some justification for Cervantes' error, and probably even condone the error as an "exception acceptable due to good usage." That notorious "good usage" is very easy to establish several centuries later, when history has confirmed Cervantes as a literary genius. For such grammatical mistakes are like coups d'état: if a coup fails, it is referred to as a sinister attempt against the duly constituted authority; if it succeeds, it becomes the date of a national celebration and a model to be followed. The same principle holds true with Cervantes' "...hoy hacen...". The important point is that, when he wrote the line, Cervantes committed an inexcusable grammatical mistake. Likewise, today's writers in Spanish America—the classics of tomorrow—must be free to make similar "mistakes," to turn the Spanish language in new directions, for they are setting the norms for the next hundred years.⁸

In conclusion, Sábato attacks the "academic" dictum, resurrected every so often, that, just as the "best" English is supposedly spoken

in Oxford, so the "best" Spanish is supposedly spoken in Toledo. Toledo, thus, would represent the absolute seat of authority and correctness of the Spanish language, and the poor mortals who inhabit the outer reaches of the Spanish empire would be eternally condemned to babble monstrous dialects of the mother tongue. This is simply not the case, for each region or nation lends its own genius or "soul" to the language it speaks, molding it in subtle ways, adapting it to its own forms of life and civilization. This process is one of enrichment and not impoverishment. And it is shaped by that region's poets, its prose-writers, and even by the children playing in its streets. The idea of a "fixed" or "perfect" language, then, is a totally invalid concept.⁹

The tyrannical prestige of "classical" Spanish, then, must be ended. Carlos Fuentes states that Spanish America's language will continue to be false and anachronistic as long as it is content to reflect and justify the present order of things. Spanish American works today must not be of order, but disorder—or an order different from the presently accepted one. It must not simply reflect (and thus reinforce) the current "establishment." Today's literature must deny to the established order the traditional language which it desires; it must oppose that order with a new language of alarm, of renovation, of discord, humor and ambiguity—a language, in sum, which will more closely coincide with the true state of Spanish American society and open new avenues of expression for evolving, future societies.¹⁰ Our societies, Fuentes says, do not want or need more witnesses and critics. They need writers who will look, listen, imagine and speak—and who will deny that we live in the best of all possible worlds.¹¹

Fuentes reaffirms an idea which we dealt with in Chapter I—that Europe has lost its central position in world culture, and that today, universality no longer means adhering to European models. The Latin American writer, in his "peripheral" geographical and cultural position, is just as central to universal culture as any writer anywhere, for, going back to Octavio Paz's notion, Latin American man is now the contemporary of all men. Acceptance of this idea leads to the assertion that to write about the people of Peru or Mexico or Argentina with the language particular to those regions is not to be regionalistic or restricted in scope. The author who does so is simply focusing on the universal by means of the particular and the familiar. (Fuentes, of course, is not referring to costumbrista writings which are limited in scope, but to novels which deal with universal matters, but with a more restricted focus.)¹²

Fuentes sees the writer as the essential link between speech and language. He bases his ideas on the structuralist view of language, which places linguistic expression between the opposing poles of structure (language, fixed into a rigid, grammatical system: synchronic), and change (speech, the constant process of linguistic development: diachronic). The point of intersection between these two categories is the word, and its shaper, the writer. Thus it is the writer who must fuse the traditional structure of Spanish with the ever-evolving spoken language to form the new literary language. Herein lies the objective of today's novelists.¹³

Sábato states that all language in the beginning is emotional, concrete and concise. It is through use and misuse that language becomes

commonplace or words abstract and devoid of real meaning (e.g., "honor," "democracy"). It is the writer's goal to return to words their original sharpness of meaning, their conciseness, their value and significance. The way to do this is by coupling words in new and unheard-of ways (he cites Borges' "infame fama") which creates something like an electrical voltage between the individual words, mobilizing their atrophied muscles and giving them a new and unaccustomed brilliance.¹⁴

Returning to his idea that to invent language is to say all the things that have been suppressed for centuries, Carlos Fuentes states that not only is there everything still to be said in Spanish America, but the way to say it is still to be discovered. For immediate reality in Spanish America today offers the writer many of the same social scenarios treated long before by realists and naturalists. The problem is to create a language that will lift such themes above the level of social protest literature. Hence the contemporary novelists' constant searching and experimentation. Fuentes states categorically: "...si no hay una voluntad de lenguaje en una novela en América Latina, para mí esa novela no existe." Thus, the linguistic plane of the novel becomes its functional axis; without a renewal of language, the novel cannot be "new," hence valid, today.¹⁵ And, at the center of the linguistic renewal ("linguistic insurrection" is an often-used term for the phenomenon) is the word itself. The word is, in today's world, power. Fuentes asserts that in its own way the word is as powerful politically, socially, psychologically, as any force on earth—an updating of the old idea that "the pen is mightier than the sword."

A world leader speaks and the mass media make his words circle the globe immediately. Fuentes illustrates by pointing to former United States Senator Joseph McCarthy, who paralyzed an entire nation with words—pure words, verbal denunciations and accusations without foundation in fact. And it is the weight of words which turned public sentiment against the war in Vietnam and ultimately brought about the political end of President Lyndon Johnson. The words of professors, journalists, news commentators, writers and citizens can alter a nation's course. And here we have the core of Fuentes' conception of the Spanish American novelist's linguistic insurrection: to fill the void between the total power of the minority and the total impotence of the majority. Spanish America needs a permanent, constant, critical restructuring of all human problems, at all levels of human society, in order to openly deny the vertical, master-to-slave hierarchy of the existing society. The word is the key, and the writer today holds that key. He can contribute to the creation of a more equal, just society; language, not guns or political power, is the instrument he must use. The old language will not do, for it has helped maintain the entrenched order for centuries. A new language is needed—one that will question and attack the status quo and show constant disrespect (desacato) for it. Language must be liberty, dissent, reproach, disrespect, or else it will be an accomplice to the old order. The problem of language boils down to a constant confrontation, a permanent dialectic, between the false, lying words and aspirations of remote, impersonal governments, and the authentic words and aspirations of the artist and his public. The artist's role is to make certain that the latter prevails.¹⁶

Julio Cortázar, through his artistic alter-ego in Rayuela, the fictitious Italian writer-critic Morelli, goes even farther than Fuentes. Oliveira, the male protagonist of Rayuela, says that the one thing certain in all of Morelli's writings is that if we continue to use language as we have until now, we shall all die without ever having even known the true name of the day. Life is sold to us prepackaged, prewrapped in a traditional literary (hence, empty, meaningless) language. The role of the writer must be to destroy language and literature as we know them, in order to create something better upon the ruins.¹⁷ What that something is remains a vague entity.

Although Cortázar's compatriot Eduardo Mallea does not arrive at the same destructive conclusion on the subject of language, he does express dismay over its present state, which he regards as an obstacle or barrier between man and the expression of his deeper, inner self. Language, as presently constituted, impedes a full expression of man and the human condition. Mallea does not know what the solution to the problem will be, but he is determined to keep searching for a way to break down the barriers.¹⁸

Expanding on the fictional Morelli's exhortation to destroy language and literature as we now know them, as well as the too-intellectualized reason which is an integral part of both, Cortázar says that we should not regard him as too much of a terrorist or anarchist. Morelli's purpose is not to completely raze Western civilization. What he wishes to do when he advocates dynamiting our present language, literature and reason, is to provoke a halt, a reassessment, a self-criticism of our society—to look at the reasons why we have come to what seems to many

people (exemplified in Rayuela's Oliveira) to be a cul-de-sac, a civilization that is bankrupt, a labyrinth with no exit. This is the philosophical point of view presented in Rayuela, and Cortázar, like Fuentes, regards our present language as being one which conforms to and expresses the status quo, one which lulls us easily into self-contentment and smugness. Before we can become aware of our situation, we must have a technical instrument—a new language—capable of expressing something different, something beyond that which we already know and accept unquestioningly. Our civilization will be able to truly appraise itself and move in new and diverse directions only when language points the way by suggesting a new order, a new direction. And language will be capable of doing this only when the artisans who mold language (writers) dynamite the existing structures of language and reshape it to meet their needs.¹⁹

Cortázar seeks not only to disrupt language but also to destroy the reader's traditional taboos. For example, in Rayuela, he attacks the sacrosanct principle that one must always read a book starting at Chapter I, then proceeding to Chapter II, and so forth to the end of the book. For that reason, he puts his famous Table of Directions at the beginning of Rayuela, advising the reader that he may choose between reading the novel in the traditional way, or else read it according to a preplanned hopscotch method, jumping around in the book until all the chapters have been read. The idea is to break down the traditional structures that stifle our society—to suggest to the reader new, unthought-of possibilities and directions that a novel might take. The deliberate breakdown and restructuring of language is aimed at the

same goal: until we make a profound critical analysis and restructuring of the language of literature, we will not be able to achieve a truly profound metaphysical criticism of human nature and the human condition. The two things must go hand in hand, simultaneously, for one is not possible without the other. And Cortázar indicates that this much-desired linguistic restructuring is not the work of grammarians nor philologists, for their task is simply to institutionalize changes after they have occurred. The task must fall to the writer—the creator, who makes the necessary changes occur.²⁰ Certainly, Cortázar's Rayuela is on the cutting edge of the linguistic insurrection. Cortázar tells how an Argentine critic once stated categorically that Cortázar's first works were better written than the later ones. From the critic's point of view, he was right, but from Cortázar's point of view, he was not. The earlier works dealt with fanciful, fantastic subjects and the language he used reflected that literary vein. In his later works, his vision turned inward and he began to search for answers or at least new paths toward answers to the great questions of man's existence, and he found that the earlier, more refined, more "literary" style did not suit his needs, so he destroyed it. This violent act is what upset the critic, who did not understand the correlation between the change in language and the about-face in subject. Once again, Cortázar's act is the result of his belief that the profound revolution in contemporary society which is so necessary will never take place unless there is an accompanying revolution in the language used to give voice to that society.²¹

The linguistic insurrection or revolution, Fuentes declares (he also refers to it as the resurrection of a lost language), requires a wide-ranging diversity of verbal explorations on the part of the novelist. As in all revolutions, the road ahead is uncharted and the future is uncertain. The many directions that linguistic exploration is taking nowadays—exemplified in Cortázar's Rayuela and José Lezama Lima's Paradiso, as well as many, many more—is the surest sign of the contemporary novel's vitality, originality, and its promise of continuing success in the future. For today's novelists are attacking frontally the previously sacred rhetoric of literary expression, and Fuentes quotes Baudelaire who said that sacred books never laugh. Notably, laughter, humor, is one of the marks of the new novel (see Chapter VI). This is further proof that the novel today is indeed forging new paths and directions in a language that had remained too long intact and unchallenged.²²

The developers of this "new" language, incidentally, are quite aware of the paradox inherent in what they are doing—they are, in effect, biting the hand that feeds them. Their attack on language is an attack on their own instrument. Although they attack words, they continue to use them, and to create literature with them. The resolution lies in the fact that the declaration of war on language is not one of a fight to the death. The objective is principally to make language more elastic, more malleable, and hence, more responsive to contemporary needs. The attack, more than on language in general, is on the artificial, "sanctified" structures into which language has been molded (or forced) over the years. It is also important to note that the linguistic revolution is not restricted to the novel—it is occurring in all

the genres. It stands out more in the novel, however, because it is more recent compared with verse and because the novel has been more conservative and traditional up to now.

Forerunners of the Linguistic Insurrection

A complete investigation into those writers in Spanish America who have contributed to the renovation of Spanish literary expression would be a full-length, independent study. Within the scope of our study we can only sketch the outlines of this process. There are three predecessors, however, who are frequently mentioned and therefore deserve at least a passing recognition: Jorge Luis Borges and the literary movement known as surrealism (exemplified by Miguel Angel Asturias and Julio Cortázar).

Turning first to surrealism, this French-inspired movement attracted many Spanish American writers, and linguistic experimentation became an integral part of its literature. Asturias, discussing the movement in general, says that there was undoubtedly something very psychologically elementary about surrealism—it allowed the writer (through the technique of "automatic writing") to release the sources of his inner being in a way which conventional writing never did. Asturias was particularly struck by the surrealistic quality of some of the Indian texts of his homeland, like the Popol Vuh and the Anales de los Xahil, which possess the kind of duality, or inseparability, between reality and dreams or fantasies which surrealism advocated. In these Mayan texts, the dreams (or unreality), told in all their detail, seem more real than reality itself. And herein lie the beginnings of today's "magic

realism"—an important aspect of the new novel (see Chapter IV). In magic realism (and in its predecessor, surrealism), there are no definable boundaries between reality and dreams, between reality and fiction, between what is seen or experienced and what is imagined. The surrealist experimentation of combining words at random to create strange, disconcerting modes of expression enriched the language of later writers (especially Asturias) by means of euphony and onomatopoeia, and helped to create the magical, dream-like atmosphere of unreality which the surrealists were striving to achieve.²³

The second, and probably the most important forerunner of today's experimenters with language is Jorge Luis Borges. In his far-reaching, philosophical, often disconcerting short stories, this Argentine writer is the first to bring the Spanish language face to face with its shortcomings. Fuentes praises Borges' prose as being the first to shake its reader, to throw him off balance, to hurl him outside himself into the world, thus giving him some sense of his relation with his nation, his continent and his universe. This does not diminish, but rather constitutes (constituye)—gives substance and relativity to—Latin American man. In order to achieve this new language, Borges mixes genres, turns to old traditions, destroys tired literary habits, and thus creates a new structure into which he injects irony, humor and games. The result is a profound revolution that equates freedom with imagination, giving the artist free rein over subject matter and form. Fuentes affirms that the giant step Spanish American literature has taken from the protest novel to a critical synthesis of society and a literature of imagination would not have been possible without Borges.

Lisa Block de Behar points to the principal elements by which Borges began to revolutionize Spanish prose.²⁵ He attacked what might have been presumed to be the strongest point—the prestigious richness of the Spanish vocabulary. Spanish has traditionally prided itself on its abundance of synonyms, which prevent dull repetition of a single word. But Borges attacks this aspect of Spanish, saying that the variety of synonyms does not produce nuances of meaning and therefore serves no purpose other than being esthetically pleasing to the ear. Lisa Block quotes Borges²⁶ as saying that these synonyms are useless words which "...sin la incomodidad de cambiar de idea, cambian de ruido..." Abundance without diversity, then, is not opulence but only waste—a false baroque style—for these words are useless in distinguishing between fine shades of meaning. Borges also rejects the use of words which have been traditionally used for their historical-literary prestige; instead, he illuminates the most trivial, everyday words with new light by juxtaposing them with others in startling configurations. (Borges for example is a recognized master of the use of the oxymoron.) He seems to have a particular sensibility for combining words in new and disconcerting ways, which draw the reader's attention to the words themselves, thus forcing the reader to focus his attention on the intrinsic meaning of the word. His reader, if perceptive, reacts, is shocked out of his passivity, is forced into a more active role. Lisa Block cites examples from the story titles in Borges' La historia universal de la infamia: "El espantoso redentor Lazarus Morell," "El proveedor de iniquidades Monk Eastman," "El asesino desinteresado Bill Harrigan," "El enemigo generoso." These titles show Borges'

tactic of bringing together concepts which are at least unfamiliar companions, and at times are even antithetical. Borges' "ecumenical" vision causes not only initial surprise due to these unusual juxtapositions, but also humor. Through these unexpected juxtapositions, which no doubt have their roots in the Renaissance conceit, Borges achieves the classical artistic synthesis of unity in variety. By doing so, he draws the reader into an active role in the reading of the story—the reader is induced to share the author's subjective viewpoint of the particular subject that he is portraying. This is a first step toward the contemporary novelists' desire to make the reader an active part of the literary creation, which we will discuss at greater length later. While Borges has never written a novel himself, today's novelists readily recognize their debt to his innovative prose.

Characteristics of the New Language²⁷

Lisa Block discerns five principal fronts on which the contemporary novelists are waging war on the traditional structures of language: (1) a mixing of oral, "popular," literature with what would be considered in traditional circles as "serious" or "important" literature; (2) a sudden surge in the humorous, particularly the ironic brand of humor in the novels; (3) a determined effort on the part of the author to get the reader involved; (4) a notable irreverence or disrespect for the traditional literary conventions; and (5) a frontal attack on old verbal clichés. Let us examine each of these categories in order to see how they result in a breakdown of the old linguistic structures.

(1) In the traditional novel, language was a traditional instrument restricted by established norms. Today's novelists, although they sometimes still use this "serious" language, mix it with popular speech patterns which can be heard, not at meetings of the Royal Spanish Academy, but on the streets and in the countryside. Such language was infrequent formerly, with the notable exception of the nativista, costumbrista author, who often included popular speech patterns in his novels in an effort to help define in the novel his home region or country. But the nativista author almost always chose an exceptional, dialectical variation of Spanish, peculiar to a particular region—one thinks immediately of the Argentine gaucho literature or of the phonetically written passages of Indian speech in Jorge Icaza's Huasiungo. In both cases, the language, phonetically spelled out, is uniquely characteristic of the region portrayed as well as the social class of the speakers. The aim of the current novelist is not at all the same—in fact, it is just the opposite. Today's novelist, in using popular, colloquial speech, is not attempting to "define" the character of any particular region. Instead, he is attempting to desanctify the heretofore sacrosanct language of Spanish American literature, to write a contemporary novel in contemporary language, and thus make it more accessible to today's readers. While a few local words may crop up here and there (Argentine lunfardo in Rayuela, Peruvian slang in La ciudad y los perros), they do not in any way block the reader's understanding of the language as a whole. This is because the popular language that the writer is employing is generally everyday conversational language—the spontaneous, living language people speak when

they are not consciously aware of "speaking correctly." This is a language understandable across regional and national borders. It is sometimes mixed with the more formal, "literary" language to provide contrast and make the reader aware of the transition (this occurs in Rayuela), and other times the author uses this conversational style exclusively. An example of the latter would be Juan Rulfo's Pedro Páramo, in which the voices of the people of rural Mexico set the style for the language used. It is a spoken, conversational language, devoid of rhetorical pretense. Rulfo says of it: "...it isn't a calculated language. I don't go out with a tape recorder to take down what people say and then try to reproduce it afterwards. There's none of that here. That's simply the way I've heard people speak since I was born. That's the way people speak in those places."²⁸ In other words, he is attempting simply to write as people speak—openly, freely, and without "literary" complications.

The use of oral, spoken language also serves the purpose of deflating the literary forms which it generally accompanies. For example, Lisa Block cites phrases such as "se lo juro," "usted me entiende," and "la señora que te dije," which appear frequently within a more "serious" or "literary" context in Julio Cortázar's La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos.²⁹ They serve to desanctify and contaminate the literary language toward which Cortázar feels such a revulsion.

Oral literature is another form of today's linguistic innovation, and Guillermo Cabrera Infante is one of its chief practitioners. He describes his novel Tres tristes tigres as a "gallery of voices," and says that in his book, narrative in the traditional sense is not

important. There are two or three basic stories in the novel which are repeated and altered by the various voices which narrate.³⁰ Cabrera Infante declares that his book operates on a totally personal level insofar as the plot is concerned, but that its real base is the spoken word, not the action or the characters. He states: "...mi primera preocupación...fue y ha sido siempre la de tratar, ver la manera de conseguir, llevar al plano literario el lenguaje que hablan todos los cubanos... Es decir, llevar este lenguaje si tú quieres horizontal, absolutamente hablado, a un plano vertical, a un plano artístico, a un plano literario. Es decir, pasar de ser un lenguaje simplemente hablado a un lenguaje escrito...." Precisamente de lo que se trataba era de escribir lo no escrito..."³¹ Here then is Cabrera's definition of oral literature. In such a scheme, plot and characterization are naturally relegated to secondary importance. The idea of the novel as a gallery of voices is the central concern. He emphasizes, however, that the language he wishes to transpose to the page is "...not the living language of the Cubans, either in their Platonic or Marxian senses—only the essentials of their language projected to what for me was at the time the highest literary potential."³² That is, he does not go out with a tape recorder and transcribe exactly what he hears. The voices in Tres tristes tigres are voices which have been strained through the author's esthetic consciousness and molded to suit his needs. Cabrera says:

I knew that the lives and the language depicted [in Tres tristes tigres]... those talkative specimens and their spoken habitat, were condemned to disappear into silence, not in the course of time...but rather to be abolished by history—that is to say, condemned to

vanish by the revolution through an immediate catastrophe by decree: a loquacious people reduced to laconism.... Thus and by a quirk of history, [Tres tristes tigres] ended by becoming a gallery of voices, almost a museum of Cuban speech in which generations to come will be able to listen to their ancestors, their old artificers, talking.³³

Out of this "oral" writing naturally flows the rampant verbal humor which characterizes the book. Cabrera Infante is the recognized Spanish-language master of the pun. He takes two or more roots of a single word to form a cluster of meanings, leading not only to a humorous reader reaction but also to a basic cleansing of the words themselves.³⁴ Cabrera Infante's natural penchant for this game of "verbal tennis" is evident in the following, in which he discusses (in English) the process of translating Tres tristes tigres: "We...went into collective bouts and fits of paronoidmassia, created Spanish, Spanish, spanning spoonerisms where there were none originally, enhanced its joyceful playfulness with new analgrams, other palindramas, different cross-sticks, and broadened its linguistic scope..."³⁵

Cabrera Infante, although he is perhaps the chief proponent of oral literature, is certainly not the only one. Many Spanish American novelists turn to the spoken word to a greater or lesser degree in their works. Even Miguel Angel Asturias, considered today to be an originator of the "new novel" but not one of its chief contemporary innovators, says that the oral aspect of language has aided him. His famous novel El señor presidente was spoken before it was written, he claims. He and a group of friends used to get together to share stories orally about dictators under whose regimes they had lived, and that is how the book began to take shape in his mind. He says he could recite entire chapters

by heart before he ever wrote them down.³⁶ So the oral aspect of writing is certainly not new.

(2) Humor has been introduced into the contemporary Spanish American novel simultaneously with the use of oral language. This is a startling departure from the traditional novel, which took itself completely seriously, allowing no place for laughter. Not only was the language of the traditional novel sacred, but so was its theme and tone. The two phenomena of oral language and humor go easily together, for humor—particularly that type of humor based upon plays on words—is clearly tied to a supple, pliable language which can be manipulated for amusing or ironic effects.³⁷

(3) One of the primary objectives of the contemporary Spanish American novelist is to involve the reader actively in the creation of the novel as well as the reading of it. The novelists' use of such tactics as oral language and humor, as well as many others, is aimed (at least partially) at attracting the reader's attention and drawing him out of his traditional, passive role as mere absorber of the novel. Julio Cortázar is one of the principal proponents of what he refers to as the "accomplice reader," and we shall examine his and other novelists' theories in detail in Chapter III.

(4) The contemporary novel is marked by an aggressive irreverence or disrespect for established literary and linguistic conventions. Specifically, the author shatters traditional syntax, the traditionally "literary" vocabulary, correct spelling, the phonetics of words and phrases. The author's purpose in breaking all the accepted rules is to render the Spanish language more elastic, more malleable, more

ductile and flexible, so that it can be reshaped to meet the overall needs of contemporary society and the novelist's own personal needs.

Carlos Fuentes points to Vargas Llosa's La casa verde as a first example of this phenomenon of the destruction of literary and linguistic sacred cows.³⁸ In La casa verde, verb tenses and subject pronouns are confused. The past is narrated in the present tense and the present in the past tense. In Fuentes' structuralist view of language, Vargas Llosa turns structured language (lengua) into the live, constantly changing process of speech (habla), as in the following oral conversation, taken from Vargas Llosa's book: "Tú pasaron cerca y en caballos chúcaros, qué tales locos, van hasta el río, ahora regresan, no tengas miedo chiquito, y ahí, su rostro girando, interrogando, su ansiedad, el temblor de su boca, sus uñas como clavos y sus manos por qué, cómo y su respiración junto a la tuya. Ahora cálmala, tú yo te explico, Toñita, ya se fueron, iban tan rápido, no les ví las caras y ella tenaz, sedienta, averiguando en la negrura, quién, por qué, cómo." The effect is to throw the reader into the midst of the conversation, dizzily trying to follow the changes of speakers, with only an occasional "tú" or change in verb tense or person to indicate a change in speaker. Vargas Llosa has completely done without the traditionally structured and acceptable way to present dialogue, with each speaker's name clearly indicating his share of the conversation.

Fuentes points to Alejo Carpentier for a second example.³⁹ Carpentier substitutes the hallowed convention of characters and plot as the central structures of the novel with a fusion in which characters and plot, rather than occupying center stage, become instead resistances

(resistencias) to a total language which develops in all directions of lo real—that which is real (as opposed to la realidad—reality—which may be deceptive and, in the end, false). Fuentes compares the change using Carpentier's favorite comparative art: music. He states that just as contemporary music has abandoned its horizontal-vertical structure of melody and harmony to become total sound, so the novel today asserts its right to be total writing, total language, with this total language flowing over, touching and colliding with the multiple planes of lo real. We suspect that Fuentes had Carpentier's El acoso in mind when he wrote this. A further illustration may be found in La casa verde; in this novel, plot and characters certainly assume a rather secondary position vis-à-vis the principal elements of time, space and language, all of which are multiple planes representing Vargas Llosa's Peru.

Yet another example to be found in Carpentier is the throwing away of the false illusion of recreating la realidad.⁴⁰ In the traditional novel, such as Doña Bárbara, language represents directly, it reproduces "reality": the Venezuelan plains and Santos Luzardo are nothing more nor less than their intended "mirrored" image. In the contemporary novel, on the other hand, there is an awareness of the artifice of creation. Fuentes notes by way of example that Carpentier's short story "Viaje a la semilla" is merely a representation of a former representation. That is, the story is a recreation (through the backward movement of time) of a former recreation (the literary recounting of the man's life) of an aspect of reality (the man's life itself). The literary recreation (the story) knows that it has no existence outside of literature. This

awareness of its own artifice is one of the strengths of the modern narrative, Fuentes believes, because it forces the reader to take stock of the situation and separate reality from fiction. The reader can no longer passively read and obligingly accept the printed page as a straightforward presentation of reality. He is forced to think, thereby joining the process of literary creation.

Cortázar speaks of "unwriting" (describir) rather than "writing" novels—meaning the invention of a counter-language, not to replace the present word images and figures, but to go beyond them.⁴¹ Where such a process will lead, Cortázar himself does not know. He only hopes it will create something better, something capable of expressing the profundities and vagaries of human experience. At any rate, his attack on the root of language—the word—stems from his desire to "unwrite" a novel. His attitude toward words, states Fuentes, is the same as Octavio Paz's, who says: "Atrápalas, cógelas del rabo, chillen, putas"—the individual word is a "whore," selling itself to any user, with no deep meaning, betraying those who entrust it with meaning. Fuentes concludes by saying that the author must "pour" (verter) the word if he is to achieve a meaningful expression through words. By "pouring," he means reshaping, remolding to meet his needs. For only a reshaped ("poured") word or language will be able to deny the false reality that a false language has given us for so long, and substitute in its place a view of the totality of lo real.⁴²

(5) The fifth and final area of attack against language in Lisa Block's analysis is the willful destruction of all those forms of "prefabricated" or "ready-made" expression which are a sign of laziness

or lack of inventiveness on the part of the writer: set phrases, clichés, trite or pedantic expressions. Words and phrases, as we said earlier in this chapter, begin with a clear, concise meaning. It is through repeated usage that they gain layers of extra meanings, or nuances of the original one. Through repeated use, words coalesce into set patterns, and after a while, the euphony of the phrase obliterates its meaning for the hearer or reader—it is used because it "sounds right." The original significance of the word or phrase is dulled or even lost. The attack on the cliché is an attempt to recharge the word or phrase with its original clarity and concision. Asturias is a case in point. He sees the foundation of the language revolution as being centered around plays on words, onomatopoeia, parallelism (the repetition of a single concept through the use of different words—a practice inherited from the Mayan Indians), the multiplication of syllables and the use of augmentatives, alliterations, verbal refrains, and the mating or juxtaposition of words that, as the Mayan Indians say, have never met before (Asturias points out that the Indians say that poetry is where words meet for the first time).⁴³ All of these methods or instruments serve the purpose of drawing the reader's attention to the individual word, forcing him to evaluate its content and meaning. These techniques do not allow preformed phrases to stand, but are instrumental in expressing in a novel way what may or may not already be familiar. What is important is that the words not betray the writer simply because they are worn out and meaningless due to overuse.

The Baroque Tendency Versus Simple, Straightforward
Language; "Beauty" in Language

Lisa Block de Behar notes that traditional literary language has been venerated and revered for so long that it practically stands apart from present-day spoken language as a separate system, one which needs to be "learned" by the beginning writer. This dichotomy between literary and spoken language traces its origins all the way back to the Spanish Golden Age, in which the dichotomy between lo culto and lo popular—the "educated" versus the "popular" in literature—was a major issue. It seems to us that there are two clearly identifiable trends in the contemporary Spanish American novel which strive to eliminate this distinction between "literary" and "non-literary" language—a "baroque" trend and a simpler, straightforward style. Superficially, these may appear to reincarnate the Golden Age dichotomy between baroque and classical, but in reality, they are both meaningful, though divergent means to a single end—the destruction of the old-style, "literary," cliché-ridden language. Language which is false or artificial, the so-called "pure literature," is the target of both tendencies. Let us examine each of these trends in further detail, beginning with the tendency toward the baroque.

The Colombian critic and short story writer Oscar Collazos defines "baroque" (in terms of today's Spanish American novel) as meaning two things: (1) it refers to scenography—a way of portraying geography or the utilization of a language which seeks to exhaust itself through the word, through verbal reiteration or in interminable descriptive phrases, in instrumental erudition (erudición instrumental); and (2) it

also refers to the intent to carry the verbal recreation of reality to its furthest consequences. Collazos cites four illustrative examples of "baroque" novels in Spanish America: Carpentier's El siglo de las Luces, García Márquez's Cien años de soledad, Juan Marechal's Adán Buenosayres, and Lezama Lima's Paradiso.⁴⁴

Alejo Carpentier is the foremost proponent of the baroque as the language most apt for the Spanish American novel, and his novels reflect his beliefs. He states very simply: "El legítimo estilo del novelista latinoamericano actual es el barroco." He bases his theory of the baroque on the fact that, as he states,⁴⁵ Spanish American art in all forms has always been baroque: beginning with pre-Columbian sculpture and pottery (example: the twisting, contorted Peruvian huacos depicting physical love, combat and other forms of violent movement and emotion) and highly decorated codices; to the elaborate (sometimes tortuously so) cathedrals and monasteries of the Colonial period. Our art today, says Carpentier, tends naturally toward the baroque because it is historically "our style," and responds best to the Spanish American novelist's need to name things. The novelist must "name" all that which defines and surrounds him in this strange and unfamiliar new world—the "contexts" which we introduced in Chapter I—in order to place himself on a universal plane. Carpentier totally rejects, of course, the approach of the nativista novel of "naming" (with an appendix to explain exotic vocabulary). His method is to define through an accumulation of adjectives and qualifiers of precise, delimiting meaning, painting a verbal picture, but always remaining on a universal plane. In this way, he believes, the Spanish American world will be comprehensible to everyone, and not regional or inward-looking. Even that which is strange and exotic to outside

eyes and minds will take on a semblance of veracity and credibility. Through the lush, luxuriant, yet concise baroque language, the Spanish American author can expand his literary horizons, opening up ever greater areas for exploration. (Carpentier contrasts the baroque concept with the contemporary French nouveau roman, which, he says, is a constricting movement, an attempt to narrow the novelist's focus rather than widen it.)⁴⁶

The master of the baroque is Lezama Lima, who defines his "poetic system of the world" as follows: "El sistema poético no pretende tener ni aplicación ni inmediatez. No aclara, no oscurece, no se deriva de él obras, no hace novelas, no hace poesías. Es, está, respira.... Lo que pretende es un henchimiento, una dilatación de la imagen hasta la línea del horizonte."⁴⁷ Lezama uses a highly baroque language, accumulating images and metaphors in an overwhelming flow of words—to portray his poetic system, seeking to open the novel's view to the widest possible vision of mankind. The idea is that through total language, one can perhaps achieve a total novel.

Julio Cortázar warns against the use of language for language's sake alone, however.⁴⁸ He cites examples—Gabriel Miró and many of the novels of Camilo José Cela—of authors whose works go no farther than language, with nothing beneath. Language in them becomes an end rather than a means to an end. Cortázar calls this type of writing "verbal masturbation," or, as Borges preferred to call it, a way of "mixing up the dictionary." For Cortázar, a highly worked, polished language should serve the purpose of conveying to the reader a system (not a "message") such as his own philosophical system (Rayuela) or

Lezama Lima's poetic system (Paradiso). Language for Cortázar should open windows on reality, it should aid in the metaphysical search which is Cortázar's central concern. Although Cortázar does not speak in terms of "baroque" and his own writings hardly fit the definition of the term, his attitude is favorable with regard to the baroque as understood and used by Carpentier.

Certainly not all of today's Spanish American novelists agree with Carpentier, however, Mexico's Juan Rulfo stands at the opposite end of the spectrum, as an advocate of a very simple and straightforward, uncomplicated narrative style. Rulfo uses a language as lean and spare as Carpentier's is rich and luxuriant. For Rulfo, simplicity is the soul of language, and he consciously avoids the baroque tendency of many of his contemporaries: "I try to defend myself against the baroque, and I'll continue to do so, with all the means at my disposal."⁴⁹ So bare-boned is Rulfo's language that Lisa Block refers to his writing as linguistic "asceticism."⁵⁰ His economy of language, she states, seeks to return to the primary function of the word—to use it as an instrument of expression and not as an instrument of adornment. Through linguistic synthesis, Rulfo regains for language its function of communication. This stark language, stripped of adornment, is uniquely appropriate for his description of the dusty villages of Jalisco and their reticent inhabitants. One wonders if Rulfo was conscious of the parallel between stark language, stark landscape and a taciturn people, or if it simply came naturally to a man who is taciturn himself and is a native of the region he depicts. One may suspect that rather than being a carefully orchestrated theoretical approach to writing, Rulfo's

style is simply a form of expression best suited to his own temperament. As we noted above, he aims to write in an oral, conversational style which is simple and direct: "I don't want to speak as you write, but to write as you speak."⁵¹

Ernesto Sábato shares Rulfo's dislike of literary language. He says⁵² that for centuries, writers and readers have abided by a dual standard of language, with the simple, straightforward language of daily conversation being used in daily life, and a special, high-flown language being set aside for use in literature. He calls this latter a "Sunday language" (lenguaje dominiguero). The everyday variety was fine for person-to-person contact but the "Sunday-best" variety was always trotted out when it was a question of creating art. Sábato notes that this tendency still persists in many journalists and some authors in Spanish America, who think it more refined to write equino where caballo would be adequate. They do not seem to realize that poetry is not created with poetic words but rather with poetic deeds or facts (hechos), expressed in a simple and direct way. The mark of a good writer, says Sábato, is that "...un buen escritor expresa grandes cosas con pequeñas palabras; a la inversa del mal escritor, que dice cosas insignificantes con grandes palabras."⁵³ Sábato backs up his position quoting the French philosopher-writer Pascal who commented on writers to whom (for example) "capital of the kingdom" sounded more refined, more elegant or more "literary" than "Paris": "Cuando uno se encuentra con un estilo natural, se queda asombrado y encantado: porque esperaba hallarse con un autor y se encuentra con un hombre."⁵⁴

Sábato insists, however, that the idea of a natural style in language does not denote an easy or spontaneous style. Quite the contrary, a "spontaneous" style would nearly always sound ragged and thrown-together. In order to make a piece of prose sound natural, it is generally necessary for the writer to work and rework his material, paring away what is unnecessary until the expression sounds easy and fluid. Perhaps the fact that Sábato has only produced three novels of note to date bears him out on this subject. We suspect that Juan Rulfo, who has written only one novel and one collection of short stories, would agree. Sábato sums up his position: "Es que los grandes creadores no son grandes por esa mera acumulación de vocablos sino por el poder revelador y expresivo que logran de los vocablos archiconocidos. Como en el ajedrez, una palabra no vale por sí sola sino por su posición, por la estructura total de que forma parte. Sólo un escritor mediocre puede desdeñar ciertas palabras, como un mal jugador desdeña un peón: ignora que muchas veces sostiene una posición."⁵⁵

On the question of beauty in language, Sábato states categorically that today's literature does not propose beauty as its objective. If beauty is achieved incidentally, that is another matter, and is worthy of praise. But he insists that the purpose of literature is to delve into the meaning of man's existence, to get to the bottom of the great mysteries of life and death. No word must be uttered in vain, and if it is (Sábato gives as an example some passages in James Joyce), it constitutes a serious defect in the literary work.⁵⁶ Sábato goes on to say that neither Shakespeare nor Dante was consciously aiming for beauty of expression, but that their goal was the metaphysical exploration of man's

existence which Sábato also advocates.⁵⁷ If they ultimately achieved beauty in their works, he says, it is not that "mere" beauty which one achieves by seeking it consciously, but rather a great and tragic beauty which arises naturally out of the depths of man's being.⁵⁸

Gabriel García Márquez agrees. He tells his stories as the common people do—unflinching, mixing reality with fiction, but with a firm conviction that it is all true (see Chapter III's section on "style"). He states that "the problem of literature is words." His short novel El coronel no tiene quien le escriba was written nine times. García Márquez ironically comments that it seemed he was writing the novel in French rather than in Spanish, a reference to the purity, the conciseness and the simplicity of the language.⁵⁹

In answer to an interviewer's question concerning whether or not literature can create an autonomous language of its own, Guillermo Cabrera Infante replies that such would be impossible without falling into the esthetic errors of writing belles lettres and into an excessive preoccupation with style, with "fine writing," worrying over le mot juste—becoming entangled in the old-style "Sunday" language, in fact—and that, he states, would be "the most idiotic of pursuits."⁶⁰

On this question of beauty in language, the novelist who has probably had the most to say is Julio Cortázar. Cortázar's fictitious alter-ego, the writer-critic Morelli, addresses the subject from the pages of Rayuela. Morelli tells us⁶¹ that he is writing a short story which he wants to be the least "literary" possible. It is a very difficult task, however, for "beautiful," "literary" expressions keep popping up naturally, unthinkingly. He cites an example: to describe a character walking down a

staircase, he writes "Ramón emprendió el descenso." He scratches this out and replaces it with "Ramón empezó a bajar." Then, he stops to ask himself why he has such an intense dislike for the "literary" language of "emprendió el descenso." It means precisely the same thing as "empezó a bajar"; the chief difference is that the latter is prosaic (that is, a mere vehicle of information) while the former combines the useful (information) with the agreeable (it is "elegant," it "sounds nice"). What repels him in the literary form, Morelli says, is the use of a verb and a noun which we almost never use in daily conversation. They are there merely for their decorative effect. He fears, however, that if he persists in this vein, everything he writes will prove to be boring and uninteresting. But at the same time that it seems to him that he is writing badly, he sees reason for hope. His former style (which we may equate, incidentally, with Cortázar's language in his early works, particularly the fantastic short stories) was merely a mirror for what he calls "swallow-readers" (lectores-alondra), who found recognition and solace in such "literary" language. It is much easier, he declares, to write "esthetically," "beautifully" (the conventional way) than it is to "unwrite" (describir) as he would like to do, in an antiliterary manner. He sees the whole question as a moral one—to do what is right, and not what is easiest. The only beauty that is satisfactory, he says, the only beauty that is artistically valid is created when the artist fuses his perception of the human condition with that of his own condition as an artist. Morelli concludes: "En cambio el plano meramente estético me parece eso: meramente. No puedo explicarme mejor."⁶²

Morelli's disdain for a "merely" esthetic, "literary" language is exemplified in Rayuela in an incident involving Oliveira. Cortázar recounts it:

...Rayuela, from a stylistic point of view, is very badly written. There's even a part (chapter 75) where the language starts to become very elegant. Oliveira remembers his past life in Buenos Aires, and does so in a polished and highly chiseled language. It's an episode that's written fussing over every word, until, after about half a page, suddenly Oliveira breaks out laughing. He's really been watching himself all the time in the mirror. So then he takes his shaving cream and starts to draw lines and shapes on the mirror, making fun of himself. I think this scene fairly well sums up what the book is trying to do.⁶³

Oliveira is obviously making fun of what Cortázar describes as an author's clearing his throat, fanning out his tail feathers, and re-producing on a slightly higher level what a semiliterate man does when he sits down to write a letter and finds it necessary to use a completely different language from the one he ordinarily speaks. Cortázar affirms that literature abounds with "well-written" works which say nothing at all if one looks closely. Any attempt to separate form and content (another of the traditional literary myths) is erroneous, for the one must adjust to the requirements of the other. A writer may have a very florid, highly developed style, but have nothing to say. Or he may have much to say but lack the necessary linguistic skills. In either case, the writer will be a failure, Cortázar says, for to be successful, the writer must achieve the synthesis to which Morelli referred (above).⁶⁴ And in his search for a new language, Cortázar-Morelli is seeking (by rather different means) to achieve the same end Borges sought (v.s.), that is, to recapture the pristine conciseness, the sharp-edged precision

of each word: "Lo que Morelli quiere es devolverle al lenguaje sus derechos. Habla de expurgarlo, castigarlo, cambiar "descender" por "bajar" como medida higiénica; pero lo que él busca en el fondo es devolverle al verbo "descender" todo su brillo, para que pueda ser usado como yo uso los fósforos y no como un fragmento decorativo, un pedazo de lugar común."⁶⁵

Experimentation with Language

Without pretending to offer a complete analysis, and relying once again on the categories used by Lisa Block de Behar in her study, it would be fair to state that the fundamental thrust in the current "linguistic insurrection" is the breaking up of clichés, and the attendant surprising and humorous effects obtained as a result. Lisa Block cites as examples Cortázar's "la frente surcada de argucias"⁶⁶ (replacing the time-worn phrase "la frente surcada de arrugas") and Cabrera Infante's "...del azuloso mar procelado (¿o se dice azulado mar proceloso?),"⁶⁷ deliberately confusing the endings of two poetic ("literary") words. The humor and the value of such cliché attacks lies in the fact that the reader reacts with pleasure and enjoyment, even self-satisfaction, when he discovers the old (cliché) form and subsequently sees the humor or irony in the new form. The imbalance between the two (what Lisa Block calls the desnivel humorístico) results not only in a humorous twist, but also in an enriched meaning, because not only does the new form carry its own (usually humorous) meaning but also, implicitly, the old, discarded meaning. Thus the figure of speech is enriched and transformed; it operates on two levels of meaning rather than one. Rather than

a desescritura such as Cortázar suggests, Lisa Block suggests that this is a sobrescritura, since the original meaning is not destroyed, but only camouflaged.

A second method of attack, related to the first, is the use of the double-entendre (la dilogfa)—the word or phrase with a double meaning—to create a humorous and disruptive effect on a set phrase, whose popularly accepted meaning is based on only one of its two possible meanings. Two examples from Cabrera Infante illustrate this method: "...yo me metí una servilleta de papel (era una fonda a la moderna) en la boca para ahogar la risa, pero la risa sabía nadar crawl..."⁶⁸; and "Oí una cascada de risa, una sola larga carcajada más cubana que argentina."⁶⁹ In each of these examples, Cabrera Infante attacks the cliché by attacking the key word within it, offering a second and totally nonsensical meaning for the word in question. In the first example, he attacks ahogar, suggesting its literal meaning "to drown" rather than its figurative ("correct") meaning "to stifle" by saying that his laughter could swim the crawl. In the second example, he attacks argentina, suggesting its more commonplace meaning "Argentine" rather than its more literary ("correct") meaning "silvery" by juxtaposing it with another adjective of nationality, "cubana." Thus, by manipulating a second (usually more ordinary, less "literary") meaning of the key word in a cliché, the author can reduce the cliché to a shambles, to a linguistic joke, making the reader aware of the words themselves and the artificiality of their traditional groupings.

Two opposing experiments against established forms in language are exemplified in Rayuela—the running together of contiguous words in a set

phrase or the breaking up of words into hyphenated syllables: "...mientras Babs lo miraba admirada y bebiendosuspalabrasdeunsolotrago...",⁷⁰ and "...mientras Gekrepten se-re-tor-ci-a-las-ma-nos..."⁷¹ Although these two methods are more or less opposite in technique, they are aimed at and achieve the same end—the destruction of the cliché employed. In order to decipher these passages, the reader is forced to slow down, and most likely to read them aloud to himself. By doing so, the author has forced the reader to stumble over the familiar—two figures of speech as common as "bebiendo sus palabras" and "retorcer las manos." By faltering over these worn-out phrases rather than skimming unthinkingly over them, the reader is forced to take stock of both the sound and the meaning of the words, thus "recreating" them for himself.

A further form of attack on the written language is made by alterations in spelling. The writer who changes the spelling of words sees himself as recreating those words, making them his. He is also making fun of those words, and of the Spanish system of spelling. These intentional misspellings tend to occur using those few letters in the Spanish alphabet which can cause confusion in spelling due to their sound or lack of sound (such as g and j; c, k and qu; z, c and s; ll and y; b and v; and the silent h). Some examples of deliberate alterations in spelling are Cabrera Infante's "...queremos quomer. —Pero, haziendo burlas, amiguito, no se come..."⁷²; and Julio Cortázar's playful silent h: "En esos casos Oliveira agarraba una hoja de papel y escribía las grandes palabras por las que iba resbalando su rumia. Escribía por ejemplo: 'El gran hasunto,' o 'la hencrucijada.' Era suficiente para ponerse a refr y cebar otro mate con más ganas. 'La hunidad,' hescribía Holiveira. 'El hego y el

hotro.' Usaba las haches como otros la penicilina. Después volvía más despacio al asunto, se sentía mejor. 'Lo importante es no hinflarse,' se decía Holiveira. A partir de esos momentos se sentía capaz de pensar sin que las palabras le jugaran sucio."⁷³ Cortázar supplies one further example in Chapter 69 of Rayuela, of which the following is an excerpt: "El desaparecido krefa en la vida futura. Si lo konfirmó, ke aya en-eya la felisidad ke, aunke kon distintas karakterísticas, anelamos todos los umanos."⁷⁴ Writers see such "terrorism" against proper spelling as "demystifying" words—taking away the sacred, untouchable aura which surrounds them and making them more accessible, more malleable, more usable. And as Lisa Block points out, this "trick" also makes fun of overly literary language as used by semiliterate or relatively uneducated people, who tend to misspell through overcorrection in an attempt to write "properly."⁷⁵

Probably the most spectacular—and the most humorous—of the deliberate mutations practiced on language by our novelists is the invention and use of words which do not exist. The author makes up words and inserts them into a given context, and leaves it up to the reader to decipher the (supposed) intended meaning. The acknowledged master of this practice is Julio Cortázar, and the most famous example is the lenguaje "glíglíco" which Rayuela's characters speak to each other as a sort of verbal game. One sentence will suffice to illustrate the game: "Apenas él le amalaba el noema, a ella se le agolpaba el clémiso y cafan en hidromurias, en salvajes ambonios, en sustalos exasperantes."⁷⁶ It is readily apparent that the subject is a sexual encounter between a man and a woman. At first glance, the passage seems incomprehensible,

but such is not really the case, for Cortázar has tied his exotic non-words together with real, correct Spanish articles, prepositions, pronouns and adjectives. ("Apenas él le... el..., a ella se le... el ... y cafan en..., en salvajes..., en ... exasperantes.") Through this linguistic restructuring, the reader's intelligence and fantasy perceive and comprehend the general sense of the passage. The endings of this new language link us closely to Spanish; amalaba and agolpaba are obviously verbs in the imperfect tense, the remaining new words are evidently nouns. So by carefully placing his fanciful words into an identifiable Spanish grammatical structure, Cortázar creates the hilarious illusion of a unique, fanciful language, while at the same time probing the deeper recesses of Spanish's inner structures. This is exactly what Lewis Carroll did in his famous poem "Jabberwocky," in which he made a game out of language while (partially) destroying and re-forming it.

The idea of language as a game (literatura lúdica) is central to the linguistic insurrection of today's Spanish American novel as it is directly tied to the writers' insistence that language should cease to be a sacred object, fixed forever in rigid forms. Cabrera Infante is in the forefront of this movement. He states:

For me, literature is a game, a complicated game, abstract and concrete at the same time, taking place on a physical plane—the page—and on the various mental planes of memory, imagination, and thought. A game not very different from chess but without the connotation of science-game which many people insist on conferring on chess, as a form of amusement and self-absorption at the same time. I always write for my own amusement and if afterwards there are readers who can read what I write and be amused with me, beside me, I rejoice that we can share this diversion a posteriori.⁷⁷

By playing with words, he not only destroys them in their present forms, but also creates new forms at random, often grotesque, often humorous, often both simultaneously: "hacer el amor hacer el amor hacer el amor—acerelamor aceleramo, acerela, acere..."⁷⁸; and one of the best-known examples: "...y me cordé [sic] de Alicia en el País de las Maravillas y se lo dije al Bustriformidable y él se puso a recrear, a regalar: Alicia en el mar de villas, Alicia en el País que Más Brilla, Alicia en el Cine Maravillas, Avaricia en el País de las Malavillas, Malavidas, Mavaricia, Marivia, Malicia, Milicia Milhizia Milhinda Milindia Milinda Malanda Malasia Malesia Maleza Maldicia Malisa Alisia Alivia Aluvia Alluvia Alevilla y marlisa y marbrilla y maldevilla y empezó a cantar tomando como pie forzado (fórzudo)..."⁷⁹ The object of this verbal game is to create new words and word groups with new and striking sounds and rhythms and meanings or suggestions of meanings. But most of all, it is a game to have fun with—a playtoy in the novelist's (and the reader's) hand, which, as Lisa Block rightly points out, requires a return to oral reading, for the full impact of the preceding variations on Alice in Wonderland can be appreciated only by reading the entire passage aloud or by hearing it read.

Cortázar's Rayuela is full of language games. We have already seen the best-known of them, the mirthful glifglico language. Cortázar's characters also play a language game they call the "cemetery game" (el juego en el cementerio). The "cemetery" in this game is the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy of the Language (which represents language in its most highly formalized, fixed form, therefore the target of destructive humor). The game consists of opening the dictionary at

random, and making up a speech or story using as many of the words on that page as possible. The more rare, exotic or technical words, the better, for that is the point of the game—to show how useless the dictionary (the repository of literary language) is. Oliveira gives us an example of the cemetery game (all of the words he uses really do exist):

"Hartos del cliente y de sus cleonasmos, le sacaron el clfbano y el clípeo y le hicieron tragar una clicca. Luego le aplicaron un clistel clínico en la cloaca, aunque clocaba por tan clivoso ascenso de agua mezclada con clinopodio, revolviendo los clisos como clerizón clorótico."⁸⁰

Another game Cortázar plays with the reader is in Chapter 34 of Rayuela in which two stories are told simultaneously. One is told on lines 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, etc.; the other on lines 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, etc. He does not warn the reader, however, and the reader is left to figure it out for himself. The reader must also decipher the apocopated words in the following: "...como lo sabe cualquiera que frecuente tertulias de españoles o argentinos después de la tercera copa / rica Latina buscando desde hace años un camino: Lezama Lima, Fuentes, Vargas Llosa, dos o tres más apenas, han empezado a abrir picadas a machete limpio / tores más jóvenes..."⁸¹ These abrupt changes give the impression of the author's mind as it jumps from one idea to the next. The game consists of following the train of thought and supplying the missing syllables to complete the words.

In another form of literatura lúdica, the Cuban novelist Severo Sarduy plays a game with his reader which he calls "radial reading." In this reading, Sarduy writes an entire passage without ever mentioning the key word. He gives numerous clues from which the reader must guess the missing key word. Sarduy gives us an example from his novel Cobra:

—Sí—añadió el Facultativo—, los curanderos legendarios que fundaron el Sikkim, para combatir el albarazo o blanca morfea, un herpes corrosivo, o más bien una lepra que atacaba al ganado, inyectaban a las reses un alcaloide del apio disuelto en agua fría. En las montañas los pastores usaban nieve. Poco a poco estos últimos fueron descubriendo que los animales, después de los enemas, al mismo tiempo que entraban en un sopor sin límites, crecían milagrosamente, y que ello, al contrario de todo lo previsto, estaba en relación directa no con la cantidad del extracto, sino con la del disolvente. Así se formó la raza de los yacks, esos búfalos mansos que aún hoy en día recorren las mesetas del Asia Central, siguiendo a los monjes peregrinos. El cambio morfológico que pretendemos puede obtenerse, y ello sin que Pup abandone los brazos de Morfeo: basta con inyectarle en las venas nieve.⁸²

In order to decipher the passage, the reader must discover the missing key word, which is morfina. Although never mentioned, morfina is suggested by (1) morfológico/morfea (a sickness)/Morfeo; (2) alcaloide del apio (read: alcaloide del opio); (3) nieve (slang name for the drug), blanca; and (4) inyectarle en las venas. These are the "radial" clues which lead to the central word, morfina, and to discover the missing link is the reader's task.

In conclusion, the language of the novel has risen from being an accessory, traditional means of expression, to one of central concern to the novelist. This preoccupation has taken and continues to take multiple directions, but the desire to reform the literary Spanish language is so pervasive among today's Spanish American novelists that it is a unifying nexus. Vargas Llosa concludes that the search for new linguistic forms of expression in many of today's writers has led to works which are, more than anything, linguistic experiments, novels whose heroes are not men, but rather words.⁸³ Cabrera Infante, in response to the question "What does literary creation mean to you?", answers simply: "Words, words, words."⁸⁴ Such is the overpowering importance of language in today's Spanish American novel.

NOTES

¹Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, pp. 30-35.

²Ibid., pp. 93-94.

³Ibid., p. 30.

⁴Ibid., p. 94.

⁵Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, p. 32.

⁶As Sábato points out, this subservience extends all the way to copying peninsular Spanish mistakes, such as the often-heard "les invitamos a escuchar" on Spanish American radio and television programs; these announcers are taking as a sign of refinement and elegance what is really no more than a peninsular confusion between the dative pronoun les and the accusative los.

⁷Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, p. 216.

⁸Ibid., pp. 219-220.

⁹Ibid., pp. 220-221.

¹⁰Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, pp. 31-32.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 94-95.

¹²Ibid., p. 32.

¹³Ibid., pp. 32-33

¹⁴Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, p. 243.

¹⁵Fuentes, "Situación del escritor en América Latina," p. 17.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 20-21.

¹⁷Julio Cortázar, Rayuela, 11th ed. (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1969), p. 503.

¹⁸Carmen Rivelli, "Entrevista a Eduardo Mallea en Buenos Aires," Hispania, March 1971, pp. 193-194.

¹⁹González Bermejo, Cosas de escritores, p. 99.

²⁰Margarita García Flores, "Siete respuestas de Julio Cortázar," Revista de la Universidad de México, March 1967, p. 11.

²¹Ibid.,

²²Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, p. 30.

²³Guibert, Seven Voices, p. 136.

²⁴Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, pp. 24-26.

²⁵Lisa Block de Behar, Análisis de un lenguaje en crisis (Montevideo: Nuestra Tierra, 1969), pp. 35-53.

²⁶In Borges: El lenguaje de Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1965).

²⁷In this section and the remaining sections of this chapter, we shall be following the general outlines of the previously mentioned study of language in today's Spanish American novel, Lisa Block de Behar's Análisis de un lenguaje en crisis. Lisa Block's book is an excellent approach to the subject of language. It is well-planned, logical in development and well-illustrated with examples from contemporary novels. Therefore, we wish at this point to acknowledge our indebtedness to this book. We shall be following the characteristics that Lisa Block lists as representative, and reinforce her categories with material we have drawn directly from our authors.

²⁸Harss, Into the Mainstream, p. 271.

²⁹Block, op. cit., pp. 89-91.

³⁰Guibert, op. cit., p. 410.

³¹Guillermo Cabrera Infante, "Las fuentes de la narración," Mundo Nuevo, July 1968, pp. 43-44.

³²Guillermo Cabrera Infante, "Epilogue for Late(nt) Readers," Review, (Winter 71/Spring 72), p. 25.

³³Ibid., pp. 25-26.

³⁴Carlos Fuentes, "On TTT," Review (Winter 71/Spring 72), p. 22.

³⁵Cabrera Infante, "Epilogue for Late(nt) Readers," p. 28.

³⁶Harss, op. cit., pp. 77-78.

³⁷We shall dedicate an entire section of Chapter VI to the novelists' use of humor.

³⁸Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, p. 46.

³⁹Ibid., p. 56.

⁴⁰Ibid.,

⁴¹Ibid., p. 72.

⁴²Ibid., p. 85.

⁴³Jean Michel Fossey, "Miguel Angel Asturias on Literature," Arts in Society, 5, No. 2 (Summer-Fall 1963), p. 354; Manuel M. Azaña and Claude Mie, "Entrevista con Miguel Angel Asturias, Premio N6bel," Bulletin Hispanique, January-June 1968, p. 139; Harss, op. cit., pp. 81-85.

⁴⁴Oscar Collazos et al., Literatura en la revoluci6n y revoluci6n en la literatura, 2nd ed. (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1971), p. 12.

⁴⁵Carpentier, Tientos y diferencias, pp. 37-38.

⁴⁶Carpentier's dislike of the nouveau roman movement, incidentally, is widely shared among today's Spanish American novelists, who consider it too limiting and too impersonal.

⁴⁷Reynaldo Gonz6lez, "Un pulpo en una jarra minoana," p. 15.

⁴⁸Gonz6lez Bermejo, op. cit., pp. 130-132.

⁴⁹Harss, op. cit., p. 271.

⁵⁰Block, op. cit., pp. 117-118.

⁵¹Harss, op. cit., p. 274.

⁵²S6bato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, pp. 210-214.

⁵³Ibid., p. 213.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 214.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 38.

⁵⁷The first part of this statement seems highly debatable. We find it impossible to believe that Shakespeare and Dante were unaware of the beauty of their verse.

⁵⁸S6bato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, pp. 207-208.

⁵⁹Harss, op. cit., p. 336.

⁶⁰Guibert, op. cit., p. 417.

⁶¹Cort6zar, Rayuela, pp. 538-539.

- ⁶²Ibid., p. 539.
- ⁶³Harss, op. cit., p. 234.
- ⁶⁴Santana, "La vuelta a Cortázar en 80 rounds," p. 9.
- ⁶⁵Cortázar, Rayuela, p. 500.
- ⁶⁶From La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos, quoted in Block, op. cit., p. 56.
- ⁶⁷Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Tres tristes tigres, 2nd ed. (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1971), p. 46.
- ⁶⁸Ibid., p. 208.
- ⁶⁹Ibid., p. 386.
- ⁷⁰Cortázar, Rayuela, p. 506.
- ⁷¹Ibid., p. 379
- ⁷²Cabrera Infante, Tres tristes tigres, p. 209.
- ⁷³Cortázar, Rayuela, p. 473.
- ⁷⁴Ibid., p. 430
- ⁷⁵Block, op. cit., pp. 69-70.
- ⁷⁶Cortázar, Rayuela, p. 428.
- ⁷⁷Guibert, op. cit., p. 408.
- ⁷⁸Cabrera Infante, Tres tristes tigres, p. 325.
- ⁷⁹Ibid., p. 209.
- ⁸⁰Cortázar, Rayuela, p. 279.
- ⁸¹Cortázar, Ultimo round, p. 143, "primer piso."
- ⁸²Cited in Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "Conversación con Severo Sarduy," Revista de Occidente, December 1970, pp. 329-330.
- ⁸³Mario Vargas Llosa, "The Latin American Novel Today: Introduction," Books Abroad, 44, No. 1 (Winter 1970), p. 10.
- ⁸⁴Guibert, op. cit., p. 407.

CHAPTER III
FORM, TECHNIQUE AND STYLE IN THE
CONTEMPORARY NOVEL

The "Total" Novel; the "Open" Novel

In the preceding chapter, we noted that Fuentes, in commenting on the language in Carpentier's novels, said that the contemporary novel strives for total language, for going beyond traditional word structures, just as contemporary music strives to be total sound, going beyond the traditional structural elements of melody and harmony. This "total" language that today's novelists are seeking is the instrument which they feel to be the most adequate to achieve what is commonly referred to as the "total novel."¹ It is a concept of the novel shared by the majority of today's novelists in Spanish America, and, consequently, it is important to define its structure.

The hidden forces in Spanish American literature present ever since the conquest have now flowered, according to Lezama Lima, opening the possibilities of a comprehensive open novel. The chroniclers of the conquest, for example, had the ability to synthesize the ancestral and the new, the mythical and the real. This ability serves today's novelist well, he says, for in today's literature, here and now no longer limit us to a given time and space. Here means planetary unity and now means the flying point of time, liberation from time, thus breaking the shackles of the old novel's taboos. The Spanish American novel today, he states, is neither strictly a novel nor Spanish American, but rather what he terms

"el relato superverbo de lo entrevisto, la fiesta del nacimiento de nuevos sentidos." The contemporary novel opens up new vistas, new ways of focusing on the totality of human experience. If we can achieve that goal, he says, the novel will be so compelling that, despite its lack of traditional form and content, it will force the reader to accept it as a novel and as a new paradigm of the novel form.²

Ernesto Sábato traces³ the ideal of the total novel back to the beginnings of the novel. He says that historically, all the great novels have been attempts to be total novels in the sense that they presented the widest possible view of mankind and the human condition. From Cervantes to Proust and Joyce, the novel has constantly sought to expand its vision. In the novels of Sir Walter Scott, Sábato finds drama, portraits, dialogue, descriptions of scenery, fantasy and reality, poetry and the most humble peasant language; ideas, good and evil, scenes of family life, and other elements which contributed toward creating as total a picture as possible of the society he was trying to capture in his novels. Today's novel, in Sábato's view, must be even more wide-ranging, still more comprehensive, by incorporating the functions which in the past belonged exclusively to the epic, poetry and confessions, the moral treatise and the essay. Such a broad-based construct is easier to achieve in the twentieth century, due to the fact that today the novel is no longer limited by the scientific, positivistic tenets of the nineteenth-century narrative. Today's novel can present a total view, not only of the outside world, but also of the inside world of man's mind, reaching into the deepest strata of the unconscious (e.g., the hallucinatory "Informe sobre ciegos" in Sábato's Sobre héroes y

tumbas). The contemporary novel is a hybrid product which looks into the world of light and the world of shadows, reason and instincts, the rational and the irrational, fantasy and everyday reality, the worlds of magic and mythology. The goal of the novelist is to create an artistic synthesis of as many of these elements as possible. Today's novel, Sábato states, tends toward becoming what he calls a "metaphysical poem"—"metaphysical" in that it delves into the ultimate nature of reality on an intellectual, abstract plane; a "poem" because it is man's (the novelist's) subjective view of the subject, without pretensions of scientific precision or truth. Today's novel, unlike its predecessors, does not seek to demonstrate or prove anything as a scientist would—it wishes only to show what exists, as completely as possible, but always with the realization that the viewpoint is subjective.⁴ In such a total view of the world, the novel easily goes beyond the old literary dilemmas which were so restricting simply because they were perceived as mutually exclusive categories: e.g., the "social" versus the "psychological" novel. There is no reason why a total novel cannot synthesize both points of view. The role of the contemporary novelist, then, is to integrate into a cohesive whole as many facets of the complex reality of the modern world as he can.

Sábato cites James Joyce's Ulysses as an illustration of what he is proposing, a form he calls a "jigsaw novel."⁵ In Ulysses, Joyce presents fragments which have little or no chronological or narrative coherence among themselves, fragments of a complicated jigsaw puzzle which will remain unfinished because many of its parts are missing, while others remain half-hidden in the shadows, glimpsed only briefly

or vaguely by the reader. This is no arbitrary game, however. It is a vision which reflects our perception of reality in life: the stream of consciousness which simultaneously admits fragments from the many diverse segments of the reality which surrounds us, creating a confusing total mosaic which is the reality we experience at a given moment. The traditional novel normally chooses one facet out of the mosaic. The contemporary novel, like Joyce's Ulysses, attempts, insofar as it is possible, to include all. When it does, it will be realistic in the best, most far-reaching sense of that term.

The attempt to present a total view of reality creates a novel characterized by complexity, difficulty, and even obscurity. The novel is no longer two-dimensional and linear, it is three-dimensional and follows many diverging paths and patterns.⁶

Such a multifaceted narrative is embodied in the chivalric novel, according to Vargas Llosa. He states that for the writers of chivalric novels, reality was a multi-faceted thing which consisted of everything that existed (exterior reality—the daily life of the medieval castles), the rational and the irrational, real beings of flesh and blood in their many emotional states (love, hate, sorrow, happiness, etc.), and beings which existed only in the collective imagination and terror of the age, such as fabulous monsters, dragons or fairies. The creators of these novels of chivalry had a total view of reality. They did not exclude anything, and were completely unconcerned with the "scientific" provability of phenomena. This is the all-encompassing view that today's novelist must have in order to create a total novel.⁷ As Vargas Llosa puts it: "Es que... la novela es el único género donde el factor

cuantitativo es tan importante como el cualitativo: mientras más niveles de la realidad, mientras más planos de la experiencia humana puedas apresar, más profunda, más rica y ambiciosa será tu novela."⁸

Vargas Llosa goes on to say that a novel which limits its scope to a single facet of reality—the psychological novel, for example—mutilates the reality which it attempts to portray, in that it cuts off a wide band of experiences and perceptions which are not strictly psychological. The novel should seek not to limit or deform reality but to expand it. That is precisely what Vargas Llosa says he attempted to do in La ciudad y los perros, working always with the total vision of the chivalric novel in mind. In writing his first novel, he states that he tried to focus on a given reality through multiple viewpoints—each viewpoint being embodied in a different character. Thus Alberto "el poeta" is a sensitive, perceptive boy; "Boa" is a vicious, instinctive, almost animal-like ruffian, etc. Each of these diverse characters acts as a prism, breaking down the external "reality" into subjective viewpoints, colored by the personality and mentality of each character. In this way, Vargas Llosa hoped to show not only the irreality of an objective "reality" but the multiple planes of what is perceived as reality.⁹ He sums up his idea of the total novel as follows:

I think every method, every procedure must be conditioned by the fictional material at hand. The best novels are always those that exhaust their material, that don't throw a single light on reality but many. The points of view that can be brought to bear on reality are infinite. It's impossible, of course, for any novel to exhaust all of them. But a novel will be greater and vaster in proportion to the number of levels of reality it presents.... In more recent times there has been a sort of decadence, a shriveling of the novel. Modern ventures into the novel form

attempt to give only a single vision, to portray a single aspect of reality. I'm in favor of the opposite: the all-encompassing novel that aspires to embrace reality in all its facets, in all its manifestations. It can never fulfill itself at all levels. But the greater its diversity, the broader the vision of reality, the more complete the novel will be.¹⁰

Vargas Llosa sees this desire to totally recreate reality in the novel as being a total rejection of present-day reality in Latin America. He believes that European and North American novelists rarely attempt to write a "total" novel nowadays because the crises which are agitating their societies are not nearly so profound as those shaking the very foundations of Latin American society today. The Latin American novelist rejects completely his contemporary society, and that is why he must recreate his own version of reality in the novel.¹¹ For Vargas Llosa, the perfect example of a total novel is Gabriel García Márquez's Cien años de soledad. It describes a total reality, a self-contained world from its birth to its death in all its multiple manifestations—the individual and the collective, the legendary and the historical, daily and mythical reality.¹²

The most outspoken advocate of giving the concept of the novel a wider, more far-reaching, more "liberal" interpretation is Julio Cortázar. He proposes that the novel should be open to all sorts of "extraliterary" influences. He asks how long we must go on clinging to the antiquated ideas of libraries and books (as we presently define them). While he derides the "scholars" in their ivory towers who are scandalized by any attempt to bring extraliterary subject matter or form into the novel, Cortázar claims such freedom to be his and every other novelist's

right, equating it with the daring gesture of Prometheus when he stole fire from the gods of his day.¹³ He says, for example, that as he writes, the central theme on which he is concentrating his attention functions as a lightning rod, attracting to it not only those topics directly related to the central theme, but also others indirectly or tangentially related, or even completely unrelated. These "peripheral" themes, which to some may seem "unliterary," form something like a circle around the central theme. Cortázar states that for him, the only honorable solution is to accept these peripheral themes as integral parts of the novel, and incorporate them as passages or fragments of the novel, as he did in Rayuela, in which many of the so-called "dispensable chapters" (as well as some of the "indispensable chapters") were of this peripheral or extraliterary nature.¹⁴ In fact, Cortázar says he is more and more interested in what he calls "literature of exceptions" nowadays. He finds the exceptions more interesting than the laws. He says that the poet should dedicate himself to the exceptions and leave the laws to the scientists and the "serious" writers (the term "serious writers," as used by Cortázar, is derogatory, denoting lack of imagination and inventiveness). He states that exceptions "offer what I call an opening or a fracture, and also, in a sense, a hope. I'll go into my grave without having lost the hope that one morning the sun will rise in the west. It exasperates me with its obedience and obstinacy, things that wouldn't bother a classical writer all that much."¹⁵

Cortázar believes that the novel is the genre which best lends itself to this openness or totality. He states that the short story

and the theater, for example, are restricted by reasons of esthetic obligation to deal with a subject on a more limited basis. To show us an ant, he says, these genres must lift it out of the anthill and show it to us isolated. The novel, due to its traditional lack of strict rules of form and of a precise definition, is freer to show us the ant within its anthill, to give us the totality of the subject under consideration. In fact, it is precisely the antiliterary characteristics of the novel, its lack of restrictions to rigid rules, which enable the novel to move in such new and interesting directions.¹⁶ It is this freedom from "literary" shackles that Cortázar hopes to expand to its outer limits and even beyond.

Other writers echo Cortázar's opinions, but develop aspects of novelistic theory of special interest to them. Vargas Llosa, for example, is fascinated by the melodrama and truculence of the Mexican equivalent of our "soap-operas." Although he considers such melodrama highly unliterary, Vargas Llosa notes that it represents an integral part of the daily reality of Latin American life. In his view, a great part of the Latin American people love, hate, dream, suffer, marry, divorce, make friends and enemies just as in the most lachrymose soap-operas. These soap-operas respond to a basic trait of the Latin American character, he believes, and for that reason he would like to experiment with melodrama in future novels.¹⁷

Another facet of the open novel is investigated by Cabrera Infante, whose view of literature is that of a game, as we have previously noted. He opens his writings to the vagaries of chance. He tells us that as his books take shape, he has retained typing errors from the rough draft or

galley proof errata, because such random errors seem to him to be in the spirit of the book and contribute to its "playful" nature.¹⁸

In a similar vein, Severo Sarduy, the contemporary Cuban novelist, has developed the notion of a "galactic" novel, another variation of the open novel concept. The "galactic" novel would be similar to a nebula of information composed only of fragments, quoting other texts or even itself. Citing from his own novel Cobra, Sarduy states that he uses entire pages from other books, and other pages from earlier chapters of Cobra itself. It is foreseeable that the final chapter of the book would be composed of quotes from the rest of the book, thus creating a sort of internal literary collage.¹⁹

These are only a few of the examples of how today's novelists are seeking to implement the ideal of a total, open novel. This movement responds to what Carlos Fuentes calls the "vision of life as accident and variety outside the monolithic demands of a static history and a fixed geography."²⁰ "Accident" and "variety" are the key words here, in that they denote the idea that in life, everything is possible, everything is feasible. In today's Latin American world, reality is of overpowering epic proportions, and the novel must be of epic proportions and possibilities also, as Carpentier says.²¹ To express these dimensions, the novel needs to expand its frontiers in all sorts of directions so that it can give voice to the totality of human experience as we know it.

Technique

Novelistic technique becomes very important to the contemporary writer, because in order to make his novel adhere to the concepts of

openness and totality as expressed in the preceding section, he must seek new ways of writing. The "how" becomes as important as the "what." Literary techniques become the tools for translating theoretical ideas into novels.²²

On the question of technical innovations, Oscar Collazos speaks of today's Latin American authors' innate inferiority complex, whereas Julio Cortázar denies its existence.²³ Cortázar agrees that such was the case formerly, but he claims that today there is no longer anything foreign in the matter of literary techniques. The shrinking of our planet through mass communications, the translations of works which follow the original almost immediately, and the increased contact among writers of many different nations have gone far toward eliminating the stagnated compartments into which national literatures used to be divided. Literature operates on a more universal plane today, although that certainly does not mean that a Mexican novel is indistinguishable from a French novel. The different cultural backgrounds and sensitivities of the Mexican and French novelist will always make their works their own. But in the matter of the formal mechanisms of techniques, there is a growing universality or simultaneity of creation and usage. The experimental field here is world-wide, and new literary techniques spread rapidly. Cortázar cites Vargas Llosa's La casa verde, saying that technically, there is nothing comparable in Europe, and that he would not be at all surprised to find European authors using its formal structure as the basis for their new novels.

It is not unexpected that it is Vargas Llosa who has had the most to say in regard to novelistic technique. In a variety of sources, he

has spelled out many of the most salient techniques used today. His study of the novel called La novela lists the three which he considers to be the most significant.²⁴ The first is the technique he calls los vasos comunicantes. This consists of joining together in one novel or short story events, characters and situations that actually occur in quite different times and places. Each separate situation then contributes its particular tensions, emotions and experiences, and, from the fusion of these disparate elements there arises a new living essence (vivencia) which, because it is disturbing and/or strange, gives the artistic illusion of life. Vargas Llosa says that this technique is quite common in the medieval novels of chivalry, and he uses it extensively in his own novel La casa verde.

A second technique, which has existed as long as the novel, is that of the cajas chinas. When one opens a Chinese box, he finds a smaller box inside. When he opens that one, he finds one even smaller. This process can go on (theoretically at least) indefinitely. This technique, applied to literature, is best represented by the Tales of the Thousand and One Nights in which Scheherazade, the narrator, would always finish one story with a lead-in to another story, so that one tale meshed with the next. Each story contained the seeds for another just as each Chinese box contains another. This technique was extensively used by Cervantes, whose Don Quixote includes many tales peripheral to the novel's development, but which evolved naturally from the principal narration.

The third technique which Vargas Llosa cites is one which he calls the salto cualitativo. This one consists of a crescendo accumulation

of elements and tensions until there is a sudden and unexpected change in the nature of artistic reality. Vargas Llosa illustrates the technique with an example from Juan Martorell's chivalric novel Tirante el Blanco. In this novel, there is an episode in which Tirante el Blanco is engaged in a duel with the knight Quigueleison de Montalbán. The narration at first is straightforward, realistic, almost photographic. The author goes into great descriptive detail concerning the knight's steeds and armor, the grandstands and the colorful dress of those observing the combat. There is a very realistic blow-by-blow description of the beginning of the combat. But as the duel is prolonged, the narrative focus turns from the two combatants to the surrounding scene, and suddenly the reader finds that the trees and the people in the stands all around can hardly be distinguished from the shadows. Finally, they fade from view as the duel continues. Then the reader understands that twilight and then darkness have overtaken the duel, that the duel has been going on for hours, although the author never says so explicitly. The light then reappears and it is once again day; then successively night and day, and night and day. All of which means that the duel, begun in a very realistic, credible manner, is now being prolonged through a highly unrealistic, almost impossible length of time. Thus, the author has taken a salto cualitativo without actually interrupting his narration.

These three early techniques—the vasos comunicantes, the cajas chinas and the salto cualitativo—are all found throughout the history of the novel, as far back as the chivalric narrative. Vargas Llosa points out several additional techniques, some more contemporary in

origin, which today's novelists are using. One of these is the montage of dialogues which occur in different times and spaces. This is an outgrowth of the vasos comunicantes, and is evident in many of the contemporary novels of Spanish America. The Peruvian novelist says that in using this technique he was attempting to break the law of causality vis-à-vis chronological and spatial sequence. Not only does this open up all sorts of possibilities for recombining the separate events, but it forces the reader to put together for himself, as he sees fit, the events narrated.²⁵

Another technique that Vargas Llosa advocates is the subordination of nature to man. He states that one of the main weaknesses of the traditional Spanish American novel was its failure to understand that the novel must always be about man and not about nature. In the traditional novel, nature too often dominated and overshadowed man. He states: "Todo puede entrar en una novela siempre y cuando, de una manera u otra, esté condicionado, subordinado a la experiencia humana."²⁶ So nature must play a secondary rather than a primary role in the novel. It should be a projection of man. Vargas Llosa says he has attempted to implement this rule by incorporating nature only insofar as it can explain, clarify or enrich the human story in the novel. Nature used in this manner is just the opposite of nature in Doña Bárbara, for example, in which the human characters seem mere extensions of the natural setting. In La casa verde, he observes, nature exists in relation to man, and not vice-versa.

Vargas Llosa also advocates using multiple points of view, particularly, the technique of perspectivism—the recounting of a story from the viewpoint of several characters. Each character, of course, perceives

people and events in different ways. Vargas Llosa says that this technique allows the author to avoid rigidity and gives him great flexibility and freedom in manipulating the characters and the events of the narration. It also avoids the superficial overview and gives complexity to the narrative (a key component of the desired "total novel").²⁷ This use of multiple points of view is echoed by Ernesto Sábato, who employs it extensively in his novel Sobre héroes y tumbas. He indicates he is very fond of using such phrases as "Martín dijo que Alejandra dijo," giving the reader second-, or even third-hand information, which has been "strained" (and possibly distorted) by the perceptions of the intervening narrator or narrators. Sábato calls this "narration to the second (or third) power." He uses it because it gives ambiguity and uncertainty to the material related, which is more the way things happen in real life than is the case with an omniscient narrator relating The Way Things Happen as absolute truth (as in the nineteenth-century novel). In the contemporary novel, the reader must sort out what he believes to be a (relatively) accurate recounting of the events from the colored versions presented by the different characters. Sábato says that for the same reason and for the same effect, he mixes past, present and future. While man lives in the present, he constantly remembers and calls on the past for examples, and continually projects toward the future. In fact, he belongs to the three times simultaneously. By mixing them in the novel, Sábato hopes to achieve a similar coexistence of these three times. As with the multiple point of view, this technique creates ambiguity, forcing the reader to sort out the course of events.²⁸

We saw earlier, in our discussion of the total novel, how Vargas Llosa advocates the use of as many planes of reality as possible to achieve as broad a view as possible of the events narrated. He also practices a technique he calls the corte continuo. He notes²⁹ that a work of fiction can never be more than a minute portion of the reality it seeks to represent—the tip of the iceberg, as Hemingway put it. The writer is forced to select those relatively few events and characters which will go toward making up his narrative. The corte continuo helps by fusing into a narrative unity causes and effects. Thus, events are explained not through a chronological sequence based first on cause, then on process and, eventually, final results (which may occur ten years later), but rather by cutting across all the intervening space and time and placing cause and final effect side by side in the novel. If the missing links of such a narration confuse the reader, well and good, for it gives him participation in the novel.

A further technique is the restructuring of dialogue (referred to as acotación dramática). We have already seen one example of how Vargas Llosa reshapes dialogue, eliminating all references to the speakers (see page 60). He states that he regards the traditional dialogue indicators (such as "Dijo, poniendo una cara lúgubre," or "Dijo, levantando el brazo parsimoniosamente") as worn-out fossils which interrupt the smooth flow of the reading of the dialogue. The reading should be as smooth as the oral act of dialogue itself. In seeking a more dynamic, creative alternative to traditional forms, Vargas Llosa often substitutes the thoughts of the speaker (which may or may not coincide with what he is saying) or the reactions of the listener. By

so doing, he hopes to create an overview of the situation in which the dialogue occurs, including the emotions and reactions of the characters who participate in the dialogue, without having to directly indicate such reactions to the reader.³⁰

Vargas Llosa discusses another technical problem which arose while he was writing La ciudad y los perros; and which he finally solved by using a variation on the technique of using multiple points of view—the technique of employing a third party (or intermediary) as narrator.³¹ The problem arose when the author approached the scenes which contain considerable shock value—for example, the scenes of collective masturbation, the episode involving the rape of a chicken or the attempt to violate one of the boys. These scenes were indispensable to the portrayal of dormitory life in the military school. But Vargas Llosa says he found a straightforward recounting of such events always turned out to be unreal or unconvincing because of their exorbitance, their gratuitous violence and savagery. For him, reality cannot be bodily transplanted into literature as the nineteenth-century realists attempted to do. In order to make these scenes viable and to cushion the shock to the reader, he hit upon the idea of presenting them through a third person intermediary. He chose a roving spectator, an unintellectual one, for he did not want the intermediary to rationalize or explain the violence. The character he created to reveal the degenerate, horrible aspect of the school is Boa, who, to some extent, is the personification of that horror (Boa has sexual relations with a dog himself). Through the use of Boa, Vargas Llosa hopes to soften the impact so that the reader will not reject the violence outright, as well he might if it

were related by Alberto "el poeta," the protagonist, whose character is too foreign to such monstrous acts. Vargas Llosa's use of an intermediary narrator responds to his belief that reality must be transformed before it is presented to the reader. Otherwise, he says, reality may die on the (writer's) operating table.

The problem of the narrator has also preoccupied Guillermo Cabrera Infante, particularly in his novel Tres tristes tigres.³² As we have seen, in this novel Cabrera Infante attempts to produce a "gallery of voices," rather than a traditional narration. In order to reproduce the voices, he says he found the first person narration to be the only adequate technical vehicle. The problem with this solution is that many readers automatically associate a first person narrator with the author of the book, and assume that such a book is autobiographical. Cabrera Infante warns against that assumption, saying that there is no more reason to suppose that a first person (in contrast with a third person) narrator is the author. However, he considers such erroneous conclusions as probably inevitable, citing Somerset Maugham's similar experience with first person narrative. The narrator, he emphasizes, is as much a creation of the author's imagination as are all the other characters and situations in the book.³³ Vargas Llosa, however, disagrees with Cabrera Infante's assertion that his novel (or any other) is not at all autobiographical; Vargas Llosa asserts that, to a certain degree, all novels are autobiographical.³⁴ The novel, he says, is like a strip-tease in which the novelist gets up and takes off his clothes in front of his readers. But the novelist must transform his experiences—he cannot simply sit down and relate his life. He must transpose his vital experiences

through his own particular sensitivities, using whatever techniques seem appropriate to the case, in order to make of his novel a work of art rather than merely a "strip-tease" act. It is through the artistic transformation that the work takes on value and life of its own, and moves away from autobiography and factual events. This is the function of "technique"—to transpose the artist's personal experiences into an autonomous, independent work of art.

Surrealism has also suggested new techniques to the Latin American novelist, particularly, as we saw earlier, the technique of automatic writing. Miguel Angel Asturias uses this technique extensively, and sees it as a way of opening up avenues of expression to the subconscious and unconscious portions of man's mind.³⁵ He says that all of his novels, with the exception of the carefully planned El señor presidente, benefited at least partially from the technique of automatic writing. He tells us that he would go over and over a story in his mind until its basic outlines were well fixed. Then he would sit down at the typewriter and let himself go, putting down anything and everything that crossed his mind, no matter how chaotic or incoherent. When he finished, he would put what he had written aside for a month or so, then go back and cut and add as he saw fit. The great benefit which results from automatic writing, he says, is (as we saw before) the new and sometimes startling juxtapositions of words.³⁶

Two additional techniques are discussed by the Chilean novelist José Donoso, in relation to his novel El obsceno pájaro de la noche. One is the use of interior monologue—hardly innovative in itself. However, Donoso uses it so that sometimes the reader is unsure of

which character is doing the thinking or speaking in the interior monologue, since more than one character is involved therein. This leads to ambiguity, forcing the reader to supply missing links and to identify speakers. The same result is obtained through the use of symbols stripped of their meaning—the second technique which concerns us here. Donoso says that symbols mean nothing to him, that he wants them to be "dynamic, vague, ambiguous, opaque."³⁷

The technique of hyperbole in the stories and novels of García Márquez is discussed by Vargas Llosa.³⁸ He cites as an example the short story "Los funerales de la Mamá Grande" in which the narrator situates himself, not on the level of fact, but rather on the level of popular imagination, belief and exaggeration. The voice of the narrator is like that of a street crier, as he begins the story "Esta es, incrédulos del mundo entero..." and continues "...es la hora de recostar un taburete a la puerta de la calle y empezar a contar desde el principio los pormenores de esta conmoción nacional, antes de que tengan tiempo de llegar los historiadores." Then the narrator sets out to tell the story of Big Mama's funeral, complete with all the wild exaggerations and embellishments of the popular or street version, without the strict truthfulness that would be required by historians, who will no doubt later record their version of the event. This approach leads to a "marvelous" version of the event, which García Márquez amplifies in his "marvelous" novel Cien años de soledad.³⁹ At any rate, hyperbole plays a major role as a technique in the development not only of the marvelous view of reality but also in the development of humor in today's Spanish American novel.

Another technique, utilized particularly by Ernesto Sábato and Julio Cortázar, is what they refer to as "brink situations." Sábato says that modern man lives at a very high pressure, constantly faced with his own annihilation and death, with loneliness and psychic torture. Man today experiences extreme situations, and faces the farthest limits of his own existence. In order to describe this state of mind, literature must create exceptional situations which place the reader in the same tension and crisis in which the characters of a novel find themselves. This is the case with the characters in the novels of Malraux, Sartre, Camus, Greene, Lagerkvist and Kafka, and must be the case with any truly great writer of our times.⁴⁰ Cortázar agrees. He thinks that brink situations, among other virtues, have the advantage of heightening the reader's interest. They create a fierce inner tension which the reader cannot elude; they traumatize him. Cortázar explains:

Brink situations are the best method I know for the author first, then the reader, to be able to dissociate, to take a leap out of himself. In other words, if the characters are stretched tight as bows, at the point of the highest tension, then there's the possibility of something like an illumination. I think the chapter about the wooden board in *Rayuela* is the one that best illustrates that. There I'm violating all the laws of common sense. But precisely because I'm violating those laws by placing my characters and therefore also the reader in an almost unbearable position...at that moment I can really get across what I want to say. What I was trying to say in the chapter of the wooden board is that at that moment Traveler and Oliveira have a sudden complete meeting of minds.⁴¹

This revelation comes about as a result of the extreme tension built up in that chapter. To relieve the tension, Cortázar turns to the traditional outlet of comic relief, although the comedy in this and most other brink

situations is a grim, uneasy humor. Cortázar says: "The chapter of the wooden board, I think, is one of the deepest moments in the book. Because lives are in the balance. Yet, from beginning to end, it's treated as a wild joke."⁴²

A technique that is receiving wide support among the contemporary Spanish American novelists, and which we have mentioned in passing on several occasions, is strongly advocated by Cortázar. This is the idea of making the reader an active participant in the creation of a novel, forcing him to abandon his passive role. Cortázar refers to this idea as the "accomplice reader" (el lector cómplice), the contrary of which—the traditional reader who passively read and credulously absorbed—he disparagingly refers to as the "female reader" (lector-hembra) or "swallow reader" (lector-alondra). For Cortázar, involving the reader actively in the process of literary creation is one of the most fundamental elements of the contemporary novel. The fictional Morelli has very definite opinions on the subject. Morelli says that in general, all novelists hope that their readers will understand them, participate in their experiences, or receive whatever message is contained in the work. The romantic novelist wants to be understood; the classical novelist seeks to teach a lesson. Morelli-Cortázar suggests a new, third possibility: making an accomplice of the reader. This requires that the reading of the novel abolish the time system of the reader and transpose him into the time system of the author. In this way, the reader will be able to become a coparticipant and "co-sufferer" (coparticipe y copadeciente) of the novelist's experience. This process involves the novelist's giving the reader

something like a façade with windows and doors behind which a mystery is unfolding. The reader then must search for the mystery (hence his complicity) and it is quite possible that he will not find it (hence his "co-suffering"). Whatever the author of such a novel may achieve for himself will be repeated, perhaps even magnified, in the accomplice reader—a result much to be desired. As for the lector-hembra, he (or she) will not look beyond the façade, where comedies and tragedies of the honnête homme can still be satisfactorily played out. In this way, both groups will be pleased, although it is clear that Cortázar-Morelli prefers the accomplice reader.⁴³ In another note, Morelli confesses that the only character in a novel who interests him is the reader, to the extent that what he may write will in some way help to change him, displace him, upset him, alienate him.⁴⁴ In still another note,⁴⁵ Morelli says that the material the novelist provides to the reader is like a series of photographs or still lifes. It would be the reader's task to invent the bridges which would create a coherent whole out of this series of disarticulated stills, which might include a character's way of combing his hair or the reasons for a character's conduct or lack of it. The novel so conceived would be similar to a series of Gestalt drawings, in which certain existing lines would induce the observer to trace imaginary forms which would complete the figures. Often, the missing lines turn out to be more important than the existing ones. Thus it should be in the novel—the links supplied by the reader's imagination would be the most important components of the novel.⁴⁶

Vargas Llosa, while echoing Cortázar's thesis, states that for him, the novel is the supreme genre because it installs the reader at the very heart of the reality evoked in the book and keeps him there, forcing him to participate in the book's action. He says that the authors he admires are those who sweep him off his feet and throw him into their (novelistic) world, not those who keep the reader at a distance.⁴⁷ Vargas Llosa points out a very interesting variation on the "accomplice reader" technique used by García Márquez. In his short story "La siesta del martes," the author withholds from the reader the most important piece of information, in fact, the crux of the story. We, as readers, must create the ending for ourselves, to our own satisfaction. This same technique of withholding the crucial ending from the reader is also used in García Márquez's early short novel La hojarasca.⁴⁸ This technique can take many different forms, but its ultimate consequence is always the same: it thrusts at least part of the burden of creating the story upon the shoulders of the reader, forcing him out of his passive role into an active one.

Technique-oriented novels have their traps, and the novelists today are aware of them. Augusto Roa Bastos, for example, warns against the danger of falling into "mere experimentation," or a new type of formalism, which would be self-serving and self-defeating. He adds, however, that even such a dead-end would be preferable to a return to the old, traditional style of writing novels. Nevertheless, he is confident that there are numerous novelists of great talent in Spanish America today who know that technique is merely a mechanism which should be used to search for an answer to the question which is always central

to the novel: "What is man?" New and novel techniques should only serve to refocus that overriding question.⁴⁹ Ernesto Sábato concurs, stating that technique for its own sake is a sterile pursuit. Techniques are useful if they respond to the novelist's needs. For example, when the novelist "discovered" the unconscious, then the technique of the interior monologue became not only useful but practically indispensable. But when a technical innovation is used for its own sake alone, he says, it is a sure sign of a period of literary decadence.⁵⁰ Finally, Vargas Llosa tells us that the only valid use of technique is to cancel the distance between the reader and the story being told—to prevent the reader from withdrawing to a distance from which he can act as judge or witness to what is occurring in the novel. Technique must serve to thrust the reader into the midst of the novel, to absorb him into the work so that he loses his omniscience and his detachment.⁵¹

We should point out in conclusion that this section on techniques does not pretend to be a compendium of all the techniques currently in use by the novelists. It is rather an investigation of those techniques discussed by today's authors in their theoretical writings. Some very well-known techniques—such as stream of consciousness—are missing, perhaps because the novelists consider them too well-known and too widely employed today to be innovations.

The Blurring of Genres

The novel has always been an imprecisely defined genre, and today it is becoming increasingly so. Many of the novelists believe that literary genres are moving closer to each other and that their delimitations are becoming increasingly blurred.

Julio Cortázar states very flatly that he does not believe in the concept of genres at all. He says that it is the old fashioned Western rationalism which has traditionally required that everything occupy a neatly defined, clearly assigned place. This includes literature, which was divided into compartments called "genres." Today's books, however, are characterized by a flexibility, an opening in all directions, which makes the idea of genres obsolete. There are novels that are poems, poems that are novels, novels that are collages. Cortázar compares the novel to a large trunk, into whose ample form a multiplicity of contents can fit with complete liberty. Cortázar suggests that the only law which should rule the novelist is that which will prevent the law of gravity from making the novel fall out of the reader's hands. Other than this whimsical general rule, he sees no other formal restrictions on the novel. And this, he states, is the novel's greatest asset, because it gives the novelist the greatest possible artistic leeway, opening up infinite creative possibilities.⁵²

Cabrera Infante tells us⁵³ he never thinks in terms of novels, stories, memoirs, essays, articles, or anything of the sort. "I never think in terms of literary forms, I think in terms of literature.... I always think in terms of the blank page and the words I shall write on it, one after another, and the interconnection of those words, their interplay, their replay, their play." (Here Cabrera is speaking of literatura lúdica, literature as a game.) The genre subdivisions of literature are unimportant to him—they are merely divisions which occupy the attention of "serious" scholars. Cabrera Infante does not

refer to his Tres tristes tigres as a novel. He always calls it by its full title or by its initials TTT. He states that Tres tristes tigres is not a novel in the traditional sense, so why does it have to have the label "novel" attached to it? He asks if Alice in Wonderland would likewise be considered a "novel." But he recognizes that people are likely to continue calling his book a novel, since other innovative works such as Tristram Shandy, Ulysses and Finnegan's Wake are called novels, although they are not novels in the traditional sense.⁵⁴

Cabrera Infante also speaks of the close kinship between the novel and poetry. He says that the novel originally sprang from epic poetry, the Iliad and the Odyssey, continuing through the medieval epics which degenerated into romances of chivalry, which ultimately inspired the first truly great modern novel, Don Quixote. Cabrera continues that it is not unexpected that the first great contemporary novel, Ulysses, also is inspired by an epic novel in verse, the Odyssey. In Ulysses, he says, Joyce recreates the poetic, mythical quality of the Odyssey. Ever since Joyce, "poetry and the novel have approached each other so closely that there are books like Nabokov's Pale Fire in which it is impossible to separate them."⁵⁵ This view of the novel is reflected in Lezama Lima's "poetic system" to which we alluded in the previous chapter. Lezama's Paradiso is, indeed, a monumental poem which ultimately became a narrative. In such a novel, the terms "prose" and "poetry" are practically indistinguishable.

The novel, according to Vargas Llosa, is an "imperialistic" genre, a genre which invades all the others and incorporates their elements. The novel uses poetry, theatrical dialogue and the essay. The reverse

does not occur, however, for the other genres are much more formally restricted in structure than the novel. Vargas Llosa points out that poetry's approach to knowledge is an intuitive one (as we have seen, Ernesto Sábato also speaks of the poetic quality of the novel, meaning its intuitive rather than its rational aspect), while the essay uses intelligence and reason much more than intuition. The novel, however, uses both approaches—the rational and the intuitive—to capture reality, and in doing so, gives a wider view of reality than either poetry or the essay. For that reason, he says that the novel is in fact a superior form of literature in that its scope and vision are broader—more total—than other genres.⁵⁶ This idea is repeated by Sábato, who says that the novel—an "impure" genre—must be a Summa of all the other genres, paralleling on the formal level the totalizing ideal of the novel.⁵⁷

Ambiguity

A remarkable trend toward ambiguity has already been noted on several occasions in this study. The contemporary Spanish American novel tends not so much toward clarity as toward an intentional obfuscation. The novelist often leads the reader into situations in which choices and directions are not clear. Sometimes the novel does not even reach a conclusive resolution, and the reader is understandably perplexed.

Carlos Fuentes says that this ambiguity is due to the changes in Spanish American society. In the days of Sarmiento, choices were simpler, easier to formulate and resolve. To choose between

"civilization" on the one hand and "barbarism" on the other was not difficult. Everyone knew in which direction the future lay: educate the people and the nation will prosper and progress. In such an atmosphere, literature reflected the clear-cut choices of society: the characters and situations of José Mármol's *Amalia*, for example, are irrevocably good or irrevocably bad. The reader has no trouble distinguishing the difference, and readily sides with the "good guys."⁵⁸ But in the twentieth century, the modern world has come to Latin America, and with it has come the end of the oversimplification that was typical of the nineteenth century. Choices are more complex now. Fuentes says that the first breakdown in this black-and-white polarity in Spanish American literature occurred in the novels of the Mexican Revolution.⁵⁹ He states that writers such as Azuela, Guzmán and Muñoz were the first to portray man's character as ambiguous, consisting of both good and evil. In the Mexican Revolution, ideological goals became entangled with personalities and charisma, and the common man did not know where his allegiance belonged. The novel of the Mexican Revolution embodied this basic trait of human nature: ambivalence, vacillation, uncertainty, ambiguity.

Today, dilemmas of epic proportions confront mankind daily. Questions of existence and faith plague him. The overwhelming complexity of life in an urbanized society, in which old values of family, community and religion can easily break down, creates a situation in which modern Latin American man does not know where to turn for answers. Like his counterpart elsewhere in the modern world, he seeks simple solutions but does not know where to find them.⁶⁰

Probably nowhere in the Spanish American world is this anguish and confusion more widely felt than in Argentina, where metaphysical anguish sometimes seems to be the national pastime. Ernesto Sábato vocalizes the feelings of one novelist facing this confusion, and tells us why the novel is the most adequate form he has found for giving voice to the ambiguity of modern life. He recognizes that, as a human being, he is full of contradictions and doubt, and that is why he chooses to be a novelist rather than a philosopher or sociologist. These latter two, he says, are obliged to put down their findings and conclusions in coherent systems of ideas. The novelist, on the other hand, is free to express in his fiction all those things that are eating away at his soul, all his internal conflicts and ambiguities. The novel can be totally chaotic and incoherent. For that reason, it gives us a deep and truthful account of reality—that is, the interior reality of man's being, which is the reality that counts. Sábato says that if three or four really good novels had been written about the dictatorship of Juan Manuel Rosas, we would "know" (i.e., "feel," "understand," "intuit") what Rosas and his period in history were like. Instead, we understand very little of him for we have mostly dry historical data, which tell us almost nothing about the real man.⁶¹

The artist is the person best equipped to portray ambiguity, according to Julio Cortázar. Citing himself as an example, he says in the section of La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos called "Del sentimiento de no estar del todo" that he often has the disquieting but rather enjoyable feeling of being not quite "with it," of being slightly off-center. This imbalance he translates into his literary works by con-

stantly throwing into doubt that which he just presented as fact, or vice-versa. In that way, he also keeps the reader off balance, wondering where truth lies, where he can take hold and be sure the props will not be knocked out from under him. Thus the novelist intentionally robs the reader of the traditional "security" he would prefer to have, and faces him with the ambiguous situations which reflect life's contemporary quandaries and which call for the "accomplice reader's" decision with regard to meaning and truth.⁶²

Citing Carlos Fuentes' La región más transparente as a model of the effective utilization of ambiguity in the novel, José Donoso says that Fuentes uses counterfeit or adulterated information and viewpoints as well as legitimate ones, leaving the reader dazed and perplexed, not knowing what to believe. Literature, concludes Donoso, has absolutely no obligation to explain or clarify.⁶³ Which is the same thing Sábato means when he says that the purpose of literature is not to demonstrate (demonstrar) but simply to show (mostrar)—to show society and human nature in all its profound and often unfathomable complexity, confusion and ambiguity.

Style

Cortázar asks:

¿Qué es un estilo, para usar una palabra ya fuera de moda, esa manera de decir las cosas que distingue al verdadero escritor de los demás? ¿La corrección, la claridad, la riqueza del vocabulario? Basta de bromas. Un estilo es a la vez un imán y un espejo, es ese milagro verbal que ni siquiera el creador puede explicar, por el cual las frases, los períodos, los capítulos y al fin la obra entera actúan como catalizadores de profundas y

múltiples potencias; es ese don de decir que a Pedro le duele la cabeza y decirlo de una manera que simultáneamente abre en el lector una cantidad de caminos que llevan mucho más allá de Pedro y de la jaqueca; es esa porosidad, esa permeabilidad, esa dinámica y esa erótica del verbo que da a Cien años de soledad lo que ninguna Salamanca prestaría.⁶⁴

Style, then, is undefinable—it is a "verbal miracle" which even its own creator cannot explain. Cortázar backs up this notion by citing a dictionary definition of style: "...[la] manera peculiar que cada cual tiene de escribir o de hablar, esto es, de expresar sus ideas y sentimientos."⁶⁵ Style is therefore an individual achievement for each person, a category in which strict norms cannot be established. Each writer must seek his own mode of expression. Cortázar advances the notion, however, that in any great style, the language ceases to be a mere vehicle for the expression of ideas and feelings and approaches that outer limit or state in which it becomes a part of what is expressed, a reiteration of the concept that "form" and "content" are inseparable.

A "bad" style, according to Cortázar, is one produced by a writer who lacks the "ear"—an innate talent—for euphony and rhythm. Without this gift, the writer's style is likely to be pompous, rambling, overly flowery, or characterized by any number of fatal "stylistic" flaws. He cites at random phrases chosen from different books: "...el tático consentimiento del ancestral y perentorio llamado de su naturaleza indócil y conceptiva..."; "...[su rostro se enciende con] el fuego indomable del sonrojo..."; "...tomándole la cara con las dos manos..." (Cortázar asks irreverently if there is someone who could take her face in his three hands). What characterizes all of these phrases is an overabundance of words, which in turn creates waste and impoverishment

in an author's style. To say much with few words should be the objective of style⁶⁶ (see Chapter II on "Simplicity of Language Versus Literary Language"). Moreover, says Cortázar, style should be original structure moving on all planes (altitude, latitude, profundity), and should be the best way to express what the author has to say. Above all, it must not be an end in itself.⁶⁷

That style is simply the best way of expressing what an author has to say is echoed by the Chilean critic and novelist Fernando Alegría. He states that if a novelist finds an esthetic form which fits his own inner reality, which helps to shape and mold it into a work of art, then he has found his "style."⁶⁸

The idea of style as "ornamentation" of language is a concept flatly rejected by Sábato and Cortázar. Style, Sábato asserts, is "the only way in which an artist can say what he has to say. And if the result is unusual, it is not because the language is, but rather because that man's way of seeing the world is." Style, he continues, must wrap itself around the writer's vision of the world as a ballerina's tights mold themselves around the contours of her body.⁶⁹ It is worthwhile to repeat Sábato's citation of Pascal's dictum which we cited earlier: "Cuando uno se encuentra con un estilo natural, se queda asombrado y encantado: porque esperaba hallarse con un autor y se encuentra con un hombre."⁷⁰ This is the heart of Sábato's theory of style: style must flow freely and naturally from what is expressed within that style, and simplicity and directness are the maximum virtues. (As we saw in Chapter II, this theory conflicts with Carpentier's theory of the baroque.) Sábato cites Dante's conciseness and Stendhal's almost

mathematical sobriety as two examples of authors who express their thoughts and emotions without verbosity. As we saw earlier, however, Sábato warns that a "natural" and "spontaneous" style is not to be equated with an "easy" style; writing which seems to flow freely is often the product of multiple anguished versions.⁷¹

That style is determined by the theme of the novel is emphasized by García Márquez, who cites his own personal example, saying that there is an easily discernible metamorphosis in his style. In El coronel no tiene quien le escriba and La mala hora, his subject was specific—the Colombian wars of la violencia—and his style was concise, sober, direct, in the manner of journalistic reporting. In La hojarasca and Cien años de soledad, his style is less direct, less concise, less dry, because he is no longer "reporting" on a problem—his literary vision has opened up to include imaginary and mythical levels as well as the commonplace, everyday levels of reality. The style of El coronel no tiene quien le escriba was simply inadequate to express what he had to say in Cien años de soledad. Therefore, he changed it.⁷²

García Márquez tells how he arrived at the style he used in Cien años de soledad. His problem in this novel was to tear down the invisible barrier between what seemed real and what seemed fantastic, because in the world he was trying to capture, that barrier did not exist. The problem was to make the reader believe the story as he did. It took twenty years and four "apprenticeship" books before he discovered the solution, which was quite simple: he had to tell the story as his grandparents would have told it. He remembers that they used to tell him stories of events that were absolutely fantastic, incredible and

sometimes horrifying and atrocious, but they always related these tales in a firm, yet serene tone of voice. In short, they never doubted their own tales, and their conviction convinced the listener that it was all true. García Márquez concluded that if he told his slightly fantastic story in the same tone of confident serenity, it would have to be equally convincing. So he set out to tell his tale in an unruffled, unperturbed style which is straightforward, direct, and which the reader finds difficult to challenge, though the story itself bends credulity to its limit. He says that it was difficult at times to reproduce the way his grandparents talked without having it sound somewhat archaic or at least out of date. But he decided simply to tell the story the way they would have told it, without sidetracking for explanations or apologies—hoping the self-conviction of the story-teller would carry the reader along with him.⁷³

The "novelistic novel" (novela novelesca) is the narrative form to which Ernesto Sábato believes the novel periodically returns. When the novel faces experiments such as the contemporary French nouveau roman, which is a dead-end alley, the novel must go back to its romantic sources for renewal. He reminds us that the word "romantic" comes from the French word roman, "novel." Therefore, to say that a novel is romantic is to say that the novel is novelistic. Of course, by "romantic," he is not referring to nineteenth-century romanticism specifically, but rather to an abstraction he calls "neo-romanticism" to which the novel comes back time and again after experimental forays in other directions. He cites as examples Stendhal and Flaubert, who were romantic writers to the core, but were repelled by the excessive sentimentalism of "pseudo-

romanticism" which was in vogue in the early nineteenth century. Flaubert's Madame Bovary, a highly romantic novel, was nevertheless written with a dryness and abruptness (violencia) which go against the romantic grain. Although Sábato does not state precisely what he means by this "neo-romanticism" to which the novel returns, it seems clear that he is referring to a general tone of subjective inquisitiveness, a tendency to examine man and his world from a personal viewpoint without scientific pretensions (as in naturalism) and without the lachrymose frivolity of some romantic literature. In general terms, then, Sábato feels the most natural style for today's novel is a return to "romanticism," in order to achieve the total novel of metaphysical concern which is his ideal⁷⁴ and to write with "passion" about man's existence.

Passion would prevent over-intellectualization, a concern unique to Cortázar among today's novelists. Yet, he warns against heeding those who would demand that literature be accessible to all. He says that while highly intellectual literature may go over some people's heads, it may also force them to take a step outside themselves, and may show them something new, something different.⁷⁵ Cortázar admits that Rayuela suffers from hyperintellectuality. But he is not willing to renounce that intellectuality, as long as he can breathe life into it. He says that he cannot and will not forsake what he knows and feels; what, in fact, he is, simply as a concession to prejudice. The problem is to give this hyperintellectuality new intentions, new targets and points of departure. Cortázar's frontal attack on traditional language and style is one major aspect of this intellectual side of Rayuela which

we discussed in the previous chapter. Cortázar says that his literary attacks which are directed at the very foundation of literary art—language, style, words—may seem suicidal, but he prefers being a suicide to a zombie. Therefore, he will hold on to his "hyperintellectuality," for he sees it as the possible "opening" toward his longed-for "something new." If his intellectual style discourages or defeats some readers, that is the price he will have to pay.⁷⁶

In conclusion, an awareness of form and a concern for style are the common denominators which Vargas Llosa finds in all of today's major novelists. The novelists, he says, seem to recognize that their success or failure depends not on the themes of their novels so much as on vision, technique and style. No one single approach or style is to be preferred. Each novelist develops his own, the one which responds to his individual needs, his personality and his perspective. Within this diversity lies the esthetic independence of Spanish America—a goal long sought but which only today is being realized.⁷⁷

NOTES

- ¹Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, p. 56.
- ²González, "Un pulpo en una jarra minoana," p. 15.
- ³Sábato, "Por una novela novelesca y metafísica," pp. 19-21.
- ⁴Fernando Alegría, "La novela total: un diálogo con Sábato," in Homenaje a Ernesto Sábato, ed. Helmy F. Giacomani (New York: Las Américas, 1973), p. 27.
- ⁵Ibid., pp. 20-21.
- ⁶We shall discuss this "difficult" aspect of the novel in more detail in Chapter IV.
- ⁷González Bermejo, Cosas de escritores, p. 62.
- ⁸Ibid., p. 80.
- ⁹Vargas Llosa et al., Antología mínima de M. Vargas Llosa, pp. 140-143.
- ¹⁰Hars, Into the Mainstream, pp. 358-359.
- ¹¹Vargas Llosa, "The Latin American Novel Today: Introduction," p. 16.
- ¹²Mario Vargas Llosa, García Márquez: Historia de un deicidio, 2nd ed. (Barcelona: Barral, 1971), p. 480).
- ¹³Guibert, Seven Voices, pp. 293-295.
- ¹⁴Cortázar, Ultimo round, p. 104, "primer piso."
- ¹⁵Hars, op. cit., pp. 242-243.
- ¹⁶Julio Cortázar, "Situación de la novela," Cuadernos Americanos, July-August, 1950, p. 229.
- ¹⁷González Bermejo, op. cit., pp. 86-87.
- ¹⁸Guibert, op. cit., p. 415.
- ¹⁹Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "Conversación con Severo Sarduy," Revista de Occidente, December 1970, p. 327.
- ²⁰Fuentes, "Hopscotch," p. 142.

²¹Carpentier, Tientos y diferencias, pp. 40-41.

²²We have already examined several of these techniques in preceding sections dealing with specific aspects of the novel. Our present section will be a more general one. Here we wish to present a broad spectrum of the technical approaches proposed by today's novelists in their attempt to create the ideal total novel.

²³Collazos et al., op. cit., pp. 39-41.

²⁴Mario Vargas Llosa, La novela (Montevideo: Cuadernos de literatura, 1968), pp. 22-28.

²⁵González Bermejo, op. cit., p. 68.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 69-70.

²⁷Ibid., p. 69.

²⁸Sábato, "Por una novela novelesca y metafísica," pp. 13-14.

²⁹González Bermejo, op. cit., p. 80.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 83-84.

³¹Harss, op. cit., pp. 355-358.

³²Guibert, op. cit., p. 418.

³³Cabrera Infante, "Las fuentes de la narración," p. 46.

³⁴Vargas Llosa, La novela, p. 7-8.

³⁵Guibert, op. cit., p. 136.

³⁶Harss, op. cit., pp. 82-83.

³⁷Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "The Novel as Happening: an Interview with José Donoso," Review (Fall 1973), p. 38.

³⁸Vargas Llosa, García Márquez: Historia de un deicidio, pp. 399-402.

³⁹For a discussion of the "marvelous" view of reality in the Spanish American novel, see Chapter IV.

⁴⁰Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, p. 131.

⁴¹Harss, op. cit., pp. 240-241.

⁴²Ibid., p. 230. We shall return to the element of humor in Chapter VI.

⁴³Cortázar, Rayuela, pp. 452-454.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 497-498.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 532-533.

⁴⁶Ernesto Sábato also speaks of this idea of making the reader an accomplice of the author. A novel must have its final development and conclusion in the reader, he says. The author and the reader must collaborate in order to create the finished work. Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, p. 197.

⁴⁷Harss, op. cit., p. 358.

⁴⁸Vargas Llosa, García Márquez; Historia de un deicidio, pp. 351-352.

⁴⁹Roa Bastos, "Imagen y perspectivas de la narrativa latino-americana actual," p. 12.

⁵⁰Sábato, "Por una novela novelesca y metafísica," p. 15.

⁵¹Vargas Llosa et al., Antología mínima de M. Vargas Llosa, pp. 137-138.

⁵²González Bermejo, op. cit., p. 128.

⁵³Guibert, op. cit., p. 408.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 412-413.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 421-422.

⁵⁶Vargas Llosa, La novela, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁷Ernesto Sábato, "¿Crisis de la novela or novela de la crisis?," Eco (Bogotá), 16 (1968), p. 630.

⁵⁸Harss, op. cit., pp. 305-306.

⁵⁹Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, pp. 14-15.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 26-27.

⁶¹Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, p. 48.

⁶²Julio Cortázar, La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1967), pp. 24-26.

⁶³José Donoso, Historia personal del "boom" (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1972), pp. 47-48.

⁶⁴Collazos et al., op. cit., pp. 48-49.

⁶⁵Cortázar, La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos, p. 94.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 95.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 98-99.

⁶⁸Ivan A. Schulman et al., Coloquio sobre la novela hispano-americana (Mexico: Tezontle, 1967), p. 139.

⁶⁹Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, p. 210.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 213.

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 212-213.

⁷²González Bermejo, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

⁷³Domingo, "Entrevistas: Gabriel García Márquez," p. 6.

⁷⁴Sábato, "Por una novela novelesca y metafísica," pp. 11-12.

⁷⁵Julio Cortázar, "Algunos aspectos del cuento," Casa de las Américas, July 1970, p. 185.

⁷⁶Hars, op. cit., pp. 244-245.

⁷⁷Vargas Llosa, "The Latin American Novel Today: Introduction," p. 10.

CHAPTER IV
REALITY AND THE NOVEL

The Nature of Reality in the Contemporary Novel

Why should men torture themselves, asks Mario Vargas Llosa, trying to create a fictional reality when there is so much drama and adventure in the "real" world around us. For the Peruvian novelist, the answer lies in the incompatibility which the novelist senses between himself and reality. This breach between the self and the universe makes of the novelist something of a misfit, out of step with his society and his times. There are probably as many explanations of this dissatisfaction as there are novelists; in fact, most novelists would probably not know why they are rebelling against reality. If they did, they would most likely not be novelists. Vargas Llosa says:

¿De qué nace esa insatisfacción de la cual es resultante una vocación literaria? Creo que en esto la respuesta varía en cada caso, que probablemente hay tantas respuestas como novelistas, pero en todo caso conviene no preguntarle al novelista los orígenes, las raíces de su insatisfacción, o, mejor dicho, de su vocación.

Creo que esto también es irremediable, que si el novelista fuera consciente del origen de ese divorcio con el mundo, si él supiera exactamente cómo, en qué momento y por qué sus relaciones con la realidad se viciaron, ya no sería novelista. Creo que la vocación de un novelista es justamente una voluntad prolongada en el tiempo, una interrogación a lo largo de una vida, sobre las raíces, los orígenes de esa insatisfacción, y simultáneamente una tentativa de desalojar de sí esa insatisfacción, ese malestar, esa ansiedad, esa urgencia más bien inexplicable que es la vocación literaria.¹

To write, then, is to search for meaning and to engage in a cathartic individual and collective endeavor. Yet, at the same time, the novelist is aware that he will not lose his rebellious spirit through creation. Writing, in other words, justifies though it may not "pacify" rebelliousness.² Literature's principal reason for being, continues Vargas Llosa, is the result of the constant need to correct or cancel "real" reality. The writer's hope is that he will negate the reality of the material world and replace it with another.³

Vargas Llosa's theory of the novelist's compulsion to write is echoed by Ernesto Sábato. Sábato says that he feels a great discontentment in the face of Latin American reality today. He believes that important literature is rather like the reverse side of the daily world, like dreams, in that the creative act is an attempt to create an alternate reality—a desire generated by the writer's discontentment toward the real world surrounding him. As the inspiration for the novelistic reality in his books, Sábato says that the author must accept all possible views of real life as reality. He says that the "gray apartment of a gray professor who lives on Charcas street" is just as much a part of reality as the more "picturesque," more "novelistic" life of the "tenement slums of San Telmo." Both must be treated as integral parts of Argentine reality.⁴

This idea of the novel as a subjective recreation of reality is central to most of the contemporary Spanish American novelists' theories of the novel. Today's novel does not attempt to mirror reality in the manner of the traditional novel; it rather rejects, attacks or reshapes the universe. Thus, Carlos Fuentes sees Cien años de soledad as the

supreme Spanish American recreation of reality: through the intermediation of the writer's imagination, García Márquez has constructed a totally fictional world, a world which does not need real reality to justify itself, but which (because it is so self-sustaining and autonomous) attacks and refashions the reality from which it was abstracted. García Márquez creates a place, Macondo, which is all places, and a time which is all times.

Imagination is the magic key to this liberation from "real reality," and almost without exception, today's writers proclaim the novelist's right to make full use of his imagination. Fuentes, in commenting on Cortázar's Rayuela, points out that Cortázar fills his artistic reality with accident, comedy, error, banality, in short, the fruits of his active imagination. "Somos como yo quiero verlos," Fuentes says, "no como ustedes quieren ser vistos."⁵ In other words, the relation between real reality and novelistic reality becomes rather tenuous at best. Almost no novelist today advocates that literature should represent or reproduce reality. Freedom, imagination and creativity are the order of the day.

It is useful at this point to recall that Vargas Llosa holds that reality cannot be bodily transplanted into literature but must be transposed: "That's one of the problems of realism. I don't think realism in literature can ever be a direct enunciation of reality. Literature is always a transposition of reality. The segment of life chosen by the author must be transformed, manipulated, compiled in a very special way to prevent it from being frozen, bled on its way into literature."⁶

This is an important point which is echoed by many of Vargas Llosa's contemporaries. Carlos Fuentes, for example, referring to his novel Cambio de piel, tells us that the only way to understand this novel is to accept the fact that it is absolute fiction. It never aspires to be a reflection of reality. Gone is the nineteenth-century ideal of the "mirror-novel." In Fuentes' view, the act of writing itself is an act of transposition, therefore, a subjective distortion of the reality being dealt with. A literary work grants a new form to a given "reality." Fuentes tells how his father read Cambio de piel, and, upon finishing it, threw it down in disgust, exclaiming "Entonces resulta que nada era cierto." The reader, Fuentes concludes, always prefers to think that what the author is telling him is all true, that it faithfully reproduces reality. But that assumption is no longer valid, for, as in Cambio de piel, it often turns out that "none of it was true."⁷ Today's novel, then, is basically unreal in the traditional sense.

To move in the opposite direction and permit "real reality" to intrude too strongly in the novel can have negative results, as Vargas Llosa points out. He says that la violencia in Colombia contained all the ingredients necessary for a series of truly great novels, yet the actual production was sparse and generally of poor quality. He attributes this to the fact that the novelists of the period approached la violencia head-on, describing in great detail the decapitations, the throat-slittings, the castrations, the rapes, in brief, the visible signs of the political turmoil. What the novelists failed to see was that the profound impact of the novel lay not in a naturalistic catalogue

of the atrocities of the fighting, but rather in the living who were undergoing mental anguish in their hiding places. The impact of the horror on the living should have been the novelists' subject, for that would be a subject which would have allowed the novelists' imagination to enter into the creation of characters and situations, which the bare recounting of atrocities ruled out.⁸

The idea that the "new novel" is necessary today because today's Latin American society is new is reiterated by Carlos Fuentes. The old society, with its myths of Latin America as the Arcadia of spirituality and good taste (as exemplified in José Enrique Rodó's famous essay Ariel), has given way to the new, consumer society of neon lights, Sears and Roebuck, washing machines, James Bond pictures and Campbell soup cans. (In his study Tiempo mexicano, Fuentes refers to this abrupt change in direction in Latin American society as a change of gods—from Quetzalcóatl to Pepsicóatl!) This is part of the price today's Latin American must pay for being the "contemporary of all men." And this reality must take its proper place in contemporary literature. The themes considered to be "literary" and in "good taste" are no longer valid in this new universe any more than the "literary" language in which former novels were written. Reality, therefore, is a wide-open concept, and each writer must be free to choose his own and deal with it as he sees fit.⁹

The new reality is not merely different, but operates on more than one level. Cortázar says that he, as well as Oliveira in Rayuela, has what could be called a "marvelous" view of reality—"marvelous" in the sense that he believes that ordinary, everyday reality conceals

a second level of reality less mysterious than human. The problem is that it is hidden by the more easily apprehended surface reality. Cortázar, through Oliveira, seeks to force this hidden substratum into the open.¹⁰ García Márquez would agree. In response to a question concerning what for him would constitute the ideal novel, he replies that it should be an absolutely free book which not only would be disturbing because of its political and social content, but also because of its power of penetration into reality—and best of all, if it were capable of turning reality over and showing us its "other" side.¹¹

It is this other side, the hidden face of reality, which intrigues so many of our novelists today. We have already seen how García Márquez uses hyperbole in his short story "Los funerales de la Mamá Grande" to evoke a second level of reality—the popular, imaginative, highly exaggerated version of Big Mama's funeral. He uses the same technique to introduce mythical, imaginative, exaggerated elements. In connection with Cien años de soledad he says:

Lo único que sé sin ninguna duda es que la realidad no termina en el precio de los tomates. La vida cotidiana, especialmente en América Latina, se encarga de demostrarlo. El norteamericano F. W. Up de Graff, que hizo un fabuloso viaje por el mundo amazónico en 1894, vio, entre muchas otras cosas, un arroyo de agua hirviendo, un lugar hasta donde la voz humana provocaba aguaceros torrenciales, una anaconda de 20 metros completamente cubierta de mariposas. Antonio Pigafetta, que acompañó a Magallanes en la primera vuelta al mundo, vio plantas y animales y huellas de seres humanos inconcebibles, de los cuales no se ha vuelto a tener noticia. En Comodoro Rivadavia, que es un lugar desolado al sur de la Argentina, el viento polar se llevó un circo entero por los aires y al día siguiente las redes de los pescadores no sacaron peces del mar, sino cadáveres de leones, jirafas y elefantes. Hace unos meses, un electricista llamó a mi casa a las ocho de la mañana y

tan pronto como le abrieron dijo: "Hay que cambiar el cordón de la plancha." Inmediatamente comprendió que se había equivocado de puerta, pidió excusas y se fue. Horas después, mi mujer conectó la plancha y el cordón se incendió. No hay para qué seguir. Basta con leer los periódicos, o abrir bien los ojos, para sentirse dispuesto a gritar con los universitarios franceses: "El poder para la imaginación."¹²

Daily life is filled with events which are impossible to explain rationally. That is why the novelist proclaims the right to exploit vivid imagination: it is his key to the "marvelous" level of reality, such as the electrician's uncanny mistake, which exists side by side with the more obvious surface reality.

Sábato's theoretical statements refine the interplay of human rationality and irrationality. The Age of Reason, he says, made the irrational side of man unacceptable. Reason had to be the basis of all human activity. The novelist, however, has the power and the duty to return to man the irrational, instinctual side of his character, which has been there all along, but has been suppressed by the emphasis on rationalism. Scientific truth, says Sábato, will always find that two plus two equals four. But human truth will sometimes find that it equals five, for the irrational world of dreams, myth, imagination and fantasy obey no scientific or mathematical principles. Sábato believes that the novelist's duty is to synthesize these two faces of man, thus creating a dual view of reality. That is how man perceives (or should perceive) reality.¹³

Cortázar says that those who distinguish between "realistic" literature and "fantastic" literature (e.g., in his Bestiario) are dealing with a false problem. For Cortázar, the "fantastic" view arises out of the surrealist philosophy which, as we saw when we

discussed Asturias, advocated a wide lens view of reality from a variety of perspectives. Eruptions of fantasy into everyday reality are not "exceptional"—they are instead quite normal, and that is the view Cortázar has sought to convey in his so-called "fantastic" writings.¹⁴ Vargas Llosa agrees, stating that the contemporary novel has merely expanded its focus to include levels of reality and human experience which have always existed but were traditionally excluded from literature: imagination, dreams, fantasy—surrealist reality. This new fusion of objectivity and fantasy is in no way an attempt to destroy objective reality, nor is it a route for mental escape. It is rather a wider, more complete way of approaching total reality (i.e., through the total novel), and thereby, facing up to reality more fully.¹⁵

According to Carlos Fuentes, the novelist's powers of imagination are the key to destroying the old literary hang-up of "regional" versus "universal" literature. He asserts that the theme and the location are not what make for good (that is, universally understandable) literature, but rather the way in which the author uses his powers of creativity and imagination to make the theme and locale of his works live for the reader. A first-class story, Fuentes says, can take place in Borges' Babel or in Rulfo's Comala. The author, not the locale, is the key to the work's success.¹⁶ This is not easy, he continues, in view of traditional Spanish American fiction. As we saw in Chapter I, Spanish America's history has sometimes been more imaginative than its narrative. Fuentes wonders how a writer could compete with the overwhelming beauty and size of the mountains, rivers, jungles and deserts of Latin America; how a writer could dare to invent characters more fabulous than

Cortés and Pizarro, more sinister than Santa Anna or Juan Manuel Rosas, or more tragicomical than Trujillo and Batista. Faced with such overwhelming "fantastic" reality, the Spanish American writer tended to retreat into a form of writing similar to the crónica, not up to the challenge of pitting his imagination against Latin America's fabulous history and geography. Today's novelist must reassert his right to imagine, to reinvent history, to remove it from its epic frame and transform it into personality, humor, language and myth, to introduce accident, variety and impurity.¹⁷ At this juncture, Fuentes returns again to the already examined concept of imagination and states that the writer's imagination is the key. The time has come when the Spanish American novel faces a new dilemma; it is no longer Sarmiento's "civilization versus barbarism," but "imagination or barbarism."¹⁸

Probably the most significant embodiment of the contemporary authors' concept of imagination is "magic realism" (el realismo mágico or lo real maravilloso). We saw previously that magic realism was inspired by French surrealism, which advocated erasing the boundary line between daily reality and dreams. The best definition of magic realism is given by Alejo Carpentier. He states: "...lo maravilloso comienza a serlo de manera inequívoca cuando surge de una inesperada alteración de la realidad (el milagro), de una revelación privilegiada de la realidad, de una iluminación inusual or singularmente favorecedora de las inadvertidas riquezas de la realidad, de una ampliación de las escalas y categorías de la realidad, percibidas con particular intensidad en virtud de una exaltación del espíritu que lo conduce a un modo de 'estado límite'."¹⁹ To begin with,

Carpentier goes on, the marvelous view of reality presupposes faith. Those who do not believe in saints cannot be cured by a saint's miracles. Carpentier cites as a literary example the convincing tone of Rutilio in Cervantes' Los trabajos de Persiles y Segismunda when Rutilio speaks of men who have been turned into wolves. Rutilio is convincing, says Fuentes, because in Cervantes' time, people commonly believed in la manfa lupina and its effect upon humans. Without faith, the "marvelous" becomes just an unconvincing literary trick, as was the case with many surrealist writers who tried unsuccessfully to invoke primitive peoples' belief in the marvelous. Carpentier says that magic realism "came home" to him when he visited Haiti. There he found magic realism coexisting with real reality on an everyday basis. Thousands of men, longing for freedom, actively believed in the magical powers of Mackandal, to the point where their collective faith produced a miracle on the day of his execution. But Carpentier believes that magic realism is an integral part of the reality not only of Haiti but of all Latin America. He cites Latin America's history: the search for the fountain of eternal youth and the golden cities of Manoa and El Dorado, among other Quixotic adventures. America is far from exhausting its supply of popular myths, he says. In fact, he concludes, all of Spanish American history is little more than a giant chronicle of lo real maravilloso.

For Gabriel García Márquez, magic realism is not only the occurrence of the unexpected, as in Carpentier's definition, but also the mysterious, the enigmatic within an otherwise clear and straightforward context. He states that for him, mystery is what gives literature its value. He

finds magic in commonplace events, just as Carpentier does, and seeks to embody this magic—which he calls the "lost chord"—in his works.²⁰ This concept is in keeping with García Márquez's (and most of his contemporaries') view of a total reality, going beyond surface phenomena perceived by the five senses, to a second level of reality, composed of dreams, intuitions and imagination. As to the objective of magic realism, García Márquez notes: "Yo creo que particularmente en Cien años de soledad yo soy un escritor espantosamente realista, porque creo que en América Latina todo es posible, todo es real.... Yo creo que tenemos que trabajar en investigaciones del lenguaje y de formas técnicas del relato, a fin de que toda esta fantástica realidad latinoamericana forme parte de nuestros libros y que la literatura latinoamericana corresponda a la vida latinoamericana donde suceden las cosas más extraordinarias todos los días como los que hicieron treinticuatro guerras civiles y las perdieron todas..."²¹

The Novelist as Witness to His Society

An important question in the contemporary novel of Spanish America is whether or not the novelist is or should be a witness to his society—whether or not his works should reflect the specific problems of Spanish American society. This question receives an almost unanimously affirmative answer from the contemporary writers, although when they say "witness to society," they mean something quite different from what was understood by nineteenth-century realists.

Ernesto Sábato says that the novelist's principal role is to be a witness of his society.²² The novelist's testimony is more complete

than that of a philosopher, for example, because the novel's hybrid nature (a cross between fiction and reality), its contradictory ambiguity, enable it to present a more complete picture of reality—its society—than any other art form. Sábato quotes Nadeau who said great novels are those which transform the writer (as he writes) and the reader (as he reads). This should be the goal of literature. The concept of giving pleasure to the reader, says Sábato, has nothing to do with literature. The novelist applies a huge magnifying glass to mankind, looking into the innermost recesses of his being. Today's novelist is less an inventor than an explorer or discoverer.²³ He leaves behind the old-fashioned exoticism of themes and locales in order to turn his vision to his own countrymen, to the men of his own city, his own street or neighborhood, in order to see what they are like inside. Sábato warns against taking social or political elements as themes—the theme of the novel must always be man, he insists. But to write sensitively, probingly, deeply about man, will inevitably be the artist's most valid way of giving a profound testimony of man and the world in which he lives. Since man is a political, economic, social and metaphysical animal, any novel which investigates man in depth will necessarily reflect all these different elements of his diverse livelihood.²⁴ This, in fact, is the ultimate test of great literature, according to Sábato: the in-depth, even ferocious, investigation of the human condition.²⁵ Any novel that actively delves into the human condition will automatically provide a truer reflection of its society than a novel that consciously sets out only to reflect that society. Sábato sounds a note that will be echoed in Cortázar,

Vargas Llosa, and others: all true literature that undertakes this in-depth look at man and his society will in some way be a merciless attack on that society, because it is an attack by the artist on his own soul and on those he knows best. This point of view inevitably opens the writer to charges of being unpatriotic. Sábato affirms that indeed it is a deep and abiding love of his nation and fellow man which leads the novelist to tear so deeply into their souls, hoping, ultimately, to make them better.²⁶

The novelist as a witness to his society is a position also supported by Julio Cortázar. Cortázar emphasizes that he would never demand that a writer act as a tribune of society, as an agitator, activist or champion of causes. But he does demand that the writer be a witness to his times in his personal way as were Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, the Argentine essayist, and Camus, the French writer.²⁷ The novel, Cortázar continues, through its multifaceted hybrid openness and totality, presents us with characters who act as witnesses and arise to testify for or against us (the readers). But in either case, they help us to understand more clearly the exact nature of the human situation of our time.²⁸

The contemporary novelist does not write with the hope of achieving prestige, riches or popularity, but for the purpose of capturing reality and expressing it in esthetic forms, states the Mexican novelist Rosario Castellanos. He or she writes with the moral imperative of denouncing what is wrong in society (a statement with which most of her contemporaries across Spanish America would disagree). And also, he writes in order to survive on the page, surrounded by all that

he loved, all that has been intolerable and painful, everything that has angered or soothed him. Rosario Castellanos concludes that, as Larra said a century before, to write in countries like those of Spanish America is to weep.²⁹

The novel's supreme purpose, according to Miguel Angel Asturias, is to "contar lo nuestro"—to tell the Spanish American story. We have spent our lives hearing the Europeans tell their tales, and now that the European novel is in a state of decline, it is Spanish America's turn.³⁰

This idea is repeated by Vargas Llosa, but as usual, he finds a rather unique way to state his case. He gives us the image of the novelist as a vulture, feeding upon the carrion of a decadent society. He explains his theory as follows:

This tendency may be defined by asserting that the most propitious moment for the development of prose fiction is when reality ceases to have precise meaning for a historic community because the society's religious, moral, or political values, which once provided the foundation for social life and the master key for perceiving reality, have entered upon a period of crisis and no longer enjoy the faithful support of the collectivity. As a result, great novels normally do not appear in times of revolutionary fervor when the entire society is united behind one great cause. Not a single outstanding novel was written during the French Revolution, or during the Russian revolution, or during the wars for independence in either North or South America, or during the Chinese revolution. Great novels never appear in these moments of optimistic exultation, of hope and faith in a country's destiny; rather they appear in the preceding period when the erosion of the old order permits the community to perceive only confusion and chaos in the reality that surrounds them.

This crisis of faith that accompanies the decay of historic reality, this skepticism toward the guiding values of the world, which is the most overt symptom of the decomposition of a society, curiously enough awakens an increasing receptivity, an appetite, an intense need for fiction, for narrative images that are capable of creating a new reality inherently different from the one in which

it is no longer possible to believe.... This is the phenomenon that is currently taking place in Latin America. The Latin American countries today are experiencing the most disturbing crisis in their history. All agree that one period is closing and that another, for better or worse, will soon open up; but no one has the courage to face up to the reality of today. Nevertheless, the narrative images inspired by this offensive reality which all despise have been received with greedy enthusiasm, with unprecedented credulity.³¹

Vargas Llosa goes on to cite the decadent societies, on the verge of dramatic or even violent change, which produced such literary outbursts as the chivalric novel, the French "romans maudits," the great Russian novels of Tolstoi and Dostoyevski. It is such societies, he contends, that breed in their artists a total rejection of society and lead them to totally recreate reality in their novels, as we saw in our section on the "total novel." Stable societies do not produce this total rejection on the part of the writer; societies in decomposition do.³²

From this concept of the novelist as a vulture, Vargas Llosa goes on to express his idea of literature as a form of permanent insurrection against the artist's society. The writer in all societies, he states, is like a wasp buzzing around the ears of the gigantic elephant (the writer's society), repeatedly stinging the elephant with his sharp-pointed literary barbs. This is a positive service to the elephant, furthermore, in that it contributes to the never-ending process of human betterment, helping to prevent "spiritual recession," self-satisfaction, paralysis, and intellectual or moral softening. The writer's mission is to agitate and alarm, to keep men constantly dissatisfied with themselves and their society, just as the novelist

is dissatisfied.³³ Societies inevitably attempt to "domesticate" literature, to integrate it into the fabric of that particular society. The Inquisition is a notorious example. The artist has the duty to fight endlessly against such domestication, even if that society happens to be one with which he finds himself in accord.³⁴ The great service that the novel renders society, Vargas Llosa says, is that it forces man to take stock of himself, of both his greatness and his limitations and failings. In this way, the novel serves to better its society.³⁵

Vargas Llosa also sees the novelist as the constant "party-pooper" (aguafiestas) of his society. He states that Spanish America today offers the novelist a veritable banquet of targets for his criticism. In Spanish America, injustice is the law, ignorance is rampant, exploitation, inequalities, misery, and economic, cultural and moral alienation are the order of the day. The "eternal malcontent" could hardly ask for more. But even if the socialist utopian society dreamed of by many (Vargas Llosa and numerous other contemporary novelists among them) should some day become a reality in Latin America, the novelist's role as malcontent would not cease. He would be compelled to continue being the party-pooper, even if it meant waging thirty-two civil wars and losing them all, as did Colonel Aureliano Buendía.³⁶

The fact that today's novel proposes as its purpose a deep and probing study of contemporary man is likely to lead to scandal, for man is so immersed in the environment that surrounds him that a sincere view of that environment is likely to produce shock. This was precisely the effect of Vargas Llosa's La ciudad y los perros. Literature, he concludes, is intrinsically scandalous.³⁷

A variation on the theory of the novelist as witness to his society which we have just examined is presented by Cabrera Infante. Cabrera Infante views himself as a literary ecologist. We saw in our chapter on language how Cabrera sought to capture, in Tres tristes tigres, a "gallery of voices" of a loquacious Cuban society which is, in his view, disappearing. In that respect, he feels the responsibility to conserve as much of that society as he can in literary form.³⁸ But when asked by an interviewer if he believes the writer's mission is to describe the world in which he lives, Cabrera Infante answers that writers are not missionaries and that they have no such "duty." His only obligation is to write as well as he can, to carry his own possibilities as a writer as far as they will go.³⁹

We may conclude this section on the nature of reality in the contemporary novel by citing Oscar Collazos, and Julio Cortázar's rebuttal. Collazos states that the permanent value of the contemporary Spanish American novel and its immense popularity—the so-called "boom" of the novel—is due chiefly to the fact that readers recognize their environment, their reality, in the novels they are reading today.⁴⁰ Cortázar agrees, but interprets reality differently. By reality, we must understand a far broader concept than the socio-historical and political contexts of Latin America—we must understand the multi-dimensional reality we examined earlier in this section, the total concept of reality, which "exalts, incites, changes, justifies, unhinges man, makes him more real, more a man."⁴¹

Commitment

The problem of a writer's commitment (compromiso) is an important one among the contemporary novelists. Is the writer the spokesman for his nation or the continent, or is he an individual revealing what he carries within himself? Should he commit himself in his novels to a particular political, social, moral or religious viewpoint? Should he be a crusader for social reform?

Carlos Fuentes believes that the writer's social conscience was born out of his traditional position in Spanish American society: a member of the elite. If not an equal of the elite in financial assets, he at least enjoyed the prestige of being a man of letters, and that won him entry into the upper echelons of society. The writer's reaction was a mixture of gratitude and shame, a feeling that somehow he had to pay the people a debt for his lofty social position. Also there was the element of frustration which arose from the fact that the writer sensed that he was addressing himself from the liberal wing of the elite to the conservative wing of the elite, which either merely tolerated his attacks on the "system" or received them with absolute indifference. This combination of factors often led the traditional writer to political and social militancy, and such militancy often showed in his writings.⁴²

Perhaps the best example of this old-style commitment among today's novelists in Spanish America is Asturias. He strongly advocates committed literature, a literature he regards as "...responsive to the needs of a nation, which acts as the voice of that people..."⁴³ His "banana trilogy" is a particularly appropriate illustration of his

belief that literature should be at the service of needed social and political changes, attacking oppression, tyranny, suffering, poverty, hunger and social injustices. He declares that the foreign audience is chiefly interested in this aspect of the Spanish American continent, and that in this way, the novelist can help to publicize, and thereby hopefully remedy, that which is wrong. It is foolish to assume, he continues, that Latin Americans can teach Europeans to reflect, to philosophize, to write egocentric or psychological novels, or to think that Latin America can produce a Proust or a Goethe. The Latin American writer has a task at hand—to better his society—and his literary works must respond to that incentive.⁴⁴ (Some of these ideas would doubtlessly infuriate most of today's writers.) Rita Guibert, in an interview with Asturias, asked him to respond to a statement made by García Márquez that the committed novel condemns the reader to a partial view of the world and life, that Latin American readers do not want or need to have their own drama of oppression and injustice told over and over again in novels because they have enough evidence of it in their daily life, and what they expect of a novel is originality. Asturias responds vehemently:

I think García Márquez's statement is really a disguised formula designed to prevent our novels from dealing with our own problems. This declaration of García Márquez makes me indignant, because it is inviting our future writers to conceal our tragedy. If it is true that we are describing our own drama and pain and that Latin America is already tired of hearing about it, let her go on listening all the same, because as long as we listen it may be remedied, but it will never be remedied if, as he suggests, we hide our tragedies and take subjects to write about from what is not ours and does not concern us, and try to create beautiful literature by dishing up plots that are alien to us and are taken directly from

European books.... We do not create literature in order to amuse and entertain people, but as part of the struggle for an America which has a right to its proper place among the nations.⁴⁵

This attitude led Asturias to create his often-criticized "protest literature." He responds to charges of literary deficiency in such works as Viento fuerte by saying: "I think it's difficult for this type of literature to be purely literary, to be concerned merely with what is beautiful or pleasing to the eyes or ears."⁴⁶

In the matter of commitment, Asturias is clearly out of step with most of today's novelists. The majority warns against the perils of committed writing such as Asturias advocates but does not uniformly follow. Alejo Carpentier, for example, notes that in today's world, no author can be truly neutral on questions of social and political concerns, and that silence on such matters is in itself a form of commitment.⁴⁷ But with that caveat in mind, he states that, as powerful and ever-present as these concerns may be, they must never be allowed to dominate a novel and turn it into a pulpit. Social and political content has its place in the novel alongside all the other components of reality. But social content must not be allowed to degenerate into social denunciation which is better expressed in an essay or in a documented sociological study.⁴⁸

Delving into the "here and now"—that which is closest to us and therefore best known—is the method advocated by Ernesto Sábato for achieving a universal view of mankind. The writer's task is to find the eternal values which are reflected in the social and political drama of his own particular time and place. To live is to be in the world,

in a given set of circumstances that we cannot and should not try to elude.⁴⁹ But the artist's commitment should be to the human condition and not to a particular political party or point of view or as a crusading social reformer. His only duty is to delve into the essence of man and to be a witness to his era, as Shakespeare and Dante were, without becoming a social reformer.⁵⁰

The distinction between "pure art" and "committed art" is another of the false dilemmas under which Spanish American literature has labored for too long, Carlos Fuentes warns. A personal, individual viewpoint in the novel will always offer the best and truest collective vision of a society. It is the novelist's duty to do so in literature, for what he feels he can accomplish in the political or social arena he should do as a citizen of his society, not as a writer. In a society such as Latin America, the writer cannot be alien to the needs of his society. Furthermore, he should be a spokesman for the masses who cannot make themselves heard. But the artist must never forget that he speaks for culture and literature in general, and he should operate on a higher level than that of social protest.⁵¹ Fuentes contradicts himself, however, by saying that a writer's actions are in his words. What a writer can do in action in society (he cites André Malraux's participation in the Spanish Civil War) is extremely limited, and generally a futile effort. What he can accomplish through his books, however, is tremendous—he reminds us that Hitler not only burned Jews, but also books, attempting to kill the ideas and opinions contained therein.⁵² Fuentes himself keeps a safe distance from committing himself

to any particular literary or ideological point of view—he prefers to keep his options open, calling his position "a rejection of every ideological a priori, an interest in the tiers monde, freedom of judgment with regard to the United States as well as the Soviet Union."⁵³

Traditionally, the Spanish American writer has had to be a crusading journalist as well as a writer, as we have seen in an earlier chapter. Mario Vargas Llosa reiterates this idea, adding that although the situation is much changed today, the novel still tends toward the journalistic approach in many cases. The obvious danger in this approach is that such literature runs the risk of becoming propaganda and of losing its artistic, creative content. That is the case with the bulk of traditional Spanish American novels.⁵⁴ An interviewer asked Vargas Llosa if it was possible for a man to be committed to a particular social system as a citizen, but deny it as a writer. Vargas Llosa answered yes, saying that a commitment to a social system affects only certain planes of reality (political, economic), while a novel seeks to represent simultaneously many more levels of reality, and the author's rebellion does not necessarily have to take place on the political and social or economic planes.⁵⁵ And even on those levels, Vargas Llosa says that a writer has the duty to be continually aware and to assume his role of gadfly, even in a society with which he finds himself generally in accord.

A different view of the problem is presented by José Donoso. He says that he has found that literature formulated merely as a "problem to solve" with no further dimensions tends to be dry and uninteresting,

because it tends to omit the metaphor, which is the essence of literature.⁵⁶

Attacked by Asturias for his lack of commitment to social betterment, García Márquez states that in his view, the artist's function in any society is to write good novels. He realizes, nevertheless, that all good novels are nonconforming by nature and will therefore be naturally subversive to a certain extent, particularly in a continent so in need of reform as Latin America.⁵⁷ But to write social novels which no one will read would be a waste of time and talent. The author's commitment should be to write and write well, to write novels which will disturb the reader through their power of penetration into the multiple levels of reality.⁵⁸ As for his personal life, he does not commit himself. He says: "Yo no participo ya en ningún acto público, para evitar confusiones. Quien tenga curiosidad por saber lo que pienso, que lea mis libros."⁵⁹

A distinction is made between personal and intellectual commitment to the ideals of socialism and artistic commitment to oneself by Julio Cortázar. In the latter area, Cortázar maintains that he is and always will be a cronopio (a creative, free spirit) who writes for his own personal enjoyment or suffering, without any pragmatic obligations to Latin America or to socialism. He will never write for anyone or any particular point of view.⁶⁰ Politics, he states, can easily come into play in a novel. It is just as valid a component of man's reality as love or nature. Viewed in this manner, politics can play an important role in the novel and can even make an impressive impact on the reader. But politics must arise naturally from the narration. If it is artifi-

cially imposed from the outside—if the novelist sets out to write a "political" novel—the work loses its literary value and becomes mere food for moths in libraries.⁶¹ Cortázar admits that his personal views tend evidently to the left, toward socialism, but he will never discuss this in his literature, for only weak authors insist on emphasizing their personal commitment in their works.⁶² Cortázar and others have been accused of literary escapism by the Colombian critic Oscar Collazos for not writing explicitly about their commitment (specifically, their ideological commitment to the Cuban Revolution). Cortázar replies that, while there are writers in Latin America who are escapists, this is no reason to confuse escapist literature with Cortázar's writing. He states that although he has a clear consciousness of the socio-cultural and political contexts of contemporary society, his writing originates at various levels of creation in which the imaginary, the mythical and the metaphysical join together to form a literature which is no less responsible, although it does not preach a social or political sermon. The author's responsibility is what counts in such a situation. Critics and readers can rather easily distinguish the responsible and creative writer from the mere escapist.⁶³

Cortázar warns graphically against the dangers of allowing one's literature to become committed to political viewpoints. In a one-page chapter of Ultimo round, accompanied by an enlarged photograph of an American dollar bill, he reprints the following statistic: "En el año 1959, los Estados Unidos obtuvieron en América Latina 775 millones de dólares de beneficios por concepto de inversiones privadas, de los cuales reinvirtieron 200 y guardaron 575. (De un acta oficial de la

INCTAD, Conferencia de Nueva Delhi, 1968.)" This paragraph is followed by Cortázar's caveat: "SIN EMBARGO / el escritor latinoamericano / debe escribir tan sólo / lo que su vocación le dicte / sin entrar en cuestiones / que son de la exclusiva competencia / de los economistas."⁶⁴

Cortázar goes on to say that any writer of socialist inclinations will be constantly urged to participate in the furthering of the cause of socialism, first through his books, later through speeches, lectures, signatures, open letters, debates, attendance at congresses and conventions, and in politics itself. It is up to the writer himself to see that this does not occur, for that would tie him down and destroy the delicate balance which permits him to write literature with "air under its wings," a literature which is free and can soar. He concludes: "Amarga y necesaria moraleja: No te dejes comprar, pibe, pero tampoco vender."⁶⁵

Historically, many great writers have revealed a wide ideological gulf between their personal convictions and what is expressed in their works, as Vargas Llosa points out. He cites Balzac, who was an absolute monarchist and anti-Semitic in his personal beliefs, but whose works reflect a progressive social and political conscience. Vargas Llosa attributes such cases to the fact that the novelist is no more responsible for the themes he writes about than the dreamer for his dreams. Both simply arise out of one's subconscious mind and take possession of the writer or dreamer. When he is writing, the writer is not necessarily the same person as when he is not writing, and there is no reason why his works of fiction should reflect his personal convictions.

This brings up the question of the writer's role in socialist countries. Since most of today's writers espouse "leftist" ideas and tend to be friends of the Cuban Revolution, the question arises whether or not the writer within a socialist society should openly criticize that society, particularly if it is in its formative stages and, as such, in need of reinforcement. This is the crux of the debate between Cortázar and Collazos, the latter maintaining the author's duty to commit himself to the cause of socialism. Cortázar replies that the creator, from the moment in which he commits himself personally to socialism, should support the system, but in a discriminating manner. He maintains the right to criticize if and when he chooses, and from this attitude there arises the possibility of friction between the writer and his socialist society⁶⁶ (as in the cases of Herberto Padilla in Cuba and Alexander Solzhenitzyn in Russia). This position is echoed by other contemporary novelists; fundamentally, the writer holds on to his elite stance, his detachment from the rest of his society. He claims the right, even in a socialist society, to be, as Vargas Llosa says, the eternal malcontent. This leads to a related theoretical position which Cortázar states as follows: "Yo creo, y lo digo después de haber pesado largamente todos los elementos que entran en juego, que escribir para una revolución, que escribir dentro de una revolución, que escribir revolucionariamente, no significa, como creen muchos, escribir obligadamente acerca de la revolución misma."⁶⁷ The true "revolutionary" novel is not one which takes the (Cuban) Revolution as its theme, but rather the novel that seeks to revolutionize the novel form itself, as does Rayuela. Thus, the author would be achieving on the literary

level the same restructuring that the revolutionaries are accomplishing on the political level—finding new forms and structures which are more capable of expressing man's needs and aspirations today.⁶⁸

In conclusion, today's Spanish American novelist is torn between the tendency toward "pure" literature and his personal feelings of guilt, rage and shame in the face of social injustice. Cortázar comes to a sort of synthesis of these two seemingly antithetical positions. Having restated his opposition to writing openly "committed" literature and to turning away from literature toward politics, he says: "En lo más gratuito que pueda yo escribir asomará siempre una voluntad de contacto con el presente histórico del hombre, una participación en su larga marcha hacia lo mejor de sí mismo como colectividad y humanidad. Estoy convencido de que sólo la obra de aquellos intelectuales que respondan a esa pulsión y a esa rebeldía se encarnará en las conciencias de los pueblos y justificará con su acción presente y futura este oficio de escribir para el que hemos nacido."⁶⁹

The Social Novel; the Psychological Novel

Ernesto Sábato notes that he has been attacked on occasion by leftist critics because his novels tend toward psychological rather than social analysis. This raises the traditional dichotomy between social and psychological literature and the polemic concerning which is more important. Sábato affirms that the problem is an artificial one, for individuals do not exist in isolation. Man lives surrounded by a society, and not only are his conscious actions and words the consequences of his continuous intercourse with that society, but so are his

dreams and nightmares. For this reason, all novels are social, even those which consciously set out to give us a "psychological" portrait of a man. In examining man, they give us a vision of the world in which he lives. What some critics call the "social novel" is an external, superficial manifestation. Sábato says that if there were "social" writers in Tolstoi's day, we do not know of them, for their novels have not endured. However, through his examination of man, and through man, society at large, Tolstoi has endured as the literary giant of his era. For to investigate a man's psychological problems is to investigate his conflicts with the world in which he lives.⁷⁰

In Chapter I, we noted Sábato advocated several psychological approaches to the novel: the descent into the "I"; interior time; man's subconscious; illogicality; the world as perceived from the "I"; the "Other."⁷¹ These are the component parts of the psychoanalytical method that Sábato proposes. His goal is to penetrate as far as possible into man's mind, and these are his tools. Thus, it is natural he should attack Robbe-Grillet's phenomenological theories of character portrayal. In Sábato's view, some of the most important characters in literature are extensions of the author himself. And although the author may not "know" his characters completely (just as no one knows himself completely), he lives his characters from within. They may escape his control (as dreams do), but they belong to him as much as his dreams. Sábato says that Robbe-Grillet's insistence on eliminating the inner life of characters from the novel must result from three factors: (1) the influence of the cinema, (2) the desire to achieve greater ambiguity, or (3) stupidity. The three

factors, he concludes, are not valid bases for literature, either separately or jointly.⁷²

Man's psyche for Sábato is an integral part of reality, perhaps the most important, if by reality we understand the broader view espoused by today's novelists. Writers who occupy themselves with their characters' feelings, passions, ideas, and their subconscious and unconscious, are giving a fuller dimension to the external world which surrounds them, for it is only through his own subjectivity that man can apprehend the outside world.⁷³ Sábato says that what is truly human in man is his soul—not his body, which is zoological, nor his spirit (espíritu), which is his divine aspiration. The soul is a dark and shadowy region of man's being, capable of good and evil, and this imperfect part of man is the part most suited to examination by the novel—the imperfect, hybrid genre. A god, says Sábato, would not write novels.⁷⁴ We should point out that Sábato does not claim to control his characters or even to understand them well. He recognizes the maxim that literary characters take on an independent life of their own as the novel progresses. Often they may begin to act in ways contradictory to the role the author originally laid out for them, and he can only watch them unfold in amazement and surprise.⁷⁵

Another view of human psychology in the theory of the novel is José Donoso's. His El obscuro pájaro de la noche deals in psychological examination. Donoso admits to extensive psychoanalysis himself, and is especially drawn to the schizophrenic aspect of human character. He states: "...I don't believe that a psychological unity exists in the human being. I have taken too many pills; I've smoked grass; too many

psychological accidents have happened to me to believe that I am one single person. I am thirty persons and I'm nobody."⁷⁶ Donoso exemplifies this idea in his juxtaposition of characters (he cites the mistress and the servant in El obsceno pájaro de la noche) who are opposing manifestations of a single personality, like the two faces of Janus.

Another facet of Donoso's psychological concepts is his theory of reaching his characters' unconscious through his own. In his earlier novels, he says, he was seeking to give the conscious part of his own unconscious—that is, a controlled unconscious. In El obsceno pájaro de la noche, however, he believes that he withdrew completely, giving his unconscious free rein to chase whatever ghosts were haunting it. Writing this novel was a totally unplanned experience. The writing itself dictated the blueprint of the novel. The novel evolved rather like a "happening."⁷⁷ (Although Donoso does not use the term, the surrealist technique of automatic writing is clearly involved here.)

Several contemporary novelists, including Julio Cortázar, react against the "psychological" novel. Cortázar's Morelli advocates presenting the characters to the reader without explaining their conduct: "Negarse a hacer psicologías y osar al mismo tiempo poner a un lector—a un cierto lector, es verdad—en contacto con un mundo personal, con una vivencia y una meditación personales... Ese lector carecerá de todo puente, de toda ligazón intermedia, de toda articulación causal. Las cosas en bruto: conductas, resultantes, rupturas, catástrofes, irrisiones."⁷⁸ That is, the author should penetrate into his characters but not with the purpose of explaining why they act as

they do: "Basta de novelas hedónicas, premasticadas, con psicologías. Hay que tenderse al máximo, ser voyant como quería Rimbaud. El novelista hedónico no es más que un voyeur. Por otro lado, basta de técnicas puramente descriptivas, de novelas 'del comportamiento,' meros guiones de cine sin el rescate de las imágenes."⁷⁹ By no means does this mean that Cortázar is uninterested in man. Indeed, man is of major concern to him. In his earlier, fantastic literature, he had been satisfied with an esthetically pleasing resolution to his stories. But, his short story "El perseguidor" was the turning point for him, when he realized that literary solutions were no longer enough; he felt that he had to deal with something much closer to him—the human condition. He took a good look at himself and his fellow man in "El perseguidor," and has continued to do so ever since.⁸⁰ What he is opposed to is the psychoanalytical approach to the characters in a book. The accomplice reader must supply missing motivations and explanations.

Another novelist opposed to the "psychological" approach is Vargas Llosa. He denounces the "psychological" novel as such, saying that by limiting its investigation to a single facet of man, it necessarily limits our view of man.⁸¹ This is not to say, however, that man is not the focus of the novel—he is, and must be. As we have seen before, the center of attention in the contemporary novel is on man rather than on nature. But Vargas Llosa, like Cortázar, does not analyze: "I'm convinced...that the novel is basically a description of acts. The successful novel is the one that manages to portray or describe individual characters, social problems, even purely physical realities through a sequence of acts, of actions. Everything else must, as it

were, transpire from these actions. Ideas, problems, moral considerations, the author's philosophy, must radiate from a story..."⁸²

Increasing "personalization: the novel of inner life"⁸³ is espoused by Carlos Fuentes. But he does not advocate a psycho-analytical approach. Neither does Alejo Carpentier, who confesses to hating what he calls "the little psychological novel."⁸⁴ Gabriel García Márquez likewise disdains analyzing his characters' actions. He says he is not interested in psychology

...because that would need a scientific training which I don't possess. The opposite happens. I develop my characters and work on them, in the belief that I'm only making use of their poetical aspects. When a character has been assembled, some of the experts tell me that this is a psychoanalytic analysis. And I'm confronted then with a series of scientific assumptions that I don't hold and have never even dreamed of. In Buenos Aires—a city of psychoanalysts, as you know—some of them held a meeting to analyze One Hundred Years of Solitude. They came to the conclusion that it represented a well-sublimated Oedipus complex, and goodness knows what else. They discovered that the characters were perfectly coherent from a psychoanalytic point of view, they seemed like case histories.... What interested me was that the aunt should go to bed with her nephew, not the psychoanalytic origins of this event.⁸⁵

García Márquez denies not only any psychological intent in his Cien años de soledad, but also any sociological, metaphysical or symbolic intentions:

I merely wanted to tell the story of a family who for a hundred years did everything they could to prevent having a son with a pig's tail, and just because of their very efforts to avoid having one they ended by doing so. Synthetically speaking, that's the plot of the book, but all that about symbolism...not at all. Someone who isn't a critic said that the interest the novel had aroused was probably due to the fact that it was the first real description of the private life of a Latin American family...we go into the bedroom, the bathroom, the kitchen, into every corner of the house. Of course I never said to myself, "I shall write a book that will be interesting for that reason," but now that it's written, and this has been said about it, I think it may be true. Anyway it's an interesting concept and not all that shit about a man's destiny, etc...."⁸⁶

In conclusion, the consensus among today's novelists seems to be that man is and must be the center of attention in today's novel. But the novelists react negatively to the psychoanalytical approach which gives a logical rationale for man's actions. Writers today are concerned only with presenting man and his actions. The reader is then free to provide any missing information he may feel is necessary to complete the total picture.

The Novel of Ideas; the Metaphysical Novel

The foremost proponent of the novel as an instrument for man's metaphysical search for the ultimate meaning of life and human existence is Ernesto Sábato. He says that the literature of our time may have denied logic and reason as the sole valid means toward such knowledge and understanding, but that does not imply a concurrent rejection of thought. The contemporary novel does not deny that men think—it merely denies that, in fiction as in real life, they obey the laws of logic. Indeed, never as today has literature been so filled with ideas and so intent on getting to know its subject—man.⁸⁷ Man's uniqueness today stems from the fact that not only does he not know what he is, but now he knows that he does not know. In such circumstances, Sábato asks, how literature could be other than one of metaphysical investigation. These philosophic questions do not belong only in treatises; they haunt man in his daily life.⁸⁸

Sábato, as we noted previously, considers the search for knowledge as one of the principal characteristics of the contemporary novel. This search for knowledge became important when man understood that

the physical world was not the sum total of man's reality, but that feelings, emotions, dreams and myths played a part. Then novelists realized that literature could also be an instrument of knowledge of man's condition, just as philosophy had been before. In fact, the novel's ambiguous, contradictory, total character possibly made it the best vehicle to that end.⁸⁹ For a novel is not bound to present a consistent, logical view of the world. Sábato asks which concept of the world was really Cervantes'—that of Don Quixote or that of Sancho Panza. The answer is probably that Cervantes tended in two directions, or perhaps in both simultaneously. Despite these inconsistencies, Sábato states that, when one finishes reading a great novel, one has the feeling of having witnessed a particular vision of the world and of human existence, even though it may have been expressed through a vague general feeling or tone rather than through an actual statement of philosophical position.⁹⁰ All great novels of all periods and from all nations have a Weltanschauung, that is, they give us a vision of the world and, by extension, the meaning of man's existence. But the novel, as we saw before, does not demonstrate—it simply shows.⁹¹

The central question of today's novel for Cortázar is the why and the wherefore (el por qué y el para qué) of man's existence, as noted earlier. In this, it differs from the earlier novel, which sought to show what man was like. Today, the novel is the best verbal instrument for capturing and examining man's condition.⁹²

Novels should be a reflection of questions concerning human existence that have disturbed the novelist, according to Eduardo Mallea. Each of his books reflects a revealing human situation through

the conflicts portrayed in it. The leitmotiv of his novels is the metaphysical search for a meaning in life, a search which he admits may sometimes overwhelm the reader. But, despite his obvious metaphysical concerns, Mallea says that his greatest desire is to be a narrator, not a thinker or philosopher. He confesses that at times he may have lacked imagination, putting ideas or reflections in his novels where action would have been preferable. But he is certain that he was not born to be intellectual, to handle ideas.⁹³

It is not necessary to look for the metaphysical dimension, in Vargas Llosa's view. He is interested in capturing, or rather in recreating, the reality which is man's daily experience. The purpose of literature for him is to give man greater access to reality. Literature is an instrument of knowledge, but the ponderous level of metaphysics is missing.⁹⁴ The reader, however, may draw metaphysical inferences from his works.

Representing the antithesis of Sábato in this respect is José Donoso, who thinks literature should not be a vehicle for expressing profound ideas. He says he would like for people to say about him what T. S. Eliot said about Henry James: "He had a mind so fine that never the shadow of an idea violated it." He is not interested in novels of ideas, he says, because he does not believe either in their validity, their truth or their permanence. For him, literature is something much more dream-like, subconscious, intuitive. He states: "If I want to express practical ideas I'm not going to express them in a novel. If I write a novel, it won't be to express an idea I saw in an essay. As Gertrude Stein once said: 'Remarks are not literature.'⁹⁵

The Urban Novel

There is a decided tendency in today's novel to move the locale from the countryside to the rapidly expanding cities of Spanish America. Carpentier proclaims that the great task which awaits the Spanish American author is to inscribe the physiognomy of her great cities on universal literature, in the way that James Joyce did with Dublin. He says that novelists have been doing this ever since Balzac, but since the cities of Spanish America are beginning to "talk" now in their own special way, today's novel must find an appropriate new way to capture this new urban existence.⁹⁶

The irony of the indigenista novels of Peru has already been pointed out by Vargas Llosa: the audience for such novels was essentially an urban, educated one, for whom the Andean Indian and his problems were far away and exotic. Vargas Llosa sought to remedy this situation in La ciudad y los perros. In it, Peruvian readers (limeños in particular) could "verify" what they were reading according to their own experiences. The streets named in the novel are real streets in Lima, with which the reader can establish immediate identification. The language also reflects the Spanish spoken in Lima, providing another point of contact. Institutions and daily occurrences are also familiar to the Lima reader. The result is an urban novel, directed toward an urban reading public (the vast majority in Peru), which responds more closely to the present-day reality of Peru. Vargas Llosa hopes that seeing everyday reality reflected in a book will make the reader take stock of his world and become conscious of the multiple aspects of the reality which surrounds him daily and which he tends to take for granted.⁹⁷

Discussing the critics' reactions to his novel Sobre héroes y tumbas, Ernesto Sábato says he is very pleased that they saw in the novel two things: (1) a treatment of the great metaphysical questions of solitude, the meaning of existence and death; and (2) Buenos Aires as the true protagonist of the novel. The novel is indeed the story of a whole city, he says, in which individual human dramas are played out. The huge, impersonal city provides a perfect background for the portrayal of human loneliness and existential anguish. Sábato suggests that in an even broader context, the protagonist could be all of Argentina.⁹⁸

The city of Havana is similarly the protagonist of Cabrera Infante's Tres tristes tigres. His purpose and focus are somewhat different, however. As we have seen, he was seeking to capture a gallery of Cuban voices before they disappear into laconism. Cabrera Infante's characters are not engaged in metaphysical soul-searching, however. And Cabrera does not attempt to portray the entire city. His focus is limited to the night-club district of pre-revolutionary Havana and the people who frequent the night spots of the Rampa—people of a very gregarious, fun-loving, loquacious nature. Cabrera considers Tres tristes tigres a "poem about Havana."⁹⁹

Although they do not speak of the importance of the urban setting in their novels, other Spanish American novelists are evidently partisans of the city-oriented novel—one thinks immediately of Cortázar's Rayuela (practically his entire production, in fact) and Fuentes' La región más transparente. However, not all of today's novelists subscribe to the urban-oriented novel. Several of them still prefer

the countryside—Asturias, Rulfo, García Márquez, and even Carpentier. Asturias has spoken out against the "urbanizing" tendency of the novel: "...our problem is to create a literature which speaks neither of asphalt, nor glass, nor concrete. It must speak of the freshness of the earth, the seed, the tree. Our literature has to give a new scent, a new color and vibration."¹⁰⁰

Alienation

Closely connected to the urban theme and metaphysics is man's alienation—a theme which is prevalent in all contemporary Western literature. Fuentes has spoken about the change from a society of simple dialectics to one of bewildering complexity in which choices and directions are difficult. The writer is caught up in this fast-changing society, and suddenly finds himself relegated to the emerging new urban middle class—the petite bourgeoisie—, no longer a member of the social elite as before. While the expanding middle class meant more potential readers for the author's novels, this bonanza was offset by his suddenly being surrounded by a class whose material goals—automobiles, televisions, stereos—were alien to the writer. Thus, the novelist felt alienated from his own society. Fuentes says that no writer in Spanish America perceived this basic alienation faster or more clearly than Juan Carlos Onetti, whose novels of human loneliness are the foundation of our alienated modern urban life. Fuentes mentions other authors—Martínez Moreno, Benedetti, Donoso, Revueltas, Sergio Fernández, Sabato—whose works round out the opening scenario of the new Latin American city dweller.¹⁰¹

Modern technology is one of the principal causes of this alienation, according to Ernesto Sábato. Machinery is turning man into an object and piling him into huge, anonymous cities, where old family structures easily break down, causing social instability and a feeling of transitoriness. Man's natural loneliness is accentuated in the urban milieu. Sábato sees this as one of the main reasons why man turns to fiction—to fill the void, to invent and complement a reality which is lacking.¹⁰²

Every novelist writes only one great book in his lifetime, says García Márquez, no matter how many separate volumes that novelist may produce. The book that he is writing, he says, is a book on the theme of solitude. From his earliest stories to the novel he is working on now (El otoño del patriarca, a study of a lonely, aging dictator), human loneliness has been his theme. He points to Colonel Aureliano Buendía in Cien años de soledad as being a study of a progression toward solitude, through the wars he fought and his accession to power. The individual characters in Cien años de soledad are not only solitary, but there is an anti-solidarity among them—everyone acts independently.¹⁰³

Literature, in order to portray this spirit of alienation, is moving toward abstraction of characters, according to Cortázar's alter ego, Morelli. Morelli states "La novela que nos interesa no es la que va colocando los personajes en la situación, sino la que instala la situación en los personajes. Con lo cual éstos dejan de ser personajes para volverse personas."¹⁰⁴ (The etymological root of persona is the Greek word for "mask.") That is, the characters cease to be living beings and become mere human types, reacting to given situations. The ultimate result of this movement toward abstraction

will be Cortázar's idea of "figures" (see Chapter VII), the completely dehumanized being.

The Difficult, Obscure, Complex Novel

One of the characteristics of the contemporary novel is its complexity and the difficulties it presents to the reader. This responds in great part to the breakdown of the old polarities of Latin American life and the emergence of a new, complex, urban, consumer society, which Fuentes describes. Vargas Llosa says essentially the same thing, defining the novel as a "verbal representation of reality": if the novel is to represent reality verbally, it must be as extensive and as intense as reality itself. We can approach reality from many different angles, from opposing points of view. The impressions we receive may be complex, confusing, yet contradictory. The novel offers this same complexity.¹⁰⁵

A more analytical point of view is employed by Ernesto Sábato. He notes several reasons why today's novel should be more obscure and offer more difficulty than the traditional novel.¹⁰⁶:

(1) the point of view: the omniscient narrator, similar to God in his all-seeing power, has practically disappeared from the novel. Novels are now written from the perspective of each character, and the total reality results from the crossing of the different versions, not always coherent nor in accord. The viewpoint today is as ambiguous as life itself.

(2) astronomical time, which is the same for everyone, has given way to interior, psychic, time.

(3) today's novel does not offer that logic which the old novel offered, written under the influence of a rationalistic spirit.

(4) the appearance of the subconscious and the unconscious, obscure worlds par excellence.

(5) characters are not described but rather act in our presence, reveal themselves through words and acts which, when not accompanied by analysis or interior descriptions, are opaque and ambiguous.

Given such characteristics, it is natural that the novel should tend toward ambiguity, complexity and confusion rather than toward clarity. Sábato speaks at length of what he calls the "descent into the I" (descenso al yo), the submersion into shadowy zones of the human psyche, which often produces a ghost-like, nocturnal tone reminding us of dreams or nightmares, such as in Franz Kafka's The Trial (or Sábato's Sobre héroes y tumbas). In this psychic underground, the law of day and light gives way to the law of night and shadows.¹⁰⁷ This leads to one of the main elements of Sábato's novelistic theory: the relation between day and night, between prose and poetry. He tells us that when he started writing Sobre héroes y tumbas his intention was to write a novel which would have two faces—a diurnal and a nocturnal one. On the diurnal surface, there would be several characters who would revolve around a practically hidden character (Fernando Vidal), one who would stand out because of his absence and because of the fascination he holds for the remaining characters. The second part ("El informe sobre ciegos") was to be the dream or nightmare of that hidden, central character—the nocturnal side of the first part of the book.¹⁰⁸ Sábato goes on to state that prose is diurnal while poetry is nocturnal—it is

the language of shadows and abysses, it feeds on monsters and symbols. For this reason, there can be no great novel which in the long run is not poetic.¹⁰⁹ For the deepest region of the human soul is a region of dreams and myths which man can reach only through poetry. That is why Sábato defends the depiction of the irrational (poetic) side of man's character.¹¹⁰

El obsceno pájaro de la noche is a good example of a "difficult" novel, and its author José Donoso tells us why it is so hard to understand:

...The Obscene Bird of Night...is one of the titles the novel has had. Another one, The Last of the Azcoitfa, was quickly discarded. It has had thirty different names, among others, Under So Many Eyelids... What does this reflect? That basically I don't know what my novel is about. There is no intention of a precise meaning. It is a novel whose development has neither been lineal, nor completely planned. It's been something like a "happening," something that's happened to me, that has been killing me and that I have been killing, that I've been tearing piece by piece out of me, branches have been growing all over it. It's a living thing. It's something that has happened to me rather than something I've written.¹¹¹

In such a novel, the best the reader can hope for is to somehow share the author's experience, to participate vicariously in the "happening."

Although he is not psychoanalytically oriented like Donoso, Asturias has a rather similar theory in his writings dealing with the essence of the Indian soul. He seeks to explore the Indian mentality on its own terms, and clarity and easy comprehension are of no concern to him: "In Hombres de maíz there are no concessions. There is no story line. Whether things are clear or not doesn't matter. They are simply given."¹¹²

In such novels as Hombres de mafz, El obsceno pájaro de la noche and Sobre héroes y tumbas, it is no wonder that the reader often feels confused and disoriented, perhaps even reluctant to continue down a road he feels he does not "understand" (Donoso, at least, would argue that understanding plays no part in his novel). Guillermo Cabrera Infante warns against a novel which becomes too hermetic or too private. He says:

...the creation of a unique and therefore hermetic language, full of multiple and secret associations exclusive to the writer and elaborated in a work of literature, as is the case in Finnegan's Wake, exhibits language as it is not, for this literary neo-language is badly in need of explanations, scholia or skeleton keys to explain not the whole book, which would be an aesthetic or rhetorical achievement, but to clarify a single sentence. This has nothing to do with language communication but with its absolute opposite—cryptology, the disguise of language through cipher. In other words: the contrary of communication: that failure of language which represents any writing that is deliberately hieroglyphic.¹¹³

Themes

The selection of themes, despite its obvious importance in the writing of any novel, is not a major concern in the theory expressed by today's novelists. Following a tradition which dates back to romantic and modernist literature, the general contention is that each novelist should seek his own directions and that there must be no restrictions on what is and is not narrative material. This attitude is predictable in the light of the prevailing search for open and total novelistic forms and the current broad interpretation of what constitutes reality. Such broad themes as man's loneliness, anguish and lack of communication have already been mentioned in previous chapters by specific authors.

But no consensus exists among today's authors concerning what a novelist's themes should be.

Carlos Fuentes cites the three early archetypal themes of traditional Spanish American literature: nature, dictatorship, and the suffering masses.¹¹⁴ These, he states, have been superseded as specific themes in recent years. One of the principal themes in today's novels is the mythical refoundation of America. He cites La casa verde, Cien años de soledad, Pedro Páramo, El lugar sin límites and Los pasos perdidos as examples of novelistic refoundation, a return to the act of genesis to redeem the original violation: the enormous rape which was the Spanish conquest of America and which filled the continent with bastards.¹¹⁵ (Fuentes' obsession with the theme of the hijo de la chingada is typically Mexican and not found among other writers.)

What particular themes a novelist should prefer is not discussed by Sábato. He says only that an author's theme must be his obsession, or his novels will not be profound. Such an obsession arises from deep within his psyche, and a true creator will always write only about that one theme. The novelist does not choose this theme—it chooses him, pursuing him through the years.¹¹⁶ That is what has happened to him, he says; his two novels El túnel and Sobre héroes y tumbas are separated by thirteen years and different plots, but they deal with the same theme.¹¹⁷

Themes are "demons" which pursue an author in Vargas Llosa's view. These demons may be people, dreams, myths, facts or events which have been engraved on his spirit. He attempts, through his writing, to "exorcise" these demons. The process of narrative creation, he declares,

consists of the transformation of the demon into a theme, thereby converting individual experience into universal experience.¹¹⁸

We have already seen that, according to García Márquez, a writer writes only one book in his lifetime, although it may have multiple volumes.¹¹⁹ And Julio Cortázar echoes Sábato's statement that the theme chooses the novelist rather than vice-versa.¹²⁰ Augusto Roa Bastos synthesizes the matter when he states that all of America has become "novelistic" (novelesca), for it is a continent in ferment in which man constantly faces a changing society and must learn to cope with it. The story of Latin American man against the continuum of Latin American geography and nature provides infinite material for the Latin American novelist. Given these circumstances, a novelist cannot afford to restrict himself to the narrow confines of literature of protest or "message" literature. The novelist must follow only the dictates of his own inspiration (or demon, or obsession).¹²¹

NOTES

- ¹Vargas Llosa, La novela, pp. 4-5.
- ²Ibid., pp. 3-5.
- ³González Bermejó, Cosas de escritores, pp. 55-58.
- ⁴Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, pp. 37-40.
- ⁵Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, pp. 65-69.
- ⁶Hars, Into the Mainstream, p. 356.
- ⁷Fuentes, "Situación del escritor en América Latina," pp. 10-13.
- ⁸Vargas Llosa, García Márquez: Historia de un deicidio, pp. 133-134.
- ⁹Fuentes, "Situación del escritor en América Latina," p. 14.
- ¹⁰García Flores, "Siete respuestas de Julio Cortázar," p. 11.
- ¹¹Armando Durán, "Conversaciones con Gabriel García Márquez," Revista Nacional de Cultura (Caracas), July-September 1968, p. 29.
- ¹²Ibid., pp. 29, 31.
- ¹³Tiempo, "41 preguntas a Ernesto Sábato," pp. 15-16.
- ¹⁴Simo et al., Cinco miradas sobre Cortázar, pp. 84-86.
- ¹⁵Vargas Llosa, "The Latin American Novel Today: Introduction," p. 9.
- ¹⁶Fuentes, "Situación del escritor en América Latina," pp. 18-19.
- ¹⁷Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, pp. 95-96.
- ¹⁸Ibid., p. 58.
- ¹⁹Carpentier, Tientos y diferencias, pp. 118-121.
- ²⁰Hars, op. cit., p. 337.
- ²¹Cited in Collazos et al., Literatura en la revolución y revolución en la literatura, pp. 28-29.
- ²²Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, pp. 48-49.
- ²³Ibid., p. 94.

- ²⁴Ibid., p. 147.
- ²⁵Ibid., p. 162.
- ²⁶Ibid., pp. 176-177.
- ²⁷Cortázar, Ultimo round, p. 214, "planta baja."
- ²⁸Cortázar, "Situación de la novela," p. 229.
- ²⁹Rosario Castellanos, "La novela mexicana contemporánea y su valor testimonial," Hispania, May 1964, p. 230.
- ³⁰Corrales Egea, "Una charla con Miguel Angel Asturias," p. 4.
- ³¹Vargas Llosa, "The Latin American Novel Today: Introduction," pp. 12, 15.
- ³²Vargas Llosa, La novela, p. 21.
- ³³Mario Vargas Llosa, Día domingo (Buenos Aires: Amadís, 1971), pp. 62-63. (Julio Cortázar echoes this idea of the novelist as the constant agitator who forces society to endlessly reevaluate itself: González Bermejo, op. cit., p. 99).
- ³⁴Mario Vargas Llosa, "Una insurrección permanente," Arbol de letras (Chile), n.d., n.p.
- ³⁵Vargas Llosa, La novela, p. 19.
- ³⁶Mario Vargas Llosa, "El escritor como aguafiestas," Arbol de letras (Chile), December 1, 1967, p. 3.
- ³⁷Vargas Llosa et al., Antología mínima de M. Vargas Llosa, pp. 125-128.
- ³⁸Cabrera Infante, "Las fuentes de la narración," p. 48.
- ³⁹Guibert, Seven Voices, p. 408.
- ⁴⁰Collazos et al., op. cit., pp. 11-12.
- ⁴¹Ibid., p. 65.
- ⁴²Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, pp. 11-12.
- ⁴³Guibert, op. cit., p. 149.
- ⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 149-151.
- ⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 174-175.

- ⁴⁶Harss, op. cit., pp. 92-93.
- ⁴⁷Euclides Vázquez Gandela, "Todo el país se ha echado a andar" (interview with Alejo Carpentier), Granma, April 6, 1969, p. 10.
- ⁴⁸Carpentier, Tientos y diferencias, pp. 31-34.
- ⁴⁹Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, pp. 44-45.
- ⁵⁰Tiempo, op. cit., p. 16.
- ⁵¹Carlos Fuentes, Tiempo mexicano (Mexico: Joaquín Mortiz, 1972), pp. 59-64.
- ⁵²Fuentes, "Situación del escritor en América Latina," p. 20.
- ⁵³Harss, op. cit., p. 309.
- ⁵⁴"Mario Vargas Llosa," (an interview by Kal Wagenheim), p. 4.
- ⁵⁵González Bermejo, op. cit., p. 76.
- ⁵⁶Donoso, Historia personal del "boom", p. 103.
- ⁵⁷Domingo, "Entrevistas: Gabriel García Márquez," p. 6.
- ⁵⁸Durán, "Conversaciones con Gabriel García Márquez," p. 29.
- ⁵⁹Andrés Amorós, "Gabriel García Márquez habla de política y de literatura," Índice, Nov. 1968, p. 32.
- ⁶⁰Cortázar, Ultimo round, pp. 210-212.
- ⁶¹Manuel Díaz Martínez, "Cuatro preguntas a Julio Cortázar," La Gaceta de Cuba, Feb. 20, 1967, p. 3.
- ⁶²Cortázar, La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos, p. 213.
- ⁶³Collazos et al., op. cit., pp. 56-58.
- ⁶⁴Cortázar, Ultimo round, p. 75, "primer piso."
- ⁶⁵Ibid., p. 125, "planta baja."
- ⁶⁶González Bermejo, op. cit., p. 122.
- ⁶⁷Cortázar, "Algunos aspectos del cuento," p. 185.
- ⁶⁸Collazos et al., op. cit., pp. 73-74.
- ⁶⁹Simo et al., op. cit. p. 114.

- ⁷⁰Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, pp. 33-34.
- ⁷¹Ibid., pp. 86-89.
- ⁷²Ibid., p. 123.
- ⁷³Ibid., p. 126.
- ⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 180-184.
- ⁷⁵Ibid., p. 175.
- ⁷⁶Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "The Novel as Happening: an Interview with José Donoso," Review (Fall 1973), p. 36.
- ⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 37-39.
- ⁷⁸Cortázar, Rayuela, p. 497.
- ⁷⁹Ibid., p. 544.
- ⁸⁰Harss, op. cit., pp. 223-224.
- ⁸¹Vargas Llosa et al., Antología mínima de M. Vargas Llosa, p. 141.
- ⁸²Harss, op. cit., p. 460.
- ⁸³Ibid., p. 308.
- ⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 57-58.
- ⁸⁵Guibert, op. cit., p. 315.
- ⁸⁶Ibid., p. 314.
- ⁸⁷Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, pp. 25-26.
- ⁸⁸Ibid., p. 40.
- ⁸⁹Ibid., pp. 88-89.
- ⁹⁰Ibid., p. 202.
- ⁹¹Ibid., p. 266.
- ⁹²Cortázar, "Situación de la novela," p. 228.
- ⁹³Rivelli, "Entrevista a Eduardo Mallea en Buenos Aires," p. 193.
- ⁹⁴Harss, op. cit., pp. 360-361.

⁹⁵Rodríguez Monegal, "The Novel as Happening: an Interview with José Donoso," p. 39.

⁹⁶Carpentier, Tientos y diferencias, pp. 12-13.

⁹⁷Vargas Llosa et al., Antología mínima de M. Vargas Llosa, pp. 125-127.

⁹⁸Sábato, "Por una novela novelesca y metafísica," pp. 10-11.

⁹⁹Cabrera Infante, "Las fuentes de la narración," p. 47.

¹⁰⁰Harss, op. cit., pp. 84-85.

¹⁰¹Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, pp. 28-29.

¹⁰²Sábato, "Por una novela novelesca y metafísica," pp. 11-12.

¹⁰³Guibert, op. cit., p. 314.

¹⁰⁴Cortázar, Rayuela, p. 543.

¹⁰⁵Vargas Llosa, La novela, pp. 2-3.

¹⁰⁶Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, p. 197.

¹⁰⁷Alegría, "La novela total: un diálogo con Sábato," p. 18.

¹⁰⁸Sábato, "Por una novela novelesca y metafísica," p. 18.

¹⁰⁹Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, p. 209.

¹¹⁰Tiempo, op. cit., p. 16.

¹¹¹Rodríguez Monegal, "The Novel as Happening: an Interview with José Donoso," pp. 34-35.

¹¹²Harss, op. cit., p. 87.

¹¹³Guibert, op. cit., pp. 417-418.

¹¹⁴Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, p. 11.

¹¹⁵Ibid., pp. 45-46.

¹¹⁶Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, p. 182.

¹¹⁷Sábato, "Por una novela novelesca y metafísica," p. 15.

¹¹⁸Vargas Llosa, García Márquez: Historia de un deicidio, pp. 86-87.

¹¹⁹González Bermejo, op. cit., p. 18.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 129.

¹²¹Augusto Roa Bastos, "Latinoamérica: continente novelesco" in "Introducción a la narrativa latinoamericana," Latinoamericana, Dec. 1972, pp. 12-14.

CHAPTER V
TIME AND MYTH IN THE NOVEL

Time

The deliberate distortion of time is one of the most evident and disconcerting aspects of the contemporary novel. Linear, chronological time as we know it in the nineteenth-century novel is often altered, destroyed or suspended in today's novel. The reader can no longer assume any logical, sequential progression from the beginning of the novel to the end. As exemplified in Alejo Carpentier's Guerra del tiempo and his short novel El acoso, time is one of the novelists' major tools in creating the "new novel."

In Chapter I, we noted that Ernesto Sábato listed as one of the characteristics of the new novel a shift from astronomical, chronological time to the inner, psychic, subjective time of man's mind. As the novelist focuses on this inner time, the reader may become confused, for the inner time is different for each character, and in any given work, various chronological levels may coexist.¹ Sábato uses his own novel Sobre héroes y tumbas to illustrate his special perception of time: for him, man lives simultaneously in the past, the present and the future. In the present, he is naturally caught up in the "here and now." In the past, he relives events, summoning up memories. And he lives in the future to the extent he makes plans for tomorrow.² So, although man is aware of the passing of chronological time in the present, he mentally carries the past and future along with him in what Lezama Lima calls

the "flying point" of time,³ which renders time a relative, personal, subjective concept.

Cyclical or simultaneous time is one variation of linear time, and is exemplified in Cien años de soledad. As Carlos Fuentes points out; in Macondo, time moves, but goes nowhere: the book ends at the same point where it began. Hence the significance of José Arcadio Buendía's decision that it will always be Monday, and of Ursula's comment: "Es como si el tiempo diera vueltas en redondo y hubiéramos vuelto al principio."⁴ The novel transpires in an unending present. Fuentes refers to this as "dead time" and tells how he sought to incorporate this concept into La región más transparente:

I was interested in time play, and [Dos Passos', Faulkner's, and D. H. Lawrence's] different ways of looking at time were helpful to me. Apart from whatever tendency a first novel may have to be a showcase of literary parentage, I was reading Dos Passos a lot, looking for a way to build dead time into a novel. In Dos Passos everything is in the past tense. Even when he places his action in the present, we know it is past. In Faulkner, everything is in the chronic present. Even the remotest past is present. And in D. H. Lawrence what you find is a tone of prophetic imminence. He is always on the brink of the future; it is always there, latent. So I very consciously drew on those three influences, three aspects of time I wanted to counterpoint and overlap in La región más transparente.⁵

This "deadening" of time in effect serves to cancel it out as a factor in the novel—the novel then seems to transcur outside the limits of time.

The juxtaposition of two separate times in a single narrative unity is illustrated by García Márquez in connection with his newest novel El otoño del patriarca. Time as a chronological flow is absolutely of no importance to him, he says. In this novel:

...un día el dictador despierta. Es un dictador que ha sido puesto por los infantes de marina que un día se van, previa firma de un tratado que les garantiza la administración vitalicia de las aduanas y el derecho a volver a ocupar el país en caso de recrudescimiento de la fiebre amarilla; se van y dejan un acorazado en el puerto que queda pudriéndose. Un día el dictador despierta y se levanta y encuentra que todo el mundo en el palacio tiene bonetes colorados: las criadas que están barriendo, los tipos que traen la leche, los ordenanzas que están descargando hortalizas. Entonces pregunta qué está pasando que todo el mundo tiene bonetes colorados. Dicen: "Mire, es que han llegado unos tipos muy raros que han venido cargados de bonetes colorados y todo lo cambian por bonetes colorados: los huevos de iguana, la manteca de caimán, los cueros de caimán, el tabaco, el chocolate, todo, todo lo que usted tiene se lo cambian ellos por bonetes colorados."

Entonces el dictador, que nunca dice nada sino que primero piensa, digiere, se pregunta ¿qué coño es esto?, abre la ventana que da al mar y ve el mar, y el acorazado de los infantes, detrás del acorazado, velas tres carabelas fondeadas: ha llegado Cristóbal Colón.

Por esto verás cómo estoy tratando el problema del tiempo. A mí me importa que todo esto haya sido historia en un momento; ahora, el orden cronológico no me importa en absoluto.⁶

Cortázar repeats García Márquez's technique of combining disparate historical times into one narration. Morelli, Cortázar's alter ego, states that it is a mistake to postulate a single, absolute, historical time in a novel. There are different although parallel times which exist together. In terms of this theory, one of the times of the Middle Ages can coexist with one of the times of the Modern Age. If they can exist side by side, inseparably, in the mind of the author, they can do so in the novel.⁷

Yet another experimentation with time is the subjective expansion or contraction of it in a character's mind. Cortázar tells how he mentally relived three whole months of his life which he spent with a friend, hunting and camping in the Argentine jungle near the Paraguayan border. One

day, years later, the entire three month's experience returned to him in minute detail in the two minutes and ten seconds it took a Parisian subway to carry him from one station to the next. Cortázar says that if it is possible to be mentally transported from one epoch to another, and to condense three months into a little over two minutes, then perhaps man has the possibility of triggering this phenomenon voluntarily, to multiply and divide time, to literally escape chronological time. He does not know how it can be done, but he sees such experiences as his own on the subway in Paris⁸ as an open doorway leading to a possible escape from time.⁹ Cortázar goes on to say that, as he understands them, both time and space are basically only working hypotheses which man—the new man sought by the characters in Rayuela—may someday, somehow, be able to break or modify.¹⁰

Despite the prominent role which experimentation with time plays in the contemporary novel, the preceding is all the theoretical material we were able to find on the subject. Many aspects of time in the novel are thus not covered here—for example, the stream of consciousness technique, which implies a subjective distortion and/or a slowing down of chronological time.

Myth

Considering the prominent part that myth plays in the contemporary novel, it is surprising to find, as in the preceding case with the subject of time, a very limited amount of theoretical exposition on its role in the works of today's Spanish American novelists. Of the contemporary writers, Miguel Angel Asturias discusses the role of myth most extensively.

He states that his use of Indian myths springs from his Mayan origins and his studies of Mayan religion and mythology at the Sorbonne: "I respond to an animist necessity to express myself on the basis of that grand synthesis which is the myth...these are not dead beliefs which I try to revive but beliefs existing today among the Guatemalan indigenes. I use these myths therefore..., not with any deliberate intention but as part of my way of being."¹¹ One strongly suspects that Asturias does have a deliberate intention in mind, however: that of portraying the collective Indian mentality through mythic embodiments. Asturias believes that countries like Guatemala are particularly receptive to myths. He says that dictators like Estrada Cabrera (the real-life model for the dictator in El señor presidente) appear only in mythologically minded countries, such as Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela, Cuba and Haiti—countries with large Indian or Negro populations. Although he knew Estrada Cabrera personally, Asturias did not attempt to portray him as a person in the novel, but rather as a myth—the all-powerful father-figure despot.¹²

Asturias recounts how a group of Russian students at the University of Moscow asked him why there are so many references to myths in Hombres de maíz, so much witchcraft and sorcery. For the Russian students, these things were false and spoiled the social protest in the book, which they interpreted as its most important aspect. Asturias responded that it would be impossible for him to write about the native races of Guatemala without dealing with the witch doctors and sorcerers, ghosts, legends and myths that are very much alive and play a critical role in the daily lives of the Guatemalan Indians. He says: "I think the basis for my

work is the mythological one, its connection with the beliefs and other aspects of the rustic, primitive, and mentally childish life of the Indians, and advancing along this path I deal with the social problems that concern them. In Hombres de maíz, which is a mythological novel, I show the constant struggle between the dealer in maize [for whom corn is merely a product, to be bought and sold] and the Indian [for whom corn is a sacred element, the basis of all life]...¹³ It is this aspect of the myth as a part of the living heritage of the Indian race that Asturias wishes to capture. He says that myths are a little like malaria: "Malaria appears as a headache, a stomach-ache; it festers and spreads. Which is more or less what myths do. They die hard."¹⁴ Even in advanced countries, like those of western Europe, Asturias says that myths persist. Those that die are replaced by new ones (such as the myth of speed). Although myths may have nearly disappeared from European literature, the myths remain alive in the minds of many people.¹⁵

Carlos Fuentes credits Asturias' use of indigenous myths as a very credible way of giving life and personality to the anonymous masses of Guatemalan Indians. Through their ancestral beliefs and their "magic language," Fuentes states, the characters of Hombres de maíz and Asturias' other indigenista novels come alive for the reader and set these books apart from the multitude of indigenista novels of social protest.¹⁶

Turning to other authors but still on the subject of myth, Fuentes says that Vargas Llosa in La casa verde, Juan Rulfo in Pedro Páramo, Roa Bastos in Hijo de hombre and García Márquez in El coronel no tiene quien le escriba achieve the enviable goal of turning traditional themes of the American hinterland into mythical literature. The locale and the

characters seem to be the same as in more traditional novels, but now the jungle and the river have become a legendary backdrop—nature is assimilated and real men and women now occupy center stage.¹⁷ Fuentes does not define what he means by "legendary backdrop," however.

Fuentes also considers that many of the contemporary novels have as their theme the mythical refounding of America (see Chapter IV), of which Cien años de soledad is the best example.¹⁸ This novel, he says, follows the three stages of Spanish American history: utopia, epic and myth. The foundation of Macondo, like that of America, was predicated on the idea of utopia—it is the promised land of new generations ("Los hombres de la expedición se sintieron abrumados por sus recuerdos más antiguos en aquel paraíso de humedad y silencio, anterior al pecado original"¹⁹). Like the Utopia of Sir Thomas More, Macondo is an island of the imagination, from which José Arcadio invents the world, points things out with his finger, then learns to name them and, finally, to forget their names. But history moves in on this paradise, and utopia is replaced by the epic: thirty-two civil wars, the banana boom, the slaughter of the banana workers—history, commerce, and activity constitute the epic history of Macondo. When the boom ends and the flood appears, Macondo is "forgotten even by the birds." The survivors, Aureliano and Amaranta Ursula, begin the third cycle of Macondo's history—its mythical existence. The simultaneous, renewable character of Macondo's existence (through myth) is only clarified on the final page, when it is revealed that Melquíades, the gypsy who accompanied the foundation of Macondo one hundred years before, had foreseen Macondo's history and written it down in a book which, when discovered and read, ended its mythical cycle.²⁰

Fuentes goes on to say that through the myth, one can reduce the past to human proportions, one can re-act (reactuar) the past. This is the meaning of the great novels of Alejo Carpentier, he says, and indeed, this is what Fuentes himself was striving for in his novel Zona sagrada.²¹ An artist can create a new myth, in fact, as Juan Rulfo does in Pedro Páramo. Fuentes says that Rulfo surpasses the "exterior myth" (old and worn-out, though consecrated through repetition) of the evil, powerful cacique and the suffering, anonymous masses. This level exists in Pedro Páramo, but it is overshadowed by a new, living myth: that of truth as a vision granted to the dead. In this novel, social and personal distinctions become blurred as the dead speak and recount the true story of Comala.²²

Alejo Carpentier, unlike Fuentes, does not speak directly of myths in his literary theories. As we have seen, however, he does refer to contextos "ctónicos" which he defines as "...supervivencias de animismo, creencias, prácticas, muy antiguas, a veces de un origen cultural sumamente respetable, que nos ayudan a enlazar ciertas realidades presentes con esencias culturales remotas, cuya existencia nos vincula con lo universal-sin-tiempo."²³ Carpentier also talks of today's novel as tending naturally toward the epic, due to the epic qualities of the contexts which make up contemporary Latin American life.²⁴ These contextos ctónicos are clearly mythical, ancestral in nature, linking contemporary man with his beginnings. Los pasos perdidos is proof of Carpentier's fascination with myth.

The mythical content of his novels is mentioned only in passing by Vargas Llosa. He states that in La ciudad y los perros, he wanted to give

a mythical vision of the military school in addition to the factual one—a vision of a series of acts in which no one believes but everyone pretends to believe—conventional social laws and ideas.²⁵ Thus, myth is defined in terms of the everyday life of modern urban man.²⁶

The novelist should beware of making a special effort to search for the mythical elements, however, says Julio Cortázar. He states that writing a novel, for him, entails the sounding of his own depths, a dialogue with his personal reality and his external circumstances. Novels are like trees, he believes, in that their leafy crown (the visible part) is nurtured by the unseen, primordial mystery of their roots. For that reason, Cortázar answers "no" when asked if he thinks novelists should abandon realism in order to search for myths and prophecies. These will be latent in any true creation of a talented author. He continues that even a realistic attitude from which all fantastic elements have been discarded, as in the novels of Vargas Llosa, will have the richness which contact with these primeval roots gives—a contact which in a different artistic temperament might engender myths and a fantastic, highly imaginative literature. Cortázar states that profundity cannot be obtained from the outside—it must arise naturally from within. For in the final analysis, the novel is its novelist, and only a novelist in contact with the roots of his culture and his own self will be able to create a truly profound novel.²⁷

We should conclude by pointing out that most of the theoretical material concerning myth deals with indigenous American myth or the ritualization of daily American life. Missing from our authors' discussions are the classical mythologies of Greece and Rome and the Bible. These play an

important role in the contemporary novel, yet, with the exception of the brief reference to Cien años de soledad and other novels as literary refoundings of America (reminiscent of the Biblical story of Genesis), classical mythology is not dealt with among today's Spanish American writers.

NOTES

- ¹Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, p. 86.
- ²Sábato, "Por una novela novelesca y metafísica," p. 14.
- ³González, "Un pulpo en una jarra minoana," p. 15.
- ⁴Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, p. 63.
- ⁵Harss, Into the Mainstream, pp. 294-295.
- ⁶González Bermejo, Cosas de escritores, pp. 35-36.
- ⁷Cortázar, Rayuela, p. 545.
- ⁸Which he incorporated, incidentally, in Johnny's similar experience in "El perseguidor."
- ⁹González Bermejo, op. cit., pp. 115-116.
- ¹⁰García Flores, "Siete respuestas de Julio Cortázar," p. 12.
- ¹¹Fossey, "Miguel Angel Asturias on Literature," p. 354.
- ¹²Harss, op. cit., pp. 79-80.
- ¹³Guibert, Seven Voices, pp. 152-153.
- ¹⁴Harss, op. cit., pp. 84-85.
- ¹⁵Guibert, op. cit., p. 154.
- ¹⁶Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, pp. 24-26.
- ¹⁷Ibid., p. 36.
- ¹⁸Ibid., pp. 45-46.
- ¹⁹Quoted in Ibid., p. 60.
- ²⁰Ibid., pp. 58-62.
- ²¹Fuentes, "Situación del escritor en América Latina," pp. 14-15.
- ²²Fuentes, Tiempo mexicano, p. 59.
- ²³Carpentier, Tientos y diferencias, p. 21.
- ²⁴Ibid., pp. 40-41.

²⁵Vargas Llosa et al.; Antología mínima de M. Vargas Llosa, p. 142.

²⁶We have already seen, in Chapter IV, Vargas Llosa's analysis of García Márquez's use of mythification in such stories as "Los funerales de la Mamá Grande," in which popular imagination and fantasy supplant the actual facts of the story to create the myth surrounding Big Mama's funeral.

²⁷Díaz Martínez, "Cuatro preguntas a Julio Cortázar," p. 3.

CHAPTER VI
HUMOR AND SEX IN THE NOVEL

Humor

The contemporary writers have introduced a new element—humor—into the Spanish American novel, an element that had not frequently appeared there before. In our chapter on language, we examined a number of the techniques which are used today to create humorous effects. In this section, we are not concerned with the techniques of humor but rather with the novelists' reasons for using it.

Fuentes has stated, as we have seen, that Latin America has traditionally been a continent of "sacred texts," and he sees the "profanation" of literature—its forays into hitherto forbidden areas (e.g., humor)—as proof of the contemporary Spanish American novel's vitality. For the first time in their literary history, he says, Spanish American books know how to laugh.¹ He credits Julio Cortázar with introducing humor, accident and chance into the Spanish American novel with Rayuela.²

Indeed, Cortázar has the most to say of any of our authors on the subject. His humor, irreverence and lack of solemnity in Rayuela is, he says, one of the Molotov cocktails that he throws at the established order. One of the worst aspects of the heritage Spanish America received from Spain is the tendency toward excessive seriousness, the lack of a sense of humor.³ Literature, he goes on, should not take itself so

seriously. Cortázar refers to this Hispanic seriousness as "...la seriedad, esa señora demasiado escuchada..."⁴ He says:

Qué suerte excepcional la de ser un sudamericano y especialmente un argentino que no se cree obligado a escribir en serio; a ser serio, a sentarse ante la máquina con los zapatos lustrados y una sepulcral noción de la gravedad-del-instante. Entre las frases que más amé premonitoriamente en la infancia figura la de un condiscípulo: "¡Qué risa todos lloraban!" Nada más cómico que la seriedad entendida como valor previo a toda literatura importante (otrá noción infinitamente cómica cuando es presupuesta), esa seriedad del que escribe como quien va a un velorio por obligación o le da una friega a un cura.⁵

Cortázar states that there are two proofs of Spanish America's literary underdevelopment: one is the lack of naturalness among the writers of the continent; the second is the lack of a sense of humor; for humor is impossible without naturalness.⁶ Cortázar asks why there is such a gulf between everyday life and literature in Spanish America. He says that he has known many aspiring writers who would be highly successful if they would only write as they think and as they talk, laugh and joke at informal gatherings in cafés, for example. Instead, at the moment of writing, they revert to the foolish seriousness which has so long characterized Spanish American literature. Then, when their works do not sell, they attribute the failure to the snobbery of a public which prefers foreign authors over national ones, to the perversity of publishing houses, or to any number of other reasons, without recognizing that the real reason for their failure is their own lack of naturalness and a sense of humor.⁷ Cortázar cites his own humorous little book, Historias de cronopios y famas: when the book first appeared in Argentina, he writes, the critics were shocked that such a "serious"

writer would stoop to such unimportance. This foolish notion of literature's importance, he says, is one of the worst things about Argentina. The idea of doing something just for the fun of it is practically nonexistent.⁸

Rayuela's Morelli lashes out at Art and its fossilized traditions; he recommends humor as the best destructive weapon: "...si alguien me hiciese tal objeción:...que yo, en vez de sujetarme a las severas reglas y cánones del Arte, estoy intentando burlarlas por medio de irresponsables chungas, zumbas y muecas, contestarfa que sí, que es cierto, que justamente tales son mis propósitos. Y, por Dios—no vacilo en confesarlo—yo deseo esquivarme tanto de vuestro Arte, señores, como de vosotros mismos, ipues no puedo soportaros junto con aquel Arte, con vuestras concepciones, vuestra actitud artística y con todo vuestro medio artístico!"⁹ However, for Cortázar, humor is not always frivolous and fanciful, as in Historias de cronopios y famas. We have already seen that he is drawn to what he calls "brink situations" such as the incident of the wooden board (Rayuela). Morelli states that humor in the novel should be like those dreams in which, half-hidden behind trivialities and pleasantries, we perceive graver, weightier matters which we often cannot fully discover. But we know they are there.¹⁰ Humor can carry us to "serious" matters: "Y así uno puede reírse, y creer que no está hablando en serio, pero sí se está hablando en serio, la risa ella sola ha cavado más túneles útiles que todas las lágrimas de la tierra, aunque mal les sepa a los cogotudos empecinados en creer que Melpómene es más fecunda que Queen Mab."¹¹

Cabrera Infante, the acknowledged Spanish-language master of the pun, is, like Cortázar, a strong advocate of the use of humor in literature. He too rejects the serious nature that has traditionally been accorded to Spanish American literature. When asked how he views his own contribution to the novel, he responds: "I wish it could be seen, not by me but by others, as the unstable foundation for some future leaning tower of disrespect. Enough of sacred cows! In literature, life, politics, history, and language let nothing human be considered divine."¹² He says he would like for his own masterpiece, Tres tristes tigres, to be taken as a huge written joke, lasting for about five hundred pages. He rejects the symbolism and prophecy which some critics have found in the book. He says: "Latin American literature errs on the side of excessive seriousness, sometimes solemnity. It is like a mask of solemn words, which writers and readers put up by mutual consent. TTT is intended to deflate many of these pretensions—I only hope it succeeds and TTT becomes TNT to them."¹³ The meaning of Tres tristes tigres, he declares, is merely nonsense.¹⁴ Moreover, he regards humor as an access to universality. Men all over the world laugh the same, he says. And humor makes some of the book's more obscure zones more accessible to the average reader—zones which would probably be incomprehensible had they been presented in a traditional ("serious") narrative manner. Humor and the pun are central to Cabrera Infante's novelistic theory, and he is quick to praise English literature, which he regards as the first great literature to recognize the major role that humor can and should play in literature.¹⁵

There was no intention of seriousness in the writing of Cien años de soledad, according to García Márquez. He purposefully wrote it off-handedly, casually, he says, because he was tired of the pedantry of so much of Spanish American literature, tired of so many novels whose ultimate aim was not to tell an interesting story but to overthrow a government. Such excessive seriousness, he continues, has caused the Spanish American novelist to lose his reading public—an unpardonable sin. Only now, when writers are beginning to take their role less seriously, is the public beginning to be won back.¹⁶

A valid point concerning humor is made by Vargas Llosa in his discussion of García Márquez's El coronel no tiene quien le escriba. The colonel of the story is really a pitiful figure, says Vargas Llosa—a penniless old man, retired from the bloody civil wars of Colombia, living in misery, hunger and tedium, surviving only on the hope of his government pension, which will never arrive. Had García Márquez written this novel in a "serious" manner, the crude realism of the colonel's situation would probably have been too much for the reader to accept, and the reader's reaction would have been incredulity, as was so often the case with the traditional protest novels. The reader can easily throw up a defense mechanism (incredulity) which protects him from the accusing finger of such novels—he finds such situations "exaggerated" or "impossible." But García Márquez softens his story with humor, which serves to cushion the shock of the old man's situation. The reader is distracted toward the humorous side of the situation and finds the colonel a human, understandable figure, deserving compassion. Thus, the reader, subconsciously perhaps, accepts the social criticism implicit in the

novel, but the criticism does not hurt or offend. The author's use of humor is the instrument which breaks down the barrier of incredulity.¹⁷

When asked why he does not use humor in his own works, Vargas Llosa answers that he does use it, but only incidentally, like Mark Twain. He is opposed to making humor the focus of literature.¹⁸ But in a different interview, he contradicts himself, stating:

I've always been completely immune to humor in literature.... It freezes things, glosses them over. Humor is interesting when it's an expression of revolt; for instance, the insolent, corrosive humor of a Céline. It can be a way of cushioning. But in general humor is unreal. Reality contradicts humor. Humorous authors have never convinced me or appealed to me. And the professional humorist is a type of author who has always irritated me. I think humor can be an ingredient of fiction, as it is of reality, but that it must always be justified by the context. It mustn't be premeditated.¹⁹

Vargas Llosa is certainly not alone in his avoidance of humor. A number of contemporary authors evidently cling to the idea of literature as a "serious" pursuit, and their works contain little humor: Sábato, Carpentier, Rulfo and Asturias, to name a few. Nevertheless, the number of authors who claim Spanish American literature needs to be less serious is increasing, and humor certainly plays a greater role in today's novel than it did fifty years ago.

Sex

Explicit sex scenes have traditionally been taboo in Spanish American literature. Only recently have they begun to appear in some novels, and only in a limited way. Sex is still largely a missing quantity. Proof of its still-forbidden nature is the scant amount of theoretical material dealing with it.

Julio Cortázar, for one, asks why Spanish American authors sidestep the question of physical love. When they deal with it, which is infrequently, they generally camouflage it behind euphemisms and circumlocutions, thus avoiding a direct encounter. Spanish Americans are no less aware of and interested in sex than any other culture, Cortázar states, and literature is capable of transmitting any human experience. Yet Spanish American writers seem to suffer from writing paralysis the moment they face the question of sex. Cortázar credits Lezama Lima, Fuentes and Vargas Llosa with making a beginning at tearing down the wall of hypocrisy which veils the subject, but they are exceptions. Cortázar hopes that the Spanish language will achieve liberation in the field of eroticism so that sex can be treated in literature as a normal part of life. This is not to say that erotic literature should become the norm in Spanish America, for if an author is not inclined in that direction (he points to Borges, for example), there is no reason why he should deal with it. The problem lies with those authors who want to deal with the topic but cannot in any other than a euphemistic manner. Cortázar says that in all his writings, he has never been able to bring himself to write a certain vulgar word, although it was needed. (The fact that Cortázar chose an erotic passage in Rayuela for introducing his lenguaje glíglíco symbolized the veiled appearance of sex, and is perhaps an indication of Cortázar's own unconquered inhibitions in this area.) Cortázar attributes the Spanish Americans' avoidance of the topic of sex to a fear of recognizing the erotic side of his personality—an aspect which needs expression just as much as the other facets of human existence.²⁰

The exclusion of sex from Spanish American literature is lamented also by Vargas Llosa. Since physical love is an integral part of reality, and literature is, by his definition, a verbal representation of reality, sex is as valid a topic for literature as any other. In his own novel La ciudad y los perros, he has sought to portray the adolescent's growing awareness of his own sexuality—an experience which is universally recognizable.²¹

Taking a more existential vein, Ernesto Sábato sees the role of sex in modern literature in a metaphysical dimension. Physical love is the supreme attempt at human communion, although it is usually a dismal failure. Thus, in today's novel, love takes on a sacred character. Sábato states that if, as Unamuno said, by means of love we find out how spiritual the flesh can be, we also find out through love how carnal the spirit can be. Ours is a century in which the pure spirit has been replaced by the spirit embodied in the flesh.²²

NOTES

- ¹Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, p. 30.
- ²Fuentes, "Situación del escritor en América Latina," pp. 17-18.
- ³González Bermejo, Cosas de escritores, pp. 102-103.
- ⁴Cortázar, La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos, p. 7.
- ⁵Ibid., p. 14.
- ⁶Ibid., p. 13.
- ⁷Ibid., p. 34.
- ⁸Harss, Into the Mainstream, p. 240.
- ⁹Cortázar, Rayuela, p. 614.
- ¹⁰Ibid., p. 454.
- ¹¹Ibid., p. 434.
- ¹²Guibert, Seven Voices, p. 428.
- ¹³Ibid., p. 415.
- ¹⁴"El sentido de TTT es el sinsentido o nonsense. O sense du non." Albert Bensoussan, "Entrevistas: Guillermo Cabrera Infante," Insula, Sept. 1970, p. 4.
- ¹⁵Cabrera Infante, "Las fuentes de la narración," p. 42.
- ¹⁶Durán, "Conversaciones con Gabriel García Márquez," p. 28.
- ¹⁷Vargas Llosa, García Márquez: Historia de un deicidio, pp. 328-332.
- ¹⁸González Bermejo, op. cit., p. 86.
- ¹⁹Harss, op. cit., p. 363.
- ²⁰Cortázar, Ultimo round, pp. 143, 153-154, "primer piso."
- ²¹Vargas Llosa et al., Antología mínima de M. Vargas Llosa, pp. 131-133.
- ²²Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, p. 88.

CHAPTER VII
THE FUTURE OF THE NOVEL

It seems fitting to end our study with some observations by the novelists concerning the future of the Spanish American novel. José Donoso, for example, warns that the novel may run the risk of becoming a literature for minorities, fatally reducing its audience as occurred with Spanish American poetry in the first half of the twentieth century. Donoso also cites Marshall McLuhan's theory of the mass media as a very real threat to the novel's future existence and success.¹ But he also sees hope that the current "boom" will leave perhaps half a dozen or more novels which will endure the test of time. He bases his hope on the fact that the Spanish American novel is not the product of rigid, meaningless literary theories, but rather a manifestation of a particular moment in Latin America's history, which it captures and reflects in all its rich variety.²

The novelist in Latin America still has much left to say, according to Asturias: "We can contribute an earthiness, a natural, animal force, a violence of new blood that will enrich Western culture and broaden man's understanding of himself." The future will bring more mature and able novelists who will bring something new, something else to the novel, although we cannot know now what that will be.³

The future of the novel offers man hope for his own future, in the view of Ernesto Sábato. In a world of chaos, where total war and total destruction are ever-present possibilities, the novel must seek

a "light in the midst of the shadows," "firm ground in the midst of the gigantic flood." Too much has been destroyed, he states, and when reality is destruction, the novel can only represent the construction of a new faith, for the novel is "the world of desires, of dreams and illusions, of the reality which never was or could not be...". In the coming years, he concludes, the novel that will truly speak to men will be the novel that offers a new, but genuine, hope for mankind.⁴

Cortázar separates the future of his own novels from that of the novel as a genre. The future of his own novels is of absolutely no importance to him—the only thing that matters is man's future.⁵ As for the Spanish American novel in general, he believes that it will continue to evolve along its present lines of development, with further restructuring of language:

...todavía se nos escapan demasiados lugares comunes, frases hechas, cursilerías, clisés de todo género en los temas y en su tratamiento; todavía no somos lo bastante rigurosos con nuestro instrumento de trabajo, todavía nuestras armas no están lo bastante afiladas. Si lográmos situarnos en ese nivel de eficacia verbal que las viejas literaturas alcanzaron al precio de una inmensa epopeya de la palabra, estaremos en condiciones de medirnos con los temas que nos propone nuestra América y nuestra hora. En cambio, si consentimos, si escribimos un poco como hablamos, si seguimos siendo más aficionados que profesionales, sólo habrá grandes novelas por excepción, como hasta ahora.⁶

In addition to the further refinement of language, Cortázar personally looks forward to something new—the "opening" to which he refers—in the novel as well as in his understanding of human existence. Morelli, Cortázar's literary double, has projected an ending for his own unfinished theoretical novel—a page containing a single phrase: "En el fondo sabía que no se puede ir más allá porque no lo hay." The

phrase is repeated all the way down the page, giving the impression of a solid, impenetrable wall, beyond which one cannot go. But at the bottom of the page, the word lo is missing from one of the repetitions of this sentence. It is like a missing brick in the wall which lets in light from the other side. It is the opening toward the unknown future which Morelli-Cortázar foresees.⁷

Cortázar says that the book he would like to write now will carry the experimentation of Rayuela to its final consequences. It will be a book that will probably have very few readers, because the ordinary bridges of language that the reader logically expects will have been reduced to a minimum. Rayuela, he says, was a first attack—there are many bridges left. In this new book, he wants to create his own language, an antiliterary language, he concedes, but a language all the same. Man cannot transform himself if he does not first transform his instrument of knowledge: "The question is: can one do something different, set out in another direction? Beyond logic, beyond Kantian categories, beyond the whole apparatus of Western thought—for instance, looking at the world as if it weren't an expression of Euclidean geometry—is it possible to push across a new border, to take a leap into something more authentic? Of course I don't know. But I think it is."⁸ This is the "opening" he seeks.

The concept of "figures" is one which Cortázar is pursuing as an alternative to characters. He sees these "figures" (or constellations") as the natural result of modern technology's dehumanization of man. He says:

The concept of "figures" will be of use to me instrumentally, because it provides me with a focus very different from the usual one in a novel or narrative that tends to individualize the characters and equip them with personal traits and psychologies. I'd like to write in such a way that my writing would be full of life in the deepest sense, full of action and meaning, but a life, action, and meaning that would no longer rely exclusively on the interaction of individuals, but rather on a sort of superaction involving the "figures" formed by a constellation of characters. I realize it isn't at all easy to explain this.... But as time goes by, I feel this notion of "figures" more strongly every day. In other words, I feel daily more connected with other elements in the universe, I am less of an ego-ist and I'm more aware of the constant interactions taking place between other things or beings and myself.⁹

The novel is necessary for the continuing development of Latin American identity, declares Carlos Fuentes. He states that Latin America still lacks a true cultural identity apart from Europe and the United States. Latin Americans, he believes, are still too caught up in the contemporary ethos of progress. But the day will come when Latin Americans will share a mutual consciousness, a mutual identity, and then the experimental contemporary novel will provide the language necessary for expressing the new society's consciousness. Today's novel will then be seen as the announcement of an era.¹⁰ Furthermore, he does not worry about the novelist's being made obsolete and unnecessary in a technological world. The novel will survive because "...in a perpetually unfinished world, there is always something that can be said and added only through the art of fiction."¹¹

Fuentes' reference to "a perpetually unfinished world" leads us to our concluding thought. Our study cannot lay any claims to being complete or finished. Contemporary novelistic theory is similar to

the open concept of the novel, in that this body of theory can never be conclusive and all-encompassing. Today's novelists are still writing novels and rethinking their positions on the various aspects of writing. As new novels and new theoretical statements appear in the future, there will undoubtedly be modifications in the directions that the novel is currently following, introduced by the novelists themselves. Therefore, to try to predict the future course of the novel in any detail would be a futile effort. Our study has focused on the present moment in the novels' development, and therefore does not pretend to be definitive.

NOTES

- ¹Donoso, Historia personal del "boom", p. 73.
- ²Ibid., pp. 110-112.
- ³Harss, Into the Mainstream, pp. 100-101.
- ⁴Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas, pp. 179-180.
- ⁵Guibert, Seven Voices, p. 295.
- ⁶Dfáz Martínez, "Cuatro preguntas a Julio Cortázar," p. 3.
- ⁷Cortázar, Rayuela, p. 425.
- ⁸Harss, op. cit., pp. 235-236.
- ⁹Ibid., pp. 236-237.
- ¹⁰Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana, pp. 96-98.
- ¹¹Harss, op. cit., p. 309.

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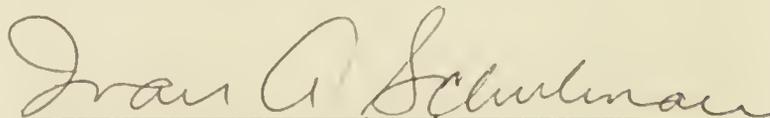
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

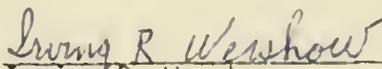
Ernest Jackson Lunsford, Jr. was born April 27, 1945, in Durham, North Carolina. He attended elementary and secondary schools in Roxboro, North Carolina, graduating from Roxboro High School in June, 1963. He attended Duke University, majoring in Spanish. While an undergraduate, he spent two semesters at the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos in Lima, Peru, under the auspices of Indiana University's Junior Year in Peru program. Returning to Duke, he received his B.A. in June, 1967. He taught for a year at the Episcopal High School in Alexandria, Virginia, before entering graduate school at Middlebury College in Madrid, Spain. He received his M.A. degree from Middlebury in August, 1969. Between 1969 and 1971, he taught as an instructor at Salem College in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. In September, 1971, he enrolled at the University of Florida to pursue a doctoral degree in Spanish with a minor in Latin American Area Studies. While at Florida, he held a graduate school fellowship, a teaching assistantship, and an NDEA Title VI fellowship in consecutive years. He received his Ph.D. in August, 1974.

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



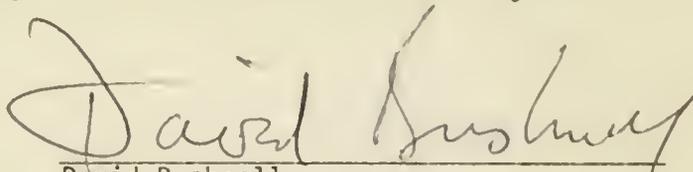
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Graduate Research Professor of Spanish

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Irving R. Wershow
Professor of Spanish

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



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This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of Spanish in the College of Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate Council, and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

August, 1974

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