THE FUNCTION OF PHYSICAL SPACE IN THE CUBAN NOVEL OF THE 1950s

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ABSTRACT

Long overshadowed by the subsequent 1960s 'Boom', Cuban novels of the 1950s have been confined to the backwater of literary analysis, often grouped together and dismissed as mere social realism like their Spanish counterparts, or described as inferior. The spatial has been similarly overlooked in literary analysis in favour of a focus on stylistic experimentation, narrative structure, characterisation and the temporal. More recently, however, theorists such as Mitchell (1980) and (1989), and Wegner (2002), have argued that literature has become increasingly spatial, and that a greater focus on spatial analysis is needed. Furthermore, conceptions of space in literature have moved from the static notion of 'setting' and identification within a specific location and time, to embrace the function of actual physical spaces, whether exterior or interior, public or private, embedded or liminal, juxtaposed, dynamic, static or fluid.

One Cuban novel of the 1950s has already been discussed from a spatial perspective - *El acoso* (1956) by Alejo Carpentier. Using the two previous studies on spatiality in this novel as a starting point (Stanton [1993] and Vásquez [1996]), this analysis expands on the conclusions made by these studies, stressing the importance of water imagery, and demonstrating that spaces in *El acoso* are essentially dynamic and female-gendered, arguing that the crisis experienced by the *acosado* is actually one of masculine identity.

Building on the expanded analysis of space in *El acoso*, three lesser-known Cuban novels of the 1950s are then considered from the perspective of space: *Los Valedontes* (1953) by Alcides Iznaga, *Romelia Vargas* (1952) by Surama Ferrer, and *La trampa* (1956) by Enrique Serpa. The socio-economic, political and cultural backcloth for the novels is set out, before an investigation into theories of space, both literary and non-literary, is conducted. Spaces in *Los Valedontes* reveal that in the rural domain, sexual identities are stable with conventional masculine hegemony virtually uncontested. Spaces in *Romelia Vargas* demonstrate that in the urban domain, female sexual identity, albeit historically suppressed, triumphs over the traditionally dominant male norm, whilst a study of spaces in *La trampa* demonstrates that not only are gangsters, policemen and homosexuals shown to occupy particularly challenged positions, but also that constructions of mainstream Cuban masculinity are under threat. The conclusion compares the function of spaces across all four novels, adding new insights into existing theories of literary space where appropriate.

This thesis, therefore, tests the hypothesis that the manipulation of space in these novels constitutes material worthy of study, showing that spaces are dynamic and challenging when female-gendered, and constituting a threat to the hegemony exerted by traditional models of masculinity. Spaces in these novels demonstrate how the early part of the 1950s was a period in which an unpredictable array of contested positions was exposed through cultural, racial, gender and sexual stereotypes, leaving conventional norms of identity open to question.

CONTENTS

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<u>Dedication</u>

For Julie Clare, who never got the chance.

PREFACE

Parts of Chapter 5, *'Romelia Vargas'* have been approved for publication as an article entitled 'From Site of Paralysis to Nerve Centre: the House as Metaphor for Personal, Social and National Change in the Cuban Novel *Romelia Vargas* (1952)', in an edited collection for the 6th Anniversary Issue of WISPS, to be published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Parts of Chapter 6, *'La trampa'* have been published as 'Gangsters, Gays & Policemen: Arrested Masculinity in the Cuban Novel 50 years Ago', in *Antes y después del Quijote: en el cincuentenario de la Asociación de Hispanistas de Gran Bretaña e Irlanda*, (CD Rom, València: Biblioteca Valenciana [2005], eds. Robert Archer, Valdi Astvaldsson, Stephen Boyd and Michael Thompson).

These two articles are enclosed at the end of this thesis.

INTRODUCTION

Cuban realist novels of the 1950s are a neglected area of an otherwise well publicised Cuban literary picture. Largely overshadowed by the subsequent canon of the 1960s 'Boom' (José Lezama Lima, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Alejo Carpentier etc.), they have been confined to the backwater of literary analysis, in favour either of assessments of the Boom writers of the 1960s, whose experimental and innovative style is perceived to be more worthy of critical study, or in favour of studies on the Orígenes literary group[1]. Often classed together and dismissed as mere social realism like their Spanish counterparts, or described as inferior novels in the gangster genre, pre-revolutionary Cuban novels have been judged, as Antoni Kapcia has argued, to be prosaic, banal, derivative, and 'alike, unoriginal, and shallow' (Kapcia 1980: 352). Cuban critic Salvador Bueno, referring to novels published before the Revolution, was scathing about their aesthetic value:

> Muchas de ellas no alcanzan un mínimo nivel de calidad. Algunos pocos
> narradores pueden salvar sus nombres del olvido más por razones
> documentales e históricas que por estrictos valores estéticos. (Bueno 1967:
> 401)

However, even a superficial reading of Cuban novels of the 1950s would not substantiate the claim concerning the similarity and banality of these novels.

The 1950s Cuban novels hitherto sought out for criticism are generally regarded as realist. Before examining the nature of realism in Cuba, it is useful to reflect on the nature of realism itself and then on its Latin American manifestation. A rather elastic critical term, realism in fiction generally attempts to represent the detail of the everyday, the commonplace, the realistic portrayal of character and event, and not the fantastic or the obscure. Realist conventions include a plot based on cause and effect, well-defined characters, and a concept of the world as knowable and open to rational enquiry. Influenced by nineteenth-century naturalism, early twentieth-century Italian literature, and mid-twentieth century Italian neo-realist cinema, social realism of

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[1] The Orígenes group, really more of a literary current, was formed at the end of the 1930s by the poet Lezama Lima, including amongst its members Cabrera Infante and Virgilio Piñera. Whilst the group catered for the minority, its aims and programme were far-reaching. As well as the journal *Orígenes*, the group published some 23 books between 1945 and 1955.

the 1940s and 1950s in Europe focuses on the depiction of less affluent characters and the socially deprived, often in a rural environment, via a downbeat, slow-paced, sometimes objective narrative stance. Such novels often have a didactic aim to expose inherent social injustice. Spearheaded by Georg Lukács and his readings of realist texts in the light of the history of the development of bourgeois society, such novels have traditionally been examined in terms of patterns of social conditions and the underlying contradictions they reveal within the framework of class consciousness. Prompted by currents in literary theory over the last few decades, this thesis offers a new way of examining such texts.

Realism in Latin America

Latin American realism has been generally undervalued outside the continent because it never produced the outstanding realist works found in European literature, most of which were imported into Latin America in translation. Mexican cultural theorist Néstor García Canclini maintains that many Latin American writers were trained in the conviction that 'great literature' lies in other countries, and that they must therefore emulate foreign styles and themes (García Canclini 1995: 75), whilst Jean Franco argues that 'Realism rarely produces the greatest novels in Latin America' (Franco 1969: 254). Philip Swanson suggests that any discussion of Latin American realism alongside nineteenth-century European realism is problematic, given that whilst many Latin American works are an accurate reflection of social reality, they do not attain the literary achievement of their European novels. Rather, they are best viewed in their own right, without reference to currents of realism elsewhere (Swanson 2005:14).

In the nineteenth century, Latin American realism, like its European counterparts, was the domain of the bourgeois novelist who attempted to convey the relationship between the individual and society as accurately as possible. The detail of daily living conditions provided the backcloth to the events of such novels. This persisted until the 1930s when realism developed into social realism, a genre which sought to expose the economic exploitation of the working class and the peasantry. Some of these writers were Communists who 'also aimed at showing the emergence of new class situations and even at arousing people to action' (Franco 1969: 231). Whilst in Europe such 'proletarian' novels were set amongst mines and factories, in Latin America they took their inspiration from indigenous communities and agricultural workers.

Realist-influenced works produced during the first half of the twentieth century in Latin America, particularly during the late 1920s and early 1930s, tended to be classified into the more specific genres of *regionalismo* and its off-shoot *indigenismo*, the Indianist novel, which favoured a traditional narrative style, and in which indigenous Indian people played an important role. Such novels were didactic in their attempt to highlight an unjust social system. Whilst some tended towards the picturesque, others were sordid in tone, and yet others idealised the Indian as more human than those who purported to be sophisticated. Although these novels often had a very specific local flavour, they also sought to be universal in their themes, in common with European works. They did not, however, reach such a large and literate readership as the European ones.

Naomi Lindstrom argues that Latin American realists were drawn to regional and ethnic folk cultures for subject matter, and that realism in early Latin American writing is difficult to define (Lindstrom 1994: 34). She further argues that realism has been steadily present throughout the history of Latin American literature, seeking to represent social and individual realities with a relatively low component of artistic distortion. However, the fantastic, magical and mythical elements present in Latin American literature have attracted more international and critical attention (Lindstrom 1994: 110). The critical skew away from realism became more pronounced as the century progressed. Whilst on the one hand, according to Lindstrom, there was a growing belief that purely realistic strategies had lost their efficacy, it was also felt amongst critics that the definition of realism had become more flexible and inclusive. By 1960 a revised concept was emerging that allowed greater latitude for stylised representation and formal experimentation that was nonetheless regarded as predominantly realistic. In fact, the most prominent realist writers succeeded in influencing the general climate of social thought. For Lindstrom, the most influential of Latin American realist works are those which explored the torment surrounding the plight of indigenous peoples (Lindstrom 1994: 111).

Lindstrom further argues that until the 1950s very few Latin American authors had been able to attract an audience outside the region. Miguel Ángel Asturias and Carpentier only retrospectively gained their international reputations, once critics had hailed them as practitioners of magic realism and the new novel (Lindstrom 1994: 140). The view that this was mere regional literature persisted amongst editors in publishing houses despite their knowledge of its quality. During the 1950s, however, Latin American fiction began to reach audiences further afield, and furthermore, these works were being read in translation alongside English and other European language authors. Latin American fiction began to be viewed as innovative in its narrative construction and

use of time and space (Lindstrom 1994: 141). Not surprisingly, this rise in acclaim for innovative authors brought with it the demise of the more regionalist and realist works, which now had even less chance of reaching an international readership.

For Swanson, the bridge linking regionalism and social realism with fantasy and innovation in form is magic realism (Swanson 1990: 4), which is based around the idea that Latin American reality is different from that of Europe and North America, being unusual, fantastic, or 'marvellous', due to its bizarre history and varied ethnological make-up. Swanson encapsulates the view that Latin American reality is more akin to fantasy, due amongst other things to 'the indigenous population's view of life based on myth and legend' (Swanson 1990: 4). He then contemplates the debate as to whether the fantastic as encapsulated in magic realism points to the sheer exuberance of Latin American reality, or whether it goes beyond this to question or subvert the notion of Latin American reality in general (Swanson 1990: 4). It is possible that magic realism performs both of these functions.

Donald Shaw argues that as regards fiction, the 1940s was 'the crucial decade of the century' in terms of Latin American literary output (Shaw 2002: 84). He cites the publication of works by Asturias and Carpentier in 1949, *Hombres de maíz* and *Los pasos perdidos* respectively, as the year in which magic realism was launched, and viewed Juan Carlos Onetti's *La vida breve* (1950) as 'the advent of the Boom itself' (Shaw 2002: 83). For these three writers, Shaw maintains, reality is there to be questioned and should be fused with the imaginary. Shaw detects in this period a tendency for writers to doubt their ability to provide an accurate reflection of Latin American reality. By the end of the 1940s, then, Latin American fiction had begun to express itself in ways other than traditional realism and *indianista* themes by seeking to embrace universalism, the magical, the metaphysical and the disturbing (Shaw 2002: 107).

Most critics agree that Mexican Juan Rulfo's 1955 novel *Pedro Páramo* was a landmark, despite only achieving recognition a decade after publication (Beardsell 1990: 74). Set in the seemingly social realist context of the lives of poverty-stricken peasants in the arid southern Mexican region of Jalisco, Rulfo's book subverts the realist genre by use of experimental techniques, mythical overtones, an architectonic structure, and elements of magic realism. It was acclaimed for its innovative use of chronology and juxtaposition of different time periods, its themes of *caciquismo*, revolution, religion and death, its use of sound and cinematic qualities, and its involvement of the reader in the unravelling of events and character relations. It also invited the

reader to learn about the nature of reality as we construct the substitute reality of the text (Beardsell 1990: 82). This novel, therefore, can be said to lie at the crossroads of realism and the stylistic innovation of the 1960s Boom. Verity Smith views *Pedro Páramo* as a post-realist novel, in which realism and its conventions are but a pretext for their subversion and parody (Smith 1997: 734), whilst Lindstrom credits Rulfo with inventing a new approach to writing the rural novel, by avoiding the usual conventions of identifying characters and places within recognisable locations (Lindstrom 1994: 152). Furthermore, Rulfo overcame the tendency towards reproducing the particular local speech of rural communities in realist works by having his characters speak a common language which was not identifiable as that of any specific location (Lindstrom 1994: 152-3). He also resisted the tendency towards focalisation through a well-educated central character. Lindstrom draws on Joseph Sommers' view that Rulfo's very conception of reality includes components which, for others, constitute the mythical, the abnormal or the supernatural (Lindstrom 1994: 155)[2].

Although Randolph D. Pope places the Latin American novel at the start of the 1950s firmly within the realist genre, with novels 'tinged by an existentialist pessimism, with well-rounded characters lamenting their destinies, and a straightforward narrative line' (Pope 1996: 227), he does, however, note the tendency by this period for these writers to be no longer dependent on European or North American models of literature. Pope identifies the period 1950 to 1975 as marking 'a change in the self-perception of Spanish American novelists', with the most acclaimed of these convinced of 'a social and political discourse that only shows its weakness when exposed in the literary text' (Pope 1996: 226). Pope argues that many authors felt obliged to compensate for the lack of social comment from the press, with the result that the instructive rather than the aesthetic was uppermost in their output. Enrique Anderson-Imbert had previously gone further than this, having argued that Latin American novelists of the 1940s and 1950s wanted to represent reality as 'something objective' in their novels, as 'something alive, unruly, rough and unpolished, something between novelist and reader', in which 'chronological and spatial orders become confused' (Anderson-Imbert 1969: 716). Swanson affects a compromise by arguing that despite elements of a more experimental style of fiction in the 1940s and 1950s, realism predominated until well into the first half of the twentieth century (Swanson 2005: 19).

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[2] See Sommers, J. (1974) 'A través de la ventana de la sepultura: *Pedro Páramo'* in *La narrativa de Juan Rulfo: Interpretaciones críticas*, ed. Joseph Sommers. Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, p. 161.

Realism in Cuba

If realism in Latin America has been generally undervalued, in Cuba it has been all the more so. Gustavo Pérez Firmat argues that because Cuban culture lacks the indigenous substratum that is so strong a presence in other parts of Latin America, and because it has experienced so much contact with the outside world, its writers have tended to look outwards for cultural models which can be 'translated' and assimilated into its own medium (Pérez Firmat 1989: 2-10). In other words the Cuban writer inherited from Spain and other European countries a set of artistic and literary resources, and it was the task of many Cuban writers, Pérez Firmat claims, to mould these elements into a uniquely Cuban authentic form of expression.

Along with García Canclini (1995), Pérez Firmat (1989) further argues that the Cuban writer was conditioned by history to look for opportunities for displacement, be they geographical or linguistic. The root of this particular tendency amongst Cuban writers may lie in the reality that writers elsewhere in Latin America were operating within countries that had gained their independence some eighty years before Cuba. Roberto Fernández Retamar, drawing on José Martí, argues that 'our entire culture is taken as an apprenticeship, a rough draft or copy of European bourgeois culture' (Fernández Retamar 1989: 5). However, whilst Cuban literature is thus perceived as imitating foreign models, such works may in fact be a reflection of Cuba's own reality, since writers in every culture produce works that could be termed 'realism' in their attempt to reflect accurately the particularities of their own social environment.

Cuban literary production of the nineteenth century included one major work of realist fiction. *Cecilia Valdés, o, La Loma del Ángel: novela de costumbres cubanas* by Cirilo Villaverde, which has been described as 'probably the most famous Cuban novel' (Thomas 1998: 213), was written in two parts: in 1839 and 1882. Cecilia is a young *mulata* who feels a reciprocated attraction towards the white son of a slave plantation owner. The son is unaware that she is his half-sister, his father's illegitimate daughter. The novel is a social document charting the importance of the urge to *mejorar color* through sexual relations. (Gallagher 1973: 441-442)[3].

In their overviews of Cuban literary achievement during the first half of the twentieth century, literary critics such as Lourdes Casal (1971), Julio Martínez (1990) and Smith (1997) indicate

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[3] The concept of *mejorar color*, literally to 'improve colour', signifies the desire to whiten the skin of one's descendents through procreation with a person of a paler skin colour.

that Cuban writers have been considered in terms of generations, with the first generation of the republic representing the first two decades of the century. Most of the novels produced during the first two decades of the twentieth century are described by Martínez as pointing to 'a definite realism' (Martínez 1990: 323). Given that many writers had experienced the armed struggle for independence against Spain, their output was characterised by social preoccupations, focusing on war heroes from the fight for independence, on disdain for authority and the United States, and on the exploration of nationhood. Such novels tended to be historical, and included the names of real people and places. Sometimes taking their cue from the naturalism of Emile Zola, many writers of the 1920s reflected the hostility felt by Cubans towards foreign domination by giving their novels a didactic and political tone: *Coayboy* (1927) by José Antonio Ramos is a good example, as well as works by Luis Felipe Rodríguez, Carlos Loveira and Jesús Castellanos. Smith singles out Loveira's novels *Generales y doctores* (1920) and *Juan Criollo* (1927) as 'fundamental for an understanding of the social reality of his era' (Smith 1997: 238), whilst Kapcia has argued that these novels were strongly imitative of both Spanish and French nineteenth-century realism, many of them lacking depth and historical value (Kapcia 1980: 350).

Novels of the first generation up to around 1920 were often written in a national tradition of self-deprecation, known as the *choteo*, a bittersweet mockery of life's adversities. By the 1920s this had developed into criticism of unwelcome external entrepreneurship and internal corruption. This then gave way to the genre of *costumbrismo*, a particular type of realist literature prevalent in the 1930s, which, responding to political instability and corruption, idealised rural customs. Examples can be found in the work of Loveira and Enrique Serpa. Afro-Cuban themes led to the creation of *criollismo*, in which the typically Cuban, the regional, and the autochtonous were portrayed. *Criollismo* was an effort to capture the essence of Cubanism through the idiosyncrasies of popular culture, including events, practices, customs, and landscape. This style can be found in Carpentier's *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó! historia afro-cubana* (1933), whilst *negrismo*, a product of acculturation and hybridity incorporating myths from Afro-Cuban culture, was a style found particularly in the work of Lydia Cabrera.

During the 1930s, however, other strands began to appear in Cuban novels, in that some writers showed a tendency toward evasion and introspection, and away from social realism; Rodríguez experimented with innovative techniques in *Ciénaga*, published in 1937 but reworked from a previous 1923 version. Serpa's *Contrabando* (1938) experimented with the technique of stream

of consciousness, whilst Enrique Labrador Ruiz's trilogy of *novelas gaseiformes*[4], the first of which was published in 1933, was characterised by evasion, a trend which was to continue in later years. The year 1933 also saw the publication of *Pedro Blanco, el negrero* by Lino Novás Calvo, a novel about slavery, colour and alienation. During the 1940s the twin concerns of social issues and introspection continued, with the output of Carpentier continuing into the next decade: *El reino de este mundo* (1949) and *Los pasos perdidos* (1953) displayed Carpentier's capacity for 'verbal density, imaginative plots and frequent use of American themes' (Smith 1997: 239).

The 1940s and early 1950s saw an intensification of previous trends, with the dual strands of social concerns and esoteric fictional worlds remaining a strong feature of novelistic output. By this time many established writers (Carpentier, Labrador Ruiz, Novás Calvo and Serpa) had escaped the social dislocation and the struggle against Batista by publishing in exile. The other major writer of the 1950s alongside Carpentier was Virgilio Piñera, whose technique of evasion was evident in the parallel reality of a fictitious world in *La carne de René* (1952). The expression of social concerns had developed by then into what Julio Martínez describes as 'a literature suffocated with traditional realism' (Martínez 1990: 240). Casal has pointed out that few new novelists emerged during the 1950s, and that 'The Cuban revolution provided the theme for the most representative novels of the period' (Casal 1971: 454)[5]. Kapcia agrees, arguing that 'The novel … seemed stuck in "social realism", often an updated *costumbrismo*, almost as though novelists were still "writing the 1930s" well into the 1950s' (Kapcia 2005: 99).

Cuban novelists in the 1950s, therefore, attempted both to engage with the social and political concerns of the time, and to seek flight from them by creating alternative realities. It is fair to say that critics have not found their attempts particularly successful. It is still possible to detect a romantic view of the country in some rural-based Cuban novels of the period, and evidence of a journalistic style amongst those who started by working for the press. Also detectable is the tendency towards objectivism, in which often tragic events are conveyed dispassionately, and existentialism, with its sense of despair and its questioning of man's position in the world. That this negative view of the Cuban novel was widely shared is evident by the lack of critical attention.

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[4] Labrador Ruiz's trilogy consisted of *El laberinto de si mismo* (1933), *Cresival* (1936) and *Anteo* (1940).
[5] Casal is referring to the 1933 Cuban Revolution here.

The Cuban novel of the 1950s has attracted some critical attention, but many critics limit their discussion exclusively to the work of Carpentier: Henríquez Ureña (1963 and 1979), Anderson-Imbert (1969), Martin (1989), Swanson (1990), Bloom (1990), Ryan (1991) and Lindstrom (1994). Gordon Brotherston (1977) has acknowledged the intellectual legacy of Cuban writers but has also focused exclusively on Carpentier in terms of 1950s output. Other critics focus on the Boom writers, omitting the work of other Cuban writers: Gallagher (1973), Brushwood (1975), Bhalla (1987), King (1987), Williams (1995), Pope (1996), Hart (1999), Shaw (2002), Balderston and González (2004) and Kristal (2005). Franco (1969) has examined Cuban writers of the first forty years of the Republic, and those who published after the 1959 Revolution, thus omitting the 1940s and 1950s. Specific overviews of Cuban literature follow a similar pattern, focussing on Carpentier and Piñera from the 1950s: Lazo (1965), González Echevarría and Pupo-Walker (1996) and Souza (1976). Some skip the 1950s altogether (de Armas and Steele [1978] and Siemens [1988]), whilst Seymour Menton (1975) did not refer to novels published before the Revolution.

Smith includes an eight-page section on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Cuban prose and poetry, examining Labrador Ruiz and Piñera as well as the Boom writers, but not engaging with other writers of the 1950s (Smith 1997: 235-242). Catherine Davies (1997) includes Dulce María Loynaz's 1951 novel *Jardín* in her analysis of twentieth-century narrative by Cuban women, but does not include the female-authored novel *Romelia Vargas* (1952) analysed in this thesis. More recently, Anke Birkenmaier and Roberto González Echevarría's 2004 collection of papers from a conference held at Yale University in 2002 on the last one hundred years of Cuban literature, accords prominence to intellectual movements of the 1950s, and yet discusses only aspects of Carpentier's work and that of Piñera in terms of individual novelists. One can only conclude that critics have not found the majority of novels of this period worthy of interest.

Critics within Cuba who have examined literature of the 1950s, without mentioning any of the less well-known novels in this thesis, include Juan Remos y Rubio (1958), Pablo de la Torriente (1963), and Sergio Chaple (1996). Some critics have mentioned the novels in this thesis, but without providing an analysis of them. Anderson-Imbert (1969, first published in 1963) has briefly mentioned writers Serpa and Ferrer but has offered no comment on the novels analysed in this thesis. Henríquez Ureña (1979) listed writers by genre and period, and although he included the little-studied novels and authors which form the basis of this thesis, he too offered no comment or evaluation of them. Raimundo Lazo claimed that socio-cultural considerations

prevailed over the personal in the work of the writers he mentions (Alonso, Cardoso and Piñera), noting 'la franca superación del cuento, perfeccionado y diversificado, con respecto a la novela de más laboriosa y menos afortunada producción' (Lazo 1974: 277-278).

Critics since the 1950s have offered little explanation for their lack of interest in the novels of the 1950s. Kapcia has attributed the weakness of the position of the pre-revolutionary Cuban novel to the general lack of maturity of the genre in Latin America and the economic pressures which militated in favour of the short story over the novel, concluding that only Carpentier stands out as an exception (Kapcia 1980: 352). Cuban critics during and shortly after the 1950s, therefore, were pessimistic about their nation's literary production. Bueno's article in *Carteles* provided a useful analysis of the general literary situation in Cuba, lamenting 'la situación desastrosa del libro publicado en nuestro país' (Bueno 1952: 50). He attributed the absence of a thriving literary output to:

> Causas económicas, impuestas oficiales, escasa formación de hábitos de
> lectura, acentuación de la atracción de cine, la radio y la televisión, los
> caracteres epocales, tales como la prisa y la frivolidad. (Bueno 1952: 50)

Similarly, Piñera offered some insight into the literary scene of the 1950s, bemoaning the lack of literary activity and critics, claiming that 'existe la literatura cubana pero... sólo en los manuales' (Piñera 1955: 51), and, with reference to the literary men of the 1920s, asking '¿Qué resta de aquellos hombres? ¿Qué forma final adoptaron? ... ¡Bah! Han devenido políticos, profesores, periodistas, ... ¿Y en cuánto a sus obras? Pura ganga' (Piñera 1955: 54).

Bueno is one of a handful of Cuban critics who do mention the novels in this thesis, listing and describing as 'algunas novelas notables' Alcides Iznaga's *Los Valedontes* (1953), amongst others. He provided a one sentence summary of the plot of each novel, without engaging in further analysis. His more recently published *Ensayos sobre literatura cubana* (2003) contains only studies of novels by Dulce María Loynaz and Carpentier. José Antonio Portuondo (1962) listed Iznaga, but Ferrer is not mentioned, even though it was her novel that won the *Concurso de novela* prize of 1952 over that of Iznaga.

With the new political and social order following the Revolution in 1959, there was a gap of nearly ten years before further reviews of 1950s Cuban novels were published[6]. Several works briefly mentioning 1950s Cuban writers and novels appeared during the 1970s, both from within and outside Cuba. Casal's chapter in Carmelo Mesa-Lago (1971) has provided an overview of the general cultural and literary climate before and after the Revolution (see Chapter One). As regards the novel of the 1950s, Casal is the only critic to have provided a representative list of novels published. She is alone in including all three of the lesser-known writers featured in this thesis. In her assessment that 'Te Cuban Revolution of 1933 provided the theme for the most representative novels of the period', she has rightly highlighted the social and political significance of these novels, but has not engaged in a critique of them (Casal 1971: 454).

Martínez offers an insight into novels of the 1950s. He believes that those writers who chose the path of social evasion may have been seeking a voice for their disillusionment, leading them to abandon the social realist form, and engage in introspection and the depiction of 'esoteric fictional worlds' (Martínez 1990: 326). This current coexisted alongside social realism, he maintains, throughout these two decades, together with the third strand he identifies, the tendency to gangsterism in the name of revolutionary struggle. In terms of actual texts, he lists Serpa's *La trampa* (1956), Labrador Ruiz's *La sangre hambrienta* (1950), and Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos* (1953). He also cites Piñera's *La carne de René* (1952) as an example of the tendency towards evasion, noting how the fictional world created therein parallels reality in an attempt to expose its absurdity. However, he also notes that the everyday nature of the revolutionary struggle against Batista during the 1950s led some novelists to 'capitalise on its ensuing human drama for their themes' (Martínez 1990: 326). As he further argues, with reference to the 1940s, 'The preoccupation with Cuba as a collectivity whose intrinsic nature was still in the process of being identified remained a powerful subterranean catalytic undercurrent in many novels' (Martínez 1990: 326).

Against this rather meagre background, then, the starting point for this investigation into Cuban realist novels of the 1950s is Casal's 1975 thesis on images of Cuban society among pre- and post-revolutionary novelists. She listed thirty-seven novels compiled from a variety of sources in several North American libraries (Casal 1975: 112). Casal then applied several criteria to the

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[6] Criticism of Cuba's literary production was not in abundance as writers themselves grappled with the option of either compliance with the dictates of the new revolutionary government over literary production, opposition, or exile.

novels in order to reduce them to fifteen novels eligible for her study, in terms of images of society during the decades before and after the Revolution: novels published outside of Cuba; novels with historical settings far removed in time from the 1950s and 1960s; novels without a predominantly Cuban setting, and novels which could not be located in any North American library were all eliminated. Casal's final list of fifteen Cuban novels published in the 1950s is listed below[7]. To provide sufficient depth for further analysis, four novels from Casal's final list of fifteen have been chosen: Alejo Carpentier's *El acoso* (1956), *Los Valedontes* by Alcides Iznaga (1953), *Romelia Vargas* (1952) by Surama Ferrer, and *La trampa* (1956) by Enrique Serpa. The basis for the selection of these novels is that as a group they offer a much richer scope for analysis due to the immediate impact of their use of space, both exterior and interior. They also reflect a tendency towards the cinematic, and are therefore rich in exterior visual and spatial elements. The other novels were not selected for a variety of reasons: either they were unavailable in Cuban shops and libraries, or a copy was catalogued in the Biblioteca Nacional but was absent from the shelves, or a copy was obtained and read but was not selected because it did not offer as rich a scope for analysis as the four novels that were selected.

The novel *El acoso* provides the springboard for the analysis of the other three novels. The reason for this is that of the twenty or so existing studies on this novel, two offer an analysis of physical spaces, thus opening up the possibility of applying the same focus to other Cuban novels of the 1950s. These two studies are a thesis by Margaret Stanton (1993), and an article by Carmen Vásquez (1996). Whilst some critics have placed the events of *El acoso* during the run-up to the fall of the dictator Machado in 1933 (Pogolotti [1958], Mócega González [1975], Schwarz [1988]), the narrative also draws on readily identifiable events from the early 1940s as well as the continuing climate of violence and dislocation of the 1950s. *El acoso* focuses on the pursuit of a hunted man as he undergoes a series of personal crises, within the context of the turbulence caused by the quest for heroic status amongst groups motivated by violence.

It was decided to consider *Los Valedontes* first of the three lesser-known novels because its rural setting situates it closest in form to the realist genre, whilst the two other novels are both urban in

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[7] Labrador Ruiz, E. (1950) *La sangre hambrienta*, Gómez, F. (1951) *El burguesito recién pescado*, Clavijo Tisseur, A. (1952) *La maestra del pueblo,* Ferrer, S. (1952) *Romelia Vargas,* Iznaga, A. (1953) *Los Valedontes,* Esténger, R. (1954) *El pulpo de oro,* Wen Maury, J. W. (1954) *La noche de un Martes 13,* Espinosa, M. (1955) ¡*Bastardo*!, Tur Canudas, A. (1955) *La tierra y la viejecita,* Serpa, E. (1956) *La trampa,* Carpentier, A. (1956) *El acoso,* Ortega, G. (1957) *Una de cal y otra de arena,* Patiño Hernández, A. (1957) *Ritmo de juventud,* Patiño Hernández, A. (1957) *Una mujer y tres espejos,* De Boullon, F. (1957) *Lucha de razas* (Casal 1975: 127-128).

character, and differ considerably from this genre. *Los Valedontes* is situated in a poor, drought-stricken, rural sugar-mill community in the late 1940s. The main themes of this novel are rural poverty and the neglect of children, the power of the landowner to exploit his employees, the mill workers' disillusionment with successive governments, and the need for Cubans to maintain their own culture and identity as opposed to emulating a North American one.

Romelia Vargas is an important but overlooked novel which should be better recognised and appreciated for reasons which will be elucidated in Chapter Five. It is set in Havana during the run-up to the fall of Machado in 1933, with a *mulata* protagonist recruiting for the revolution. The novel defies generic classification, given that it lacks the representative quality of the social realist genre, with its characteristic of continuity and daily repetition, or the features of *costumbrismo*, *novela negra*, existentialism, or any other recognisable genre. To today's readers, however, it has a feminist resonance, given the position of the protagonist Romelia as head of a revolutionary group and the direct call to the reader in the introduction to applaud Romelia in her revolutionary mission. The novel's main themes include Cuba's colonial past versus its revolutionary future, engagement with revolutionary activity and gender power.

The final novel, *La trampa*, is located in Havana during the early to mid 1950s. Set within the context of the *grupos de acción*, *La trampa* can be classified as a 'gangster' novel, in which elements of the *novela negra* are discernible. The novel's alternating structure enables the author to exploit the themes of power, gangsterism, threatened masculinity, and the futility of violence as a strategy against unequal power relations in society.

The novels have attracted some critical attention within Cuba. Ana Cairo (1993) focuses on the way that writers have dealt with the 1933 Revolution in the narrative form. She analyses three of the novels in this thesis, omitting, not surprisingly, *Los Valedontes*, with its rural setting and preoccupations (see Chapters Three, Five and Six). Casal's 1975 thesis, already used here for its comprehensive list of novels, has explored the images of society in pre- and post-revolutionary Cuba as presented in novels of the two periods, in an attempt to contrast this view with other available data on this subject. She also set out to test certain hypotheses concerning the extent to which the Revolution changed the image of society, based on her analysis of these novels (Casal 1975: 1). Her analysis referred mainly to the social position of the characters and changes in social attitudes towards race, gender and class, rather than to spatial elements. Virginia Domínguez (1987) has edited and distilled sections of Casal's thesis to develop Casal's work on

images of women in pre- and post-revolutionary Cuban novels, and to explore gender issues. She has also reflected on the various roles assigned to the writer and literature, and analysed both male and female characters in these novels, correlated with race, before examining stereotypes and drawing her conclusions. Although Casal and Domínguez are the only critics who engage with the three lesser-known novels in this thesis, it is Domínguez's comments on them that are the more useful. Whilst Casal and Domínguez have considered all four of the novels (see Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six), theirs was a sociological rather than literary approach, and hence they did not consider them from a spatial point of view.

Some critics have detected the underlying potential inherent in certain Cuban novels of the 1950s. Pamela Smorkaloff examines the plight of the creative writer throughout the decades prior to the Revolution, explaining that by the 1940s and 1950s most of them were writing scripts for the very successful, often American-controlled, radio stations. Contractually tied in to such companies, writers were overworked, their obligations leaving little free time for personal literary pursuits. When a writer did produce a work of fiction, this became the property of the soap company that sponsored the radio programmes. Smorkaloff argues that despite the restrictions imposed by what amounted to a discouraging publishing environment, 'in time, adversity strengthened writers' resolve, and they redoubled their efforts in defence of national culture' (Smorkaloff 1997: 56). She concludes that in the final decades of the Republic the Cuban writer's resilience and ability to resist repressive circumstances was in evidence, and that despite operating in a climate of political turmoil and corruption in the 1940s and 1950s, for these writers 'the most troubled periods often bear the most interesting fruit' (Smorkaloff 1997: 57). Whilst she does not explicitly say that the novels of this period were not inferior, she does consider them alongside other writers operating in equally troubled periods, such as Villaverde and José Martí, implying at the very least that 1950s writers are worthy of some merit.

Domínguez, who has examined the representation of women in the pre- and post- revolutionary Cuban novel, a subject which had formed part of Casal's 1975 thesis, has stated that 'the material Casal examined remains vastly understudied' (Domínguez 1987: 26). Whilst this is testimony to the novels' neglect and not necessarily to their quality, another of her arguments is more convincing: 'Novels become especially valuable documents when formal systematic investigation of the society in question is limited or nonexistent'. Furthermore, she has concluded that whilst novels are seen as reflections of society, they are also 'a medium through which norms and values

are introduced and transmitted. Novels are not just images of the present but also anticipations of the future' (Domínguez 1987: 27).

Martinez, Smorkaloff and Dominguez all indicate, therefore, that novels of this period offer more insight into the period than has hitherto been acknowledged. Smorkaloff's observation is strengthened by Martínez's comment that many of these novels contain 'powerful subterranean catalytic undercurrents' (Martínez 1990: 326). Taking as a cue the two studies on *El acoso* already undertaken by Stanton and Vásquez, a close, spatial analysis of the novels in this thesis does indeed reveal the presence of undercurrents of upheaval, with tensions and fissures across a variety of axes. Such undercurrents include notions of gender and sexuality, citizenship, and unexpected relationships of power. The novels show how the early 1950s were characterised by particularly fraught social and political conditions, without clear-cut class definitions. Identities are questioned, indistinct, and shifting. Aesthetic qualities raise and reinforce questions of power relations, leading to the inversion of private and public spaces. Seemingly established issues of identity are questioned, and an unpredictable array of positions of contestation are presented, in which ideological, gender and sexual stereotypes are contested, whilst constructions of 'mainstream' Cuban masculinity are threatened, indicating the degree to which society at the time was dislocated and dysfunctional.

A spatial approach

The rationale for the claim that space is important in these novels is fourfold. Firstly, literary theorists have indicated that spatiality is increasingly important in novels from the 1940s onwards and particularly in novels of the social realist genre (Frank [1945], Frye [1957], Mitchell [1980] and [1989])[8]. Mitchell's main premises are that space should be prioritised over time in literature, that space is an essential feature of literary interpretation, and that literary space tells us more about society and history than we would otherwise have known (Mitchell 1980: 567). More recently, Phillip Wegner argues that 'a literary criticism orientated towards spatial concerns might enable us to read familiar texts in new ways' (Wegner 2002: 191). He calls for recognition that spatial analysis should form the basis of literary theory in the light of an increasingly spatialised and globalised age. Whilst some critics of 1950s Cuban literature (Casal [1975], Domínguez

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[8] Northrop Frye made the link between the descriptive type of literature, social realism, and the didactic (Frye 1957: 79), a link reiterated and developed by W.J.T. Mitchell (Mitchell 1980: 551-553) (see Chapter Two).

[1987], Smorkaloff [1997] and Martínez [1990]) suspect that there is more to these novels than might at first be apparent, none of them has identified the importance of spatiality. Their focus is on the role of the writer, narrative structure, characterisation and social typologies.

Secondly, studies by Stanton (1993) and Vásquez (1997) have already demonstrated that a spatial analysis of *El acoso* has proved to be a highly effective tool in exposing the novel's less obvious themes and in shedding light on the predicament of the *acosado*. Other commentators have missed the importance of a spatial analysis of this and other Cuban novels of the 1950s. These two studies have thus paved the way for a spatial analysis of novels of the period which have hitherto been neglected, providing a springboard for the study of the novels selected in this thesis.

Thirdly, the depiction of reality in these texts, even after only a preliminary reading, is highly visual, three-dimensional, and atmospheric, despite often only the scantest amount of physical detail. Given that as a group these novels were published in the 1950s, Cuban writers of the 1940s and 1950s may have been influenced by neo-realism and the *film noir* in cinema (an outdoor location, the long shot, an emphasis on the social position of the protagonists, and implied social criticism), as well as the North American crime novel.

The fourth reason for a spatial analysis is that spaces in these texts encompass a rich and wide variety of environments, with urban and rural, interior and exterior, personal and private spaces represented, as well as more complex, embedded spaces. Spaces in this thesis include some of those identified by theorists as occurring frequently in novels, such as the domestic house, the park, the cinema, the brothel, the car and the café, but they also include the more culturally specific locations of the *batey*, or sugar-mill (see Chapter Two). These spaces invite particular readings of the events and characters presented in them. For example, the public space of the park in *Romelia Vargas* is host to a highly private, secret meeting. It is also the location for an intimate sexual encounter, as is, in contrast, the tiny embedded space of the corridor in the Vargas house. The privacy of Estrella's rooms in *El acoso* is disrupted by the more public pursuit of the *acosado*, and the normally private space of a bedroom used for childbirth in *La trampa* becomes a place for visitors employed in the public domain. The normally public spaces of the café and restaurant in both *Los Valedontes* and *La trampa* become the locations for personal issues concerning gender and sexual identity.

Notions of space in relation to literature are as varied as they are in non-literary fields. A distinction should be made between actual spaces in the real world and aesthetic recreations of reality as expressed in fiction, even if these recreations purport to be 'realistic'. Some spaces in novels might be a simple representation of a real fictive space, such as a particular park or street, whilst others may be partially based on a real space but altered by the writer. Alternatively, some may be entirely imagined, for example, spaces in fantasy or science fiction, and others may be more complex, consisting of small, embedded spaces within larger spaces, or spaces which may not normally come under scrutiny, such as corridors or storage areas. Some are liminal spaces, zones of transition between other, more readily defined spaces. Finally, there are spaces in novels which only exist extradiegetically; these are conveyed through the mind of a character, recalling a space s/he has known elsewhere, or in the past.

There has been much confusion over the meaning of terminology used by writers and critics with regard to literary space. 'Setting', 'space', 'spatial form' and 'spatiality' have all been used within this context, and for the purpose of this thesis it is also necessary to reflect on the notion of 'physical space'. 'Setting' and 'spatial form' have been used for many years in the history of literary criticism, whilst 'space' is a more recent term which has been increasingly used since the 1970s, in both literary studies and cultural studies in general.

In its broadest sense, setting can mean both the physical space in which the narrative takes place, and the historical time period in which the novel is set. Furthermore, there are two broad approaches towards the analysis of physical space as setting in the realist novel: firstly, spaces in the novel can be examined as real spaces, with the décor or external landscape reflecting the character's personality or position in society. In this case, both the artefacts and people in the novel have a similar meaning as people and artefacts in the real world. They are taken to be representations of the real world, with the reader accepting their representation. Conversely, the spaces in the novel can be viewed as artistic constructs created purposefully by the writer, in order to say something else about the characters or society. Here, the reader stands outside the novelistic world, evaluating its elements for their contribution to an artistic whole rather than as a copy of the real world.

René Wellek and Austin Warren undertook a thorough analysis of the novel in their *Theory of Literature*, first published in 1949, in which they drew attention to the influence on literature of the philosophical current of existentialism, prevalent during the 1940s, and the growing concern

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with the space and time aspects of literature and art. Literary criticism has traditionally distinguished three constituents of the narrative genre: plot, characterisation and setting. Setting has often been treated under the terms 'atmosphere', 'tone', or 'mode'. Wellek and Warren viewed setting as 'a matter of period', distinguishing between the Romantic and the Realist setting (Wellek and Warren 1982: 220). If the setting is natural, rather than man-made, it may be used as a projection of the human will, as they illustrated: 'A stormy, tempestuous hero rushes out into the storm' (Wellek and Warren 1982: 221). They pointed out that environments, including domestic settings, can be used as metaphorical representations of character, and have drawn attention to setting as determinant, as physical or social causation, and as something over which the individual has little control. Their study has provided a thorough analysis of literary techniques up to the mid-twentieth century. However, they did not discuss the notion of smaller, physical spaces as opposed to wider settings, nor the possibility that settings and spaces may be dynamic rather than static.

Michael Toolan develops the analysis of setting begun by Wellek and Warren, viewing it as determinant and causation, and playing a causal or analogical role in relation to character and events, or a menacing, soothing, emblematic or almost animate role (Toolan 1992: 104). His focus on setting, rather than space per se, whilst useful for its insight into how character is conveyed through setting, favours the traditional view of space as secondary to character. He does not engage with space as an analytical tool to reveal other aspects and themes which might be underpinning a work of fiction.

Jeremy Hawthorn suggests that recent literary critics have felt uneasy about using the term 'setting', seeing it as unfashionable and inappropriate when applied to postmodern fiction, which typically presents human beings as 'symbolically homeless, deracinated, alienated from their environment' (Hawthorn 2001: 104). In his analysis of settings in literature, he stresses the need to decide whether setting is generalised or specific, and whether it is functioning in a symbolic way. A setting may be accurate and realistic, but also symbolic of something else, as in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (1924), in which the sanatorium represents pre- First World War Europe with its many sicknesses. The writer may use a setting in the historical past, Hawthorn contends, to avoid addressing contemporary issues about which he or she feels uncomfortable or confused, or for the purposes of self-preservation if he or she is operating under conditions of censorship. Despite the admission by Hawthorn that the term 'setting' has become outdated, he nonetheless offers some useful insights on the function of setting which do not appear to have

been articulated elsewhere. Novels which foreground the importance of setting, usually labelled 'realist', have been regarded in general by critics as inferior to novels in which other techniques are more prevalent, for example linguistic experimentation, unusual narrative order, or the replacement of speech by interior monologue. Rather than use the term setting, the term space will be used and elaborated further in Chapter Two.

Space is often deployed in terms of national, regional and local perspectives in area and postcolonial studies. Although an increasingly unfashionable term amongst literary critics of recent years, setting still seems to have the connotation of the broad location for the events of the novel, such as a particular district of the city or a specific country town, at a particular time in history, and within a particular demographic context. The term 'space', on the other hand, has been used more recently to denote either a broad umbrella concept covering all of the terms listed above, or to refer to the actual physical spaces depicted within novels. These consist of the smaller, more specific, definable physical environments in which characters are placed, such as a café or a park. Such spaces can then be further broken down into even smaller zones, such as a corner of the café or a particular building in the park. Space in this thesis denotes exactly these types of physical spaces, and not broader geographical locations.

The other widely used term is 'spatial form', borrowed from the plastic arts. It came to be used in relation to literature after Joseph Frank's seminal essay of 1945 'Spatial Form in Modern Literature'. It refers to the way in which modernist writers attempted to disrupt the hitherto mainly temporal nature of the novel by making their works more spatial. This was achieved by attempting to slow down narrative time, by juxtaposing the narrative sequence, or by encouraging readers to construct a mental picture of the actual sequence of events for him/herself. Spatial form, therefore, does not refer to actual physical spaces in novels, but rather to the organisation of the narrative structure, and 'spatiality' can be understood as synonymous with spatial form. When physical spaces are juxtaposed in a narrative, they contribute to the novel's spatial form. The terminology used in connection with space in literature is discussed further in Chapter Two.

As can be seen from the above discussion, the academic context for this thesis lies between cultural studies and literary criticism. This thesis, therefore, is concerned with identifying the fundamental patterns informing the fictive world of the novel, as they are elucidated by the physical environments in which the characters and events are placed. It tests the hypothesis that the manipulation of space in the work of these less well-acclaimed authors constitutes material

worthy of study, allowing for a richer and more nuanced understanding of the social and political context of the period, presenting a depiction of the Cuba of the 1940s and 1950s in all its key facets, exposing the fundamental differences between these texts and their hitherto unrecognised literary merits. The thesis shows how a large proportion of society was fragmented and oppositional, with different sectors vying for power, and thereby elucidates issues of contested identity.

In Chapter Two the theoretical basis for the thesis is expounded, drawing on the intellectual formation of spatial theory in the twentieth century, which represents a variety of disciplines, and which can be divided into two main categories: those who have theorised space in the real world and those who have examined the representation of space in literature. A multi-disciplinary survey is needed, since each discipline has adopted a different approach, and there are areas where social and literary approaches converge. Thinkers on space in the real world include Henri Lefèbvre, Michel Foucault, Fredric Jameson, Edward Soja and Doreen Massey. Those who have theorised literary space include Frank, Frye, Gaston Bachelard, Mikhail Bakhtin and Mitchell. The chapter addresses the notion of space as opposed to place, space as a mental construct, domestic space, liminal space and gendered space. The chapter concludes that a range of theories about space are of relevance to the novels in this thesis, and it acknowledges the terminological minefield which needs to be negotiated for an understanding of 'space' in literature, explaining why the term 'physical space' was chosen for this thesis.

This spatial focus allows the authors to dislocate (consciously or subconsciously) contested elements in order to disclose or explore concealed, underlying social tensions. These individual spaces may be arranged at particular junctures of the narrative, or juxtaposed, creating a notion of simultaneity and performing synergistically in the production of further meanings. In terms of the function of these spaces, three major categories have emerged: gendered spaces, spaces which function as potential thresholds, and spaces embedded within larger spaces.

Through the analysis of spatial elements in four novels, this thesis investigates how ideological, gender and sexual stereotypes were contested during the 1940s and 1950s, and examines the position of several social groups, including gangsters, policemen, homosexuals, revolutionaries and intellectuals. The use of space in these novels is at times complemented by intertextual play with other texts and genres, be they novelistic, dramatic, or filmic. For example, the hill in *Romelia Vargas* invites connections with a famous nineteenth-century work of Cuban realism,

whilst the plight of the *acosado*, the hunted man in *El acoso*, bears the hallmarks of existentialism. Spaces are at times accompanied by the use of leitmotifs, repetition and circularity. Spaces that perform as thresholds onto new experiences allow for an appreciation of the effect of social and political dislocation or upheaval on the individual or group. For example, the park in *La trampa* is a threshold into alternative sexual behaviours. Other spaces in these novels function as windows into the text, opening up for inspection underlying tensions and schisms beneath a veneer of superficial stability.

Chapter One provides an analysis of the socio-economic, political and cultural climate in Cuba during the late 1940s and 1950s. The first part explains how Cuba was an essentially primate economy, with a long history of sugar production, and how American visitors played a key role in tourism, as well as in the gambling and prostitution industries. The huge difference in standards enjoyed by most city-dwellers as opposed to country-dwellers, and the many schisms between the two environments are outlined, as well as the nature of the rapid growth of Havana, with particular reference to living space and recreational space.

The second part of Chapter One provides an overview of the political scene in Cuba from the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado during the 1920s to his downfall in 1933, through the first regime of Fulgencio Batista during the 1930s, to the Auténtico government of the 1940s, and finishes with a depiction of conditions under the second *batistato* during the 1950s. It was considered necessary to include a portrayal of conditions under Machado, since the revolutionary struggle to bring about his downfall forms the specific backcloth to most of the novels.

The third part deals with the cultural climate of Cuba in the 1950s, the cultural heritage of the writers, and the different literary genres in which they operated. The tendency towards literary generations is highlighted, public attitudes towards literature are discussed, as are possible foreign influences on writers. The importance of radio and the popularity of the *radionovela* are stressed. The situation for professional writers is briefly examined, and how some were obliged to make a living from journalism because of the lack of publishers, a largely disinterested reading public, and strong competition from imported popular literature from North America and Europe.

Some twenty articles on *El acoso* are evaluated in Chapter Three. This is the only novel of the four to have attracted considerable critical attention, both within and outside Cuba. I consider in detail the two particular studies on *El acoso* which focus on a spatial analysis: Stanton (1993) and

Vásquez (1996). Then, having assessed the views of other critics on this novel, I argue for a greater emphasis on issues of sexual identity and masculinity as identified through spatial analysis. In Chapter Four I demonstrate that when a spatial analysis is applied to *Los Valedontes*, it can be concluded that traditional notions of gender and sexuality, although briefly challenged, remain stable. A spatial analysis of *Romelia Vargas* in Chapter Five reveals that sexual identities in this novel are subject to challenge and instability, whereas in Chapter Six I argue that the hitherto unrecognised theme of *La trampa*, as identified through space, is that of contested masculinity.

In summary, only two critics have hitherto demonstrated the value of a spatial analysis in the appreciation of one particular Cuban novel. This thesis re-evaluates their analysis of space in *El acoso* and applies a spatial analysis to three further Cuban novels of the period, revealing insights into sexual identity which were not previously apparent, as the following chapters will show. In Chapter Seven conclusions are drawn about the function of physical space in all four novels as a group, comparing and contrasting the seventeen particular spaces within them. I demonstrate that sexual identities are increasingly unstable across the three lesser-known novels, and reveal insights into how these novels add to our understanding of the literary theory of space.

CHAPTER 1: THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

In the Introduction I argue that the manipulation of space in the work of four Cuban novels reveals new insights into issues of gender and identity in Cuba in the 1950s, allowing for a richer and more nuanced understanding of these texts. In order to fully appreciate these insights, the following overview of the nature of Cuban society, and of the economics, politics and culture of the time provides the backcloth to the events and themes within the novels.

The nature of Cuban society and economy in the 1940s and 1950s

Cuba in the 1950s displayed elements of the classic dependency between core and periphery nations; after fighting the Spanish in three wars of independence in the nineteenth century, Cuba was then subjected to intervention by the USA in 1898, when the Spanish forces were defeated. Cuba was proclaimed a republic in 1902 under the terms of the Platt Amendment[9], and for the next fifty years this republic would be 'characterised by endless violence, dramatic corruption, military revolts, gangsterism and sporadic military intervention by the United States' (Gott 2004: 113). However, the country also experienced 'spectacular economic growth and prosperity for a small section of society' (Gott 2004: 113). In terms of national wealth in Latin America, by 1957 Cuba was outranked only by Venezuela, Puerto Rico, Argentina and Uruguay. Only in these latter two countries did daily average food consumption exceed that of Cuba, a country which lay within the top quartile of wealth in the world due to consistent economic growth since World War II (Nelson 1972: 48-49).

The economic history of Cuba in the first half of the twentieth century cannot be separated from the history of sugar production. Cuba was a prime example of a one-crop export-orientated economy, trading mainly with the United States, with on average a quarter of its national income generated by sugar. Cuba's economic wealth had for decades been determined by the state of the sugar industry, which was subject to seasonality. Sugar took up half of the land and a quarter of

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[9] The Platt Amendment was a rider to the Army Appropriations Act, a US federal law of 2nd March 1902, which stipulated the conditions for the withdrawal of US troops remaining in Cuba since the Spanish-American War, and which defined the terms of Cuban-US relations until 1934.

the labour force. Meanwhile, Cuba's other main products, coffee and tobacco, were not dynamic sectors. The years following Independence brought about a huge transformation in the way sugar was grown, with fewer but larger estates, representing the continuation of a hitherto stratified rural society. A powerful oligarchy of *latifundistas*, or estate owners, constituted the remnants of the old colonial power structure. There were also a few remaining independent farmers, tenant farmers, and a great number of impoverished labourers. By the 1950s a quarter of the cane-land was still owned by four North American companies (Blackburn 1963: 58). In the view of Dudley Seers, 'the Cuban economy was so wedded to the US economy that the country was … an appendage of it' (Seers 1964: 20). Diversification for Cuba was almost impossible in the face of such economic dependence. Trade treaties with the United States since 1903 had ensured that goods exchanged between Cuba and the United States were preferentially taxed, keeping Cuba locked into this restrictive economic relationship.

The 1950s saw considerable economic growth, largely due to tourism from the United States and an expanding programme of public works. Most profits from tourism, however, went to the United States, and even much of the food and drink for tourists was imported. Tourism earnings were obtained not just from cultural or climatic attractions, but also by commercialised vice and prostitution (Blackburn 1963: 62). Such strong economic ties with the USA extended to cultural influence in the form of imported literature.

The government colluded through concessions, licences, and the construction of multi-million dollar tourist complexes. The gangster and brothel underworld of Havana in the 1950s was intimately connected with the police, and most nightclubs paid protection money to particular police officers (Thomas 1998: 1097). While gambling was flourishing as a major industry, more than 5,000 beggars, many of whom were women and children, wandered the streets (Pérez 1988: 304). Havana had become known as the 'Monte Carlo of the Caribbean', and as a centre for commercialised vice and illegal drugs, underwritten by organised crime from the United States and protected by President Fulgencio Batista.

The tourism and vice industry coexisted with the superficially prosperous and sophisticated, if Americanised, lifestyle of the Cuban middle class. Unlike other Latin American countries, Cuba's middle class was not overshadowed by a powerful upper class because the Cuban elite had been decimated financially during the sugar crisis between the wars of independence in the nineteenth century. From the 1940s onwards the countryside was increasingly repossessed by the urban

nouveaux riches (Blackburn 1967: 59), and ownership of a country estate was the outward sign that a businessman or politician had achieved success.

By the late 1940s Cuba's middle class ranked as the largest in Latin America in relation to the country's total population. However, it was a middle class deprived of the opportunity for entrepreneurialism usually associated with this class, since American investment dictated many business opportunities. Furthermore, the middle class increasingly 'perceived their standard of living in decline as they fell behind the income advances of the USA' (Pérez 1988: 297). Cuba's middle class readily embraced North American modes of behaviour, participating readily in American-style social and sporting events. Many wealthy Cubans sent their sons to the United States for their education, since mastery of English was seen as essential. This accounted for the large number of language schools and North American business academies in Havana.

The middle class represented 11% of the total labour force, consisting of teachers, doctors, lawyers, managers, civil servants, office workers and salesmen (Pérez 1988: 295-296). Unemployment was not uncommon even among lawyers, city doctors, architects and engineers, and young middle class graduates were frustrated over the lack of available job opportunities. On the other hand, there were an enormous number of government officials, many of whom were ill-paid, corrupt, and manipulated by politicians. Employment in unionised sectors (docks, electrical works and cigar factories) was higher than average.

By the 1950s, however, the Cuban middle class was in a state of crisis. Greatly affected by a stagnant economy, and with a growing sense of frustration at the lack of opportunities open to them, 'the result was the structural integration of the Cuban bourgeoisie within the economy of an alien capitalism' (Blackburn 1963: 60). Robin Blackburn further noted the 'strikingly deracinate and expatriate composition of the Cuban capitalist class', and its 'markedly parasitic character' (Blackburn 1963: 61 and 63). He quoted Lowry Nelson, who summed up the nature of Cuban society in the 1950s thus: 'One has the general feeling that Cuban society has not yet 'set' or 'gelled'' (Blackburn 1963: 73). Antoni Kapcia clarifies the lack of social cohesion as operating 'within rather than between classes, the rich mixing in their social clubs, the poor seeking their belonging in religious groupings, trade unions, self-help or recreation and sport' (Kapcia 2005: 91).

If the Cuban middle class was frustrated and displaced, conditions for its working class were even less favourable. The labour force was split into two groups: rural workers who were on low incomes and badly housed, with an illiteracy rate of 42%, and urban workers who were relatively well-paid when employed. Consisting of the rural labour force and the urban proletariat, 70% of the 220,000 independent rural workers were engaged in small-scale subsistence as *minifundistas*, either as owners, renters or squatters (Pérez 1988: 295). A further half million were paid agricultural workers, half of these being cane cutters (Pérez 1988: 295). The urban proletariat, in contrast, fared better; also numbering half a million, they worked in manufacturing, commerce, and transportation (Pérez 1988: 295). With greater access to health and education they were paid higher wages, and enjoyed greater job security. Cuban urban labour had been highly unionised since the 1920s, and by the 1950s 'labour had almost a stranglehold over the government' (Thomas 1998: 1173). Batista had been obliged to enter into an alliance with organised labour in 1938, and some labour leaders, driving round in Cadillacs, were involved in gangsterism.

The large-scale unemployment of the Depression had continued well into the 1940s, and by 1958 there was 16.4% unemployment, with 30.2% of workers underemployed (Segre *et al* 1997: 91). Nearly 60% of the total labour force was permanently affected by these conditions, with seasonality an intrinsic feature of rural employment (Pérez 1988: 299-300). However, the Cuban economy not only suffered from unemployment and underdevelopment; there was also a very large informal sector. The mass migration of rural-dwellers into Havana and Santiago during the 1930s, and the large number of unregistered people, criminals, shanty dwellers and the long-term unemployed, resulted in a distortion of the old class structure.

The 1953 census revealed that nearly 60% of Havana's work force was employed in the tertiary sector (Segre *et al* 1997: 99). This, however, failed to take account of the mass of dispossessed people, who, having failed to secure work in the central districts, were now obliged to join recent rural immigrants in the shanty-towns on the edge of the city. Such workers became spatially marginalised, since options for social and occupational mobility were severely limited (Segre *et al* 1997: 98). Furthermore, this figure of 60% did not take into account part-time and seasonal workers, and the informal sector. Nor did it account for the high number of people employed as domestic workers (cooks, maids, chauffeurs and messengers etc.), many of whom may have held several positions.

Whilst approximately 20% of Cuban women in 1953 were part of the labour force, many did not earn money consistently. They were part-time or seasonal workers, often working for a relative without pay (Pérez 1988: 305). Only about 12% were full-time members of the paid labour force, and over half of these were engaged in the service sector (Pérez 1988: 305). However, with two of every three Cuban women literate, they occupied over 50% of professional and technical posts, with strong representation in primary teaching.

Cuba's apparent wealth in relation to most of Latin America, therefore, concealed tensions and frustrations; Cubans were living within a North American cost of living index, with Havana the fourth most expensive city in the world, at a time when wages were much lower than in the United States. Whilst inflation mounted, there was little industrial development and no new wealth being created within Cuba. Even money lending was US-dominated. Furthermore, as a consequence of the widespread use of the American electricity system, only American products could be used. US brand names became generic: *el kleenex*, *el yale* and *el remington* passed into popular consciousness, whilst Coca Cola and Corn Flakes became part of the fabric of everyday life for many (Pérez 1999: 370). Woolworths and El Encanto department stores dominated Havana, replacing older, smaller establishments and street vendors.

If it was the Cuban middle class which most readily aspired to a North American lifestyle, it was they who also had the greatest access to education. Despite the 'National Campaign Against Illiteracy' of 1952, more Cubans had access to primary education relative to the total population in 1923 than in 1953, and the education system remained inadequate and inefficient (Seers 1964: 168). Access to education was uneven throughout Cuba, and was related to Cuba's generally uneven economic development. The illiteracy rate for the country as a whole stood at 23%, with only three countries in the rest of Latin America enjoying a more favourable percentage. In rural Cuba, however, the picture was much worse, with illiteracy at more than 40%, and highest in Oriente at 50% (Nelson 1972: 45).

If schools in Havana were in a poor condition, those in rural areas were even worse; there were chronic shortages of books, stationery, paper, desks and blackboards, whilst existing buildings were in need of repair. In short, there was 'a catalogue of handicaps for child and teacher' (Seers 1964: 171). Seers further noted that the Ministry of Education's administrative capabilities were described as 'discontinuous, non-professional and over-centralised' (Seers 1964: 171). Whilst in 1953 a fifth of the eligible children in urban Cuba did not attend school, in the rural locations the

proportion was doubled (Seers 1964: 170). During the late 1930s the then populist leader Batista had sent soldiers to build and teach in rural schools, known as *escuelas cívico-militares* or *escuelas cívico-rurales*, and this system persisted into the mid-1940s. Some changes had been made by 1955 when nearly a quarter of total government expenditure was devoted to education, reflecting a higher percentage than elsewhere in Latin America.

Although access to education was clearly defined along class lines, racially the population was less clearly segregated. According to Thomas, half of Cuba's total population of 5.8 million were 'negroid', a further 20% *mulato*, and the remainder white (Thomas 1998: 1117). Pérez, however, has estimated the percentage of Afro-Cubans as just over a quarter (Pérez 1988: 306). It is difficult to estimate with accuracy the percentage of blacks and *mulatos* amongst the population, since the description of colour was often a self-defined category. Black people were very poorly represented in the professions, in government or in public life, owing to their lack of access to education. Conversely, they were over-represented in construction, entertainment, and domestic service. In the army under the *mulato* Batista, they numbered just under one-third, whilst in the political arena most active radicals or progressives were white (Thomas 1998: 1122). Although the Constitution of 1940 had barred race discrimination, racial prejudice now crept in with American tourists. This discrimination emanated chiefly from the middle class, which was keen to emulate North American habits. Casal has argued that black Cubans tended to see their problems in class, rather than racial terms (Casal 1975: 61). She concluded that there was discrimination, particularly in terms of occupation and access to social clubs, with blacks not fully integrated into society. Thomas indicates that black people, often barred from the smart hotels frequented by Americans, were deprived of ownership of space within their own country (Thomas 1998: 1121).

Although Catholicism was still the official religion of Cuba in the 1950s, in reality the Catholic Church had lost much of its pre-Independence power. It remained a Spanish rather than Cuban institution, to which only the upper class related. Churches were found mainly in the rich suburbs and old city centres, with very few in the country, and those who wished to enter the clergy were obliged to study abroad. Catholicism, however, still pervaded many social attitudes, and carnivals in honour of local saints persisted, even though these were greatly modified by Afro-Cuban *santería.* Ignorance was rife over the traditional rites of Catholicism, superstitions flourished, and *santería* was the religion practiced by a significant proportion. Neighbourhoods often had their own *orisha*, or spiritual representative of dead, well-respected men. Whilst the black and *mulato*

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middle class had become largely assimilated into white Spanish society, they diverged over the actual practice of certain religious festivals within *santería.* Mainstream Catholic religious practice, then, was not a strong feature of daily life in 1950s Cuba, crystallised by Blackburn as 'more a diffused cultural presence, providing an (often adulterated) popular imagery and mythology, than a powerful and oppressive social institution' (Blackburn 1963: 65). As Ian Lumsden argues**, '**Cubans have historically been casual and individualistic about their religious observances' (Lumsden 1996: 43).

Lumsden highlights the particularly important role played by the family in pre-revolutionary Cuban society. Given that institutions such as churches and schools did not play a significant role, especially in most of rural Cuba, and that many Cubans lived an economically precarious existence without social support, the family was a more important institution than might have been expected (Lumsden 1996: 55). It was customary for Cubans to have deep feelings of *sentimiento* towards their families, and anyone who criticised their family was regarded with suspicion, his humanity and integrity in question (Lumsden 1996: 56). Marriage was used by the elites to safeguard property and honour, whilst amongst the poor it was often unaffordable, meaning that illegitimate children were often disowned by the father or bore a social stigma. Gender roles were clearly identified and machismo was deeply ingrained. Women generally colluded with the expectation of machismo from men, conforming to expectations on their part to be both chaste and provocative (Lumsden 1996: 38). Double standards applied within marriage, in that it was the reputation of men that counted (Lumsden 1996: 38). Women working outside the home might reflect badly on the husband's ability to provide for his family. In rural areas, women were confined to the home and prevented from working the land, reinforced by men's perpetration of the view of women as physically and mentally inferior (Lumsden 1996: 52). The extramarital sexual affairs of husbands were tolerated, though not those of wives, who nonetheless kept up the public face of the marriage. Casal has argued that female honour had been an index of family prestige during the nineteenth century, and that virginity was still highly valued (Casal 1975: 66).

The role model for Cuban women was the Virgin Mary, embodying characteristics of the good mother, subservience, sexual innocence and lack of sexual drive. She should remain in the home and be obedient to her father or husband. In reality this applied mostly to upper-class women rather than the urban and rural poor. The influence of the Catholic Church over gender roles, however, was not as strong in Cuba as in other Latin American countries (Lumsden 1996: 43).

The Cuban version of the Catholic Virgin Mary, the Virgen de la Caridad, is black and pleasure-loving, affording a paradox with which Cubans live quite comfortably (Smith and Padula 1996: 8). The often strong-willed Cuban woman exists alongside the self-abnegating qualities associated with these religious figures[10].

Women had fought for feminist legislation, and some had held political office. They had formed the Club Femenino in 1917, and the Lyceum of Havana in 1929. Presidents Machado, Grau and Batista recognised the importance of the support of women during their campaigns for presidency in the 1930s and 1940s, and instigated new legislation in favour of women's rights in the work place, although in practice much of this was ignored (Smith and Padula 1996: 19). By the 1940s and 1950s, women's legal status was advanced in comparison to the rest of Latin America, but although the 1940 Constitution prohibited sexual discrimination, enforcement was another matter. In 1950 the law on women's civil rights contained greater detail on the implementation of equal rights for women (Casal 1975: 70-71), but by then the Women's Movement was running out of steam, and those women who were politically conscious concentrated their efforts on challenging Batista's new period of dictatorship (Smith and Padula 1996: 21).

However, women's participation in political protest and armed struggle has not been fully recognised. It can be traced back to the First War of Independence of 1868, in which women served as spies, messengers and nurses. This vital role continued during the anti-Machado struggle of the early 1930s, and also during the insurrection of the mid-1950s, when they played a central role in key positions in the urban underground as well as in the sierra, some taking up arms, suffering persecution and imprisonment, torture or even death (Smith and Padula 1996: 22-24). A small group were personally close to the revolutionary leaders, and Fidel Castro later acknowledged their importance by creating the Federation of Cuban Women in 1959.

Nikki Craske has provided an insight into the differences between the way gender and sexuality are viewed in Latin America as opposed to by western societies (Craske 2003: 200- 221). Colonisation greatly influenced gender and sexual hierarchies, with Catholicism bringing a negative view of sexuality, misogyny, and the persistence of particular notions of honour and

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[10] The terms *hembrismo*, the celebration of female attributes, and *marianismo*, the cult of self-abnegation and asexuality, demonstrate this paradox. Smith and Padula argue that the condition of Cuban women before the revolution was more complex than has been recognised, ranging between the extremes of the wealthy socialites of the Havana Country Club to girls as young as eleven sold into vice, with a growing number of professional women in between, working as lawyers, doctors, journalists and teachers (Smith and Padula 1996: 8).

decency. Heterosexual males have enjoyed greater power to label others and have therefore controlled hegemonic discourse. They use binary models of sexuality, which are less fluid than European models. Resistance has taken the form of women's groups and a vibrant carnival subculture. Perhaps the most significant difference between sexual relations in Latin America and the West is that 'in Latin America men who have sexual relations with men do not necessarily consider themselves to be gay or bisexual' (Craske 2003: 200).

Women greatly outnumbered men in Cuba as a result of its slave history, leading to fierce competition for women amongst men, miscegenation and a large *mulato* population. Male-to-male sexual activities were another result of the shortage of women (Smith and Padula 1996: 9). Discussion over sexual matters in general was heavily suppressed, especially in public. Pregnant women were kept out of public view where possible, and the sexual functions of the body were mystified (Lumsden 1996: 31). Although machismo was widespread in the whole of Latin America in the 1950s, in Cuba it took a particularly extreme homophobic form (Lumsden 1996: 36). Attitudes to homosexuality in pre-revolutionary Cuba were related to the construction of gender and sexuality, which still took its cue from intrinsically Spanish values, upon which African culture did not significantly impinge (Lumsden 1996: 43). In fact machismo was reinforced by Afro-Cuban culture, given that black men were assumed by other Cubans to be symbols of virility (Lumsden 1996: 51). *Santería* prohibited both women and homosexual men from initiation into the religion. Paradoxically, *santería* rituals were reputedly very popular with Cuban homosexuals. The dominant belief was that masculine sexuality was more important than the expression of both female and homosexual sexual identity. Drawing on the threefold belief systems of Spanish, Catholic and African patriarchy, any man whose behaviour appeared feminine was deemed homosexual and labelled *maricón*, a term which attracted much ridicule and repugnance[11].

Homophobia was so deeply ingrained as to become institutionalised; homosexual sons would often be sent abroad by their upper class parents (Lumsden 1996: 56). Recognition of homosexuality was forbidden in public, and barely tolerated in private. The only public manifestation of homosexuality was confined to bars called *locas*, in which effeminate behaviour was the only permissible expression of homosexuality (Lumsden 1996: 57). Located in districts such as Colón in Centro Habana, these were subject to police raids. The press would periodically demand that such *barrios* be cleaned up. However, there was no systematic persecution and raids

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[11] The term *maricón* also denotes cowardice.

were usually motivated more by corruption than by morals (Lumsden 1996: 57). A man labelled *entendido*, however, was more discreet in his behaviour and maintained a more masculine demeanour. Homosexuals were generally aligned with women, in that they too were attracted to strongly macho men. Gay men were unlikely to be attracted to each other; rather, they favoured straight men with huge sexual appetites, who would at times avail themselves of gay men if there was a shortage of women (Lumsden 1996: 30). In rural areas where men spent long periods working in isolation from women, and where homosexuality was accepted less than in the city, sexual adventure between men was tolerated if not publicly admitted. Many resorted to migration to the more anonymous milieu of the city.

By the 1950s the use of Havana as a leisure playground enabled homosexuals to express themselves in a more tolerant environment. There were male brothels and cinemas open to homosexuals, who were able to find work as hairdressers or dressmakers. Prado and Parque Central were well-established cruising areas. Middle class homosexuals nonetheless had to remain closeted behind the respectable façade of their families, frequenting mainstream cabarets and clubs. Families would accept the relationship as long as there was no public acknowledgement of it. This group of homosexuals included doctors, journalists, actors, police officers and priests (Lumsden 1996: 35). Many sought sexual contact with heterosexual machos from the lower classes.

From the sources consulted here, therefore, one would not expect to find concerns over gender and sexual identity represented in Cuban novels of the 1950s. The family appeared to be sacrosanct, and men and women appeared to occupy clear-cut roles. One would certainly not expect the traditional role of the macho to be facing any form of challenge. In terms of the work place and their status in society, women, given their growing call for emancipation and participation in public life over previous years, would be playing a more important role in employment terms, but maintaining their traditional role within marriage. However, as the analysis of the novels will show, a different picture emerges of issues surrounding sexual identity and masculinity in 1950s Cuba (see Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six).

One of the most significant aspects of Cuba in the 1940s and 1950s was the huge difference between standards of living and conditions in the cities compared to those in the countryside. With reference to urban society, the outskirts of Havana had grown at a faster pace than the centre due to the high demand for labour exerted by light industry; population growth here was

75% greater than in the city centre. The total *habanero* population grew by 45% between 1943 and 1953, a faster rate than the rest of the nation, due to an upgraded road, bus and rail network connecting it to the rural areas, with the result that by the 1950s one fifth of Cubans lived in Havana, with urban society characterised by a high level of sophistication (Segre *et al* 1997: 70 and 116). People in Havana had more access to radio, telephones, and magazines, than in any other Caribbean country. In 1949, Cuba was the first Latin American country to broadcast television programmes (Pérez 1999: 333), and cars became the symbol of a modern national identity, almost an obsession; there were more Cadillacs per capita in Havana than in any other city in the world (Pérez 1999: 338).

Havana was an example of a primate city, since by the 1950s it was 6.4 times larger than Cuba's second city, Santiago de Cuba, and 9.4 times larger than Camagüey, its third city (Segre *et al* 1997: 76). Havana dominated the economy of the whole country, producing over half of national industrial output, containing two thirds of the nation's hotel beds, the majority of its high schools and university students, three quarters of its labour force, and 90% of its architects (Segre *et al* 1997: 77).

The post-1940 boom in construction in the suburbs extended to the new airport, prestigious department stores, shopping malls and high-rise offices (Kapcia 2005: 89). By the mid-to-late 1950s, three quarters of the total value of all new construction in Cuba was in Havana city or province. Vedado became the new commercial centre, privately initiated and funded. New, modern hotels sprang up here, served by a network of nightclubs, restaurants and casinos. It was here that the nation's building boom had most effect, and where 'the creeping Floridisation' of the country was most visible (Thomas 1998: 1098). In contrast, by the 1950s a third of the city's residents were destitute; most of these were black or *mulato*, and many lived in slum tenements. According to the 1953 census, a fifth of families, averaging five individuals, lived in one single room (Seers 1964: 18).

The image of urban life was therefore dualist; the wealthy seafront of the Malecón and Vedado, with its lush vegetation, gardens and parks, stood in stark contrast to the deterioration and overcrowding of Habana Vieja. Furthermore, the irregular distribution of employment opportunities, housing and class, meant that city-dwellers were spatially limited. There was little coordination among local municipalities, authorities and architects; municipalities were still poorly linked, both in terms of communications and across the classes. Access to recreation and

open spaces was not available to all. The city suffered from certain spatial maladjustments, in that the greatest density of population lived in only 5% of the metropolitan area, one million hours daily were 'lost' in commuting time within the city, and industry and services were clustered into certain municipalities, leaving others deficient.

With only 1.1 square metres of space per inhabitant, unequally distributed throughout the city, there were clearly insufficient green spaces; 'Despite Havana's tropical location, it was not a very 'green' city by the end of 1958' (Segre *et al* 1997: 102). By the 1950s, most of the open spaces were located in the wealthier areas, with the newer districts of Vedado and Miramar better served with open green spaces. Centro Habana lacked open spaces even within the private domain of patios and courtyards, since many courtyards in old colonial mansions had been filled in to accommodate new residents. Most towns and cities contained the Republican-style park, although these were often little more than glorified squares, occupying the space of an entire city block with trees and benches, a fountain or statue, a kiosk, pergola or bandstand, and diagonal paths running corner to corner. In general, land which was not used for construction was usually left bare rather than planted with greenery. The banks of the Almendares river were an exception, with, as Segre *et al* describe:

> Immense *algarrobo* trees … entangled by spectacular vines in a theatrical
> scenery that resembled a haunted forest … in El Bosque de la Habana ….
> Nearby were the Jardines de la Tropical, which contained the rarity of a tree
> canopy and 'whimsical ferrocement architecture'. (Segre *et al* 1997: 104)

If living and recreational space was at a premium in Havana, it was plentiful in the rural areas. Country-dwellers, however, were in no position to benefit from the fruits of the land. Whilst road and rail transport had developed in support of the larger, more centralised sugar mills, including the central highway linking the whole island east to west, many smaller areas remained unconnected to the cities. The 1946 Agricultural Census disclosed that three quarters of rural dwellings were huts, or *bohíos*, consisting of planks or canes thatched with palm leaves, and without electricity or toilet facilities (Seers 1964: 95). Two-thirds of *bohíos* had earthen floors, and nearly all inhabitants used kerosene for lamps, water from rivers or wells, or were without toilets or showers (Seers 1964: 95). Only 11% of rural families had regular access to milk (Seers 1964: 97), and with meat, eggs, and fish in short supply, children in rural areas were particularly

deprived. In short, there were huge discrepancies in terms of access to and ownership of domestic and public space in the city, and to land ownership in the countryside.

There were also geographical irregularities across the island; disparities between the east and west of the island were deeply entrenched, with underdevelopment more pronounced in the east. Fundamental contradictions existed between public and private use of land and resources, and between the inner city and the outskirts. Little concern was given to the quality of the natural environment, the rational use of human and material resources, or social and spatial segregation. In brief, the nation faced weaknesses in infrastructure and structural distortions (Segre *et al* 1997: 88). Kapcia summarises how power and control over both public and private spaces was limited to a very few:

> Cuba remained as divided as ever – a booming Havana (based on American
> tourism, illegal wealth and patronage) was contrasted with the appalling
> backwardness and poverty of the *campo*, Oriente and even parts of the capital,
> where the conspicuous consumption of the *nouveaux riches* coexisted with the
> poor, forced into economic informality and prostitution. (Kapcia 2005: 63-64)

To summarise the socio-economic picture of Cuba in the 1950s, it is clear that the country displayed a variety of imbalances and schisms. Whilst the primate capital functioned almost as a country in itself, the rest of Cuba bore the traits of classic underdevelopment: weak industrialisation, unemployment, a deficient infrastructure, low technological development, and poor educational and health indicators. These contradictions and inequalities created: 'a fragmented nation …that neither understood nor felt its major national problems ... In Cuba, like in the rest of Latin America, urbanisation did not result from industrialisation' (Segre *et al* 1997: 91). Whilst by the 1950s Cuba was clearly amongst the wealthiest countries in Latin America, this wealth was extremely unevenly distributed. Cuba was still effectively a monoculture, with its economy at the mercy of international demand for sugar. As Seers, quoting Nelson concluded: 'The land was rich, but the people poor' (Seers 1964: 99).

Cuban politics from 1925 to 1955

It is not surprising that successive governments were unable to address the uneven distribution of economic resources in Cuba when one examines the socio-political nature of the thirty years prior

to the mid 1950s. An examination of Cuban politics during the first half of the twentieth century should be set against the background of colonialism. Spanish rule over Cuba as a *provincia de ultramar* had lasted 80 years longer in Cuba and Puerto Rico than in the rest of Latin America, ending with the Spanish-American war of 1898. The possibility of Spain as a destination for emigration affected Cuban intellectuals, some of whom sought exile in Spain, and participated in the Civil War. Political and economic domination by one foreign power was then replaced by that of another; Cuba was to spend the next half-century under the shadow of the United States.

Although the novels which form the basis of this study were published in the early and mid-1950s, and set mainly during the late 1940s and early 1950s, it is essential to include here the politics of the previous thirty years in order to fully appreciate the political context of the 1950s. In particular, the run-up to the fall of Machado in 1933 and the ensuing revolution are important since they form the actual backcloth to one of the novels, and also because the events and conditions in the other three novels, together with the climate of *gangsterismo* during the late 1940s, were to a large extent a product of the political circumstances of this earlier period.

Whereas the 'creaking and corrupt parliamentary façade of the Cuban Republic' (Blackburn 1963: 67) from 1902 to 1925 was sustained by frequent US intervention (in 1906-09, 1912, and 1917), the subsequent dictatorship of the Liberal General Gerardo Machado, elected between 1924 and 1927 and ruling by decree between 1927 and 1933, was characterised by strikes and violent opposition by students and revolutionary groups, which was met with brutal repression by the regime. Machado's presidency coincided with a slump in sugar prices and worldwide economic depression. When he was allowed by a controlled congress to continue in power in 1928, the student movement was outraged; its members created the Directorio Estudiantil Universitario (DEU), in direct response to the prospect of another repressive term in office under Machado. Subsequently, the underground secret society ABC was formed in 1931 by young, mainly middle class, professionals and intellectuals. Cellular in structure, its principal aim was the destruction of Machado.

Thomas explains that at this time 'violence began in earnest, with members returning coup for coup the brutalities of police and army. Bombs were laid nightly' (Thomas 1998: 595). Murders were by now happening almost on a daily basis, and Machado himself was the target of a failed bomb attack. The ABC group managed to expand to some extent across the island, and the labour unions joined in the struggle as unrest developed into widespread opposition against the Dictator.

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Machado's response was to organise a special paramilitary force called 'La Porra' (the Big Stick), or *porristas*, whose role was to combat street demonstrations and to dispose of the enemies of the regime (Aguilar 1972: 125). Leading student members of the DEU were shot, the press was censored, and terrorism and brutality against prominent government and opposition figures became a common feature of life in the city.

US ambassador Sumner Welles's attempt to negotiate a peaceful end to Machado's rule in the spring of 1933 caused resentment amongst student groups, who wanted Machado to go at any cost. Bus drivers declared a strike in July 1933, followed by tram workers, and subsequently stevedores and newspaper employees. By August 4th the capital was nearly paralysed as the general strike took hold. Even after Machado was removed by the army in the same month, revolutionary activity continued with 'occupations of factories and sugar mills by workers, looting of wealthy districts, and mob attacks on collaborators with the dictatorship' (Williamson 1992: 441).

The following twenty-five year period between the revolution of September 1933 and that of January 1959 is clearly divided into three periods. From 1933 until 1944, Batista ruled as strongman over an emerging corporatist coalition (although as elected President between 1940 and 1944), and between 1944 and 1952 two elected civilian Presidents, Grau San Martín and Carlos Prío Socarrás, presided over a tenuous parliamentary period. During the inter-revolutionary period four major groups competed for power: the Auténtico party, conservative groups, the Communists and Batista, who returned to power in 1952 by coup, ruling as dictator until 1958.

After Machado's departure, Sumner Welles and the army installed Carlos Manuel de Céspedes as head of the new government, but, having no political affiliations or charisma, he was not able to take effective control. This artificially created government, 'summoned largely in response to US needs', lacked a programme and popularity (Pérez 1988: 266). Army sergeant Fulgencio Batista seized his chance to intervene and led a revolt of non-commissioned officers in September 1933; Céspedes was replaced by a five-man committee known as the *Pentarquía*, chosen by the DEU, but it lasted only two days. It was the students who chose the committee's new provisional president, their professor Ramón Grau San Martín, who had once been leader of the DEU. With Batista as Chief of Staff, the Grau government enacted a series of social and nationalist reforms, including repudiating the Platt Amendment, dissolving political parties, extending the vote to

women, granting autonomy to Havana University, creating a Ministry of Labour, and ensuring that fifty percent of employees in each enterprise would be Cuban. Batista and Grau would legitimise their role in government for many years to come by their role in the 1933 Revolution, which had been primarily the achievement of the students. Those who opposed it included the Communists, the ABC nationalists, and ousted army officers. This created a potentially volatile and unstable situation, which Batista resolved after only four months with Grau in office; in January 1934 with US government support, Batista 'suppressed his student allies, murdered their left-wing leader Antonio Gutiérrez, and abandoned the new government's programme of reform and anti-imperialism' (Blackburn 1963: 67-68)[12].

Batista would go on to rule for the next six years as dictator, using puppets as presidents, and then as elected President himself after 1940. He marketed himself as a populist 'benefactor', relying on his core supporters of former enlisted army men, and winning the support of non-whites partly due to his humble background. He reached an agreement with the Communists, allowing them control over the labour federation, in exchange for an electoral alliance, he redistributed land, built houses for the workers, created employment through large public works programmes, and embarked on a plan to improve rural education. His brand of populism was flawed, however, as there was no strong national bourgeoisie in Cuba, upon whom he could rely for support[13]. Cuban managers often ran US-owned companies, and despite the transfer of sugar mills from US to Cuban ownership by the 1950s, Cubans had little power or control over their economy and investments.

Batista continued the process of military control begun by Machado, with virtually every branch of government under army control (Pérez 1988: 277). The army became the most significant force in politics, a power that remained deeply entrenched in Cuban society (Gott 2004: 142-3). However, the lower ranks were unable to benefit from the political corruption and *gangsterismo*, which generated a luxurious life-style for senior officers, and which angered young officers and university students alike (Gott 2004: 145).

The period from 1933 to 1935 saw the creation of *El bonche universitario*, consisting of groups of thugs based at Havana University, which, having started as one group, developed into three

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[12] Blackburn is clearly referring here to Antonio Guiteras, not Gutiérrez, verified in Thomas (1998: 700).
[13] The apparent wealth of the middle class disguised its fundamental weakness, in that the scale and nature of American control and investment over the years meant that the Cuban bourgeoisie was structurally integrated within the economy of an alien capitalism (Blackburn 1963: 60).

main groups, operating by means of intimidation and aggression. The campus was by now 'a centre of warring gangs of gunmen, policemen, ex-ministers, officers, students, all out for "supreme power", none collaborating genuinely with or "implicated with" each other' (Thomas 1998: 886). By the late 1930s, this *bonchismo* had evolved into action groups, *grupos de acción*, which were armed and purported to have a revolutionary agenda, though many of their members were motivated only by a desire for power, revenge and kudos. Much of this activity had its roots in the participation of student leaders in politics after the fall of Machado, and later on in their associations with bureaucrats and groups which perpetrated gangster activities in the late 1940s (Aguiar Rodríguez 2000: 12).

Despite the climate of gangsterism and corruption, progress was made in terms of legislation. The reforms begun by Grau and Batista were written into the new constitution of 1940, which included votes for women, legislation over hours of work, pensions, and the right to strike. Communist leader Blas Roca played an important role in drafting the sections guaranteeing workers' rights. However, whilst its contents set out a clear agenda for future achievement, there were no provisions for its enforcement, and its goals would remain dormant. Batista was elected President against Grau in the 1940 election, and ruled as a social democrat during the boom years of the Second World War, a period of legitimate democratic government. *Gangsterismo* and *pandillerismo* became the new terms for institutionalised violence and corruption. Batista's populist programme continued with social welfare legislation, a public works programme, and the incorporation of the trade unions, all with US backing. He did not attempt to challenge US interests in Cuba. He was, however, increasingly opposed by the new Auténtico Party (Partido Revolucionario Cubano-Auténtico) led by Grau and former students, who were dismayed at the failure of the revolution they had created back in 1933. In 1944 the upsurge in radical nationalism culminated in the election of Grau. Batista left office a rich man, but he was not gone for good.

Expectations were high as the Auténtico Party took office. However, 'Embezzlement, graft, corruption, and malfeasance of public office permeated every branch of national, provincial, and municipal government' (Pérez 1988: 284). Public life was by now degenerate, and 'Violence and terror became extensions of party politics and the hallmark of Auténtico rule' (Pérez 1988: 284). Much of this activity was made possible with the support of government members. Indeed, some gangsters were even given posts in the state bureaucracy. Grau made use of the *grupos de acción* in 1948 to drive the Communists out of the university and the unions. According to Charles Ameringer, he used three gangster groups, incorporating their leaders into the official police: the

ARG, the MSR, the largest and most effective, and the UIR (Ameringer 2000: 22)[14]. These groups 'competed for influence and spoils, while claiming to be revolutionary' (Ameringer 2000: 22). Their members consisted of those who were too young to fight against Machado, engaging in violence without the revolutionary goals of their older counterparts. They came to be known as *el gatillo alegre*. Much of this activity still took place without restriction on the university campus, since it was off limits to the police. Some university teachers were allegedly involved in contraband, the black market, drugs and protection (Ameringer 2000: 29).

Despite the post-war sugar boom, prosperity in Cuba remained uneven, as Pérez has stated: 'an estimated 80% of the 1949-50 budget was used to pay the salaries of public officials' (Pérez 1988: 284). Grau himself was charged with embezzling $174 million (Pérez 1988: 285). The Auténticos continued in office after the next election in 1948, when Carlos Prío Socarrás became President. Prío had participated in the fall of Machado, and was perceived as well-meaning with democratic intentions. However, Prío too succumbed to corruption. Many *compromisos* had already been granted to the various *grupos de acción* when Prío took over, and he was obliged to continue with these subventions. His 'law against gangsterism' merely sent a few to prison whilst his relations with other gangsters intensified. In continuing to legitimise these groups, Prío further delegitimised the system:

> El gansterismo dejó de ser un fenómeno estrictamente de grupos para convertirse en parte del sistema político del país, en un momento en que la llamada "democracia representativa" y la pluralidad partidista ofrecían un asqueante espectáculo. (Aguiar Rodríguez 2000: 2)

By the late 1940s the theoretically left-wing Auténticos had formed a coalition with the ultra-right Republican Party. The main opposition to the Auténticos during this period came from the Ortodoxo Party, founded in 1947 by former Auténtico Senator Eddy Chibás, in protest at the corruption within the Auténticos, and at the nomination of Prío over himself for Auténtico candidate for the post of president. Candidate Chibás used the issue of corruption, striking a chord with young Auténticos based in Oriente. These years were characterised by anarchy, violence, terrorism and gangsterism, as explained by Blackburn:

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[14] Acción Revolucionaria Guiteras, Movimiento Socialista Revolucionario, and Unión Insurreccional Revolucionaria.

> In the seven years of Auténtico government, no serious social legislation of any
> kind was passed. … The single public political issue was corruption. … Prío
> surpassed his predecessor; the end of his administration saw a frenzied,
> wholesale plunder of public funds. (Blackburn 1963: 69)

After Prío did a deal with three *bonche* groups, granting them jobs in the police force, the whole system was delegitimised, and Prío discredited. The Cuerpo Policíaco now incorporated the very gangster groups it would previously have been fighting. Chibás usefully distinguished between:

> El revolucionario disciplinado, producto de una corriente de reinvindicaciones
> colectivas contra los regímenes de fuerza, y el seudorrevolucionario, que a
> punta de pistola se aventura a realizar actos de violencia y de sangre sin otra
> causa que el instinto desorbitado, animado acaso de resentimiento, la ambición
> personal o la deplorable confusión. (Aguiar Rodríguez 2000: 5-6)

A further distinction should be made between certain violent, armed gangs on the streets, and the activities of various groups of students on the Havana University campus (*La Colina*) who, although in part penetrated by gangsters from outside, were mainly motivated by the desire for educational reform and an end to government corruption. Chibás, who by now was making a weekly radio broadcast denouncing Prío, shot himself in 1951 whilst on air, creating yet another in Cuba's long history of martyrs[15]. Chibás' death was followed by widespread disillusionment, 'cynicism, resignation, and indifference' and left the Prío government 'thoroughly disgraced, politically weak, morally bankrupt' (Pérez 1988: 287).

Whilst the violence and terrorism of the late 1940s was by no means a new phenomenon in Cuba, such activity had intensified in response to the Auténticos in government. Neither Grau, nor Prío, nor Batista had taken any steps to halt the descent into degeneracy of this period. Eventually, and perhaps inevitably, reaction against such ingrained venality would gather momentum. By the elections of 1952, another vacuum had been created; before the election could take place, during the night of 10th March 1952 Batista effortlessly and peacefully re-assumed control of the government. The coup and Batista's new regime were not unanimously welcomed, although the timing of his return to power initially worked in his favour. It was the 50th anniversary of the

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[15] Martyrdom had been incorporated into Cuba's political rhetoric since the death of the nineteenth-century Cuban independence leader José Martí; subsequent martyrs included Mella, and Guiteras.

establishment of the second Cuban Republic, and Batista could draw on the fact that the following year it would be the centenary of José Martí's birth. Such lofty propaganda contrasted favourably with the overt corruption of the previous regimes. Batista's return would see the end of constitutional politics. In his first public speech he identified himself with progress and democracy, peace and justice. The black population gave him support, since they identified with his non-whiteness and Chinese immigrant origins, and he was also supported by his army officers, who were largely blacks and *mulatos*. Peter Marshall's view of middle-class support for Batista should be read with caution, because Batista's political base remained narrow, with only limited middle class support (Marshall 1987: 39).

Batista's new regime was recognised by European and Latin American governments, as well as the United States. The Ortodoxos were in opposition, and the memories evoked by the anniversaries of the founding of the Republic and Martí's death, in Marshall's view, 'reawakened and contrasted cruelly with the increasing repression and censorship of Batista's rule' (Marshall 1987: 40). Batista's regime relied heavily on the army, the police and the judiciary, and he used the institutionalised infrastructure of corruption and patrimony. His was not, however, a regime based on systematic repression.

Opposition to Batista amongst elite power contenders gradually evolved during the decade into a more widespread desire for a major socio-economic overhaul. Pérez has concluded that 'Cubans looked upon their condition during the 1950s with a mixture of incredulity and incomprehension. … they were worse off in the 1950s than they had been in the 1920s' (Pérez 1988: 303). Profound structural imbalances, together with the climate of moral degeneration in some sectors of society, were of continuing concern to student groups and the thwarted nationalist aspirations of the Ortodoxos, from amongst whose ranks there emerged the influential figure of Fidel Castro, a young lawyer.

Castro's planned attack on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago failed in July 1953, and he was subsequently imprisoned. It was in prison that he made several famous speeches. Subsequently he met Che Guevara whilst in exile in Mexico, and organised an invasion of the Oriente region in 1956 aboard the yacht *Granma*. Despite the failure of this latter attempt, the process of widespread insurrection began, with the rebels operating in the Sierra Maestra in a guerrilla struggle, and a parallel urban guerrilla struggle taking place in the cities. After increasing

numbers of Batista's former army went over to Castro, the tide turned and Castro's army's march westwards ended in their triumphant arrival in Havana in early January 1959 (Kapcia 2005: 64).

Given the extent of US economic interests in Cuba during the 1950s, one might expect American influence on the political scene to have been considerable. However, its influence was more covert. Superficially, US involvement in Cuban politics during the 1940s and 1950s was limited to voicing official recognition and support for Cuba's presidents on an international level. It was more a case of what the US government did not do; it turned a blind eye to the thriving gambling interests of some of its citizens in Cuba, and to associated gangster activities. Whenever the genuine popular aspirations of the liberals appeared to have a chance to gain power, intervention by the USA would put paid to progress, and allow tyranny to develop. Many Cubans themselves found the benefits of continuing under the shadow of US power too much of a temptation. It was by now clear to visiting foreign observers and commentators that the disempowered and destitute poor were bearing the brunt of the excessive lifestyles of the corrupt and immoral few. It was also becoming clear that the very fabric of society was crumbling, and that cracks were beginning to appear in the increasingly transparent crust of superficial prosperity.

As Thomas indicates, 'During the first thirty years or so of independence from Spain, Cuba … had failed to create a credible political system' (Thomas 1998: 599). Those who had been instrumental in bringing about the downfall of the dictator Machado in the 1933 Revolution were bitterly disappointed by the failure of successive governments to implement true democracy and to work towards the creation of a more just society. Instead, corruption became institutionalised as successive governments plundered the nation's resources for their own benefit. As Donald Bray and Timothy Harding have stated, 'Reformist measures could not salvage a fragile social structure emanating from a basically stagnant neo-colonial economy' (Bray and Harding 1974: 602).

The context of the Cuban novel in the late 1940s & 1950s

If in the 1950s the socio-economic situation of Cuba was imbalanced and dependent, and if its political leaders were powerless to counteract violent groups, Cuba's cultural production in general, and its novelistic output in particular, was hindered by internal factors as well as by competition from imported forms. Despite their evident stylistic variety (see Chapter One), several factors militated against the success of the Cuban novel in the 1950s. In order to fully

understand the nature of literary production in Cuba during this period, it is necessary to examine how writers and their products were valued, how 'subversive' forms were viewed and how writers were treated by both the authorities and the public. Jean Franco has observed that 'Before the revolution, writers were Sunday writers with private means or jobs in other fields' (Franco 1970: 105). They needed the support of a group, be it a literary circle in a café or a political organisation (Franco 1970: 105). Some writers had been politically active; in 1928, for example, a group of writers and intellectuals were imprisoned, among them Carpentier. Such conditions led many to follow Cuba's long history of writers publishing in exile, leaving a minority to form small cultural groups around magazines with a low circulation. There had been a general lack of interest in Cuba's own literary production from both government and readers during the first four decades of the Republic. Although the second *batistato* (1952-58) was openly repressive in political terms, it was not the regime itself which limited literary production; rather, it was the cultural and social milieu which seriously restricted the forms and scope of literary expression.

Kapcia argues that the social elite, with its managerial and commercial power and interests, was more interested in aspiring to a North American type of culture, and that the cultural elite was marginalised and fragmented, with some favouring a politically engaged approach and others a more aesthetic one (Kapcia 2005: 92-93). Writers who favoured a more aesthetic approach were mainly poets, and until the early 1930s, Cuban poets dealt with the changes brought about by a more mechanised world by pursuing a strategy of evasion. This avoidance tactic helped them to 'desplazar la zona de conflicto y proyectarla hacia la supratemporalidad del fanatismo místico' (Fowler Calzada 1994: 251). It further led to a deeply religious if not transcendental tendency. After 1934 there was no longer a well-defined distinction between a cultural establishment and a vanguard, and there were by now three groupings: the major cultural institutions, the vanguardists, seeking to emulate foreign styles or promote Cuban culture, and other groupings which were either more political or experimental, and supported by prizes or private means (Kapcia 2005: 92).

Furthermore, the more literate middle and upper classes which could have fostered home-produced literature failed to show any interest. Casal has crystallised their attitude thus: 'Most of these people looked at literature with disdain, as a pastime for good-for-nothings and homosexuals' (Casal 1971: 456). José Quiroga argues that 'since the 1950s gay men had proclaimed themselves the "custodians" of Cuban culture' (Quiroga 1997: 136). It was almost expected that an intellectual in the 1950s would be gay. Pamela Smorkaloff argues that 'the allure

of an exotic and dazzling media world' meant that Cubans were distanced from the worsening problems in their own country (Smorkaloff 1997: 55). For most Cubans, 'culture was something that existed *elsewhere*' (Smorkaloff 1997: 63). She further points out that the black *guajiro* still lived in a pre-print culture, and that even for literate non-African Cubans print culture counted for very little (Smorkaloff 1997: 63). As for country-dwellers, with their low levels of literacy, they had little access to literature. Imported films and *radionovelas* provided their main form of cultural experience.

Another hindrance to the success of the novel was competition from other literary forms. The short story and poetry became the predominant literary genres of the pre-revolutionary years, attracting more attention than other forms, partly because publishing costs could be kept down. Much poetry tended towards the personal and the hermetic, making it inaccessible to most readers, whilst with the establishment of the Hernández Catá awards for short story writers in 1942 this genre had enjoyed considerable success during subsequent years. Writers included Alfonso Hernández Catá, Lydia Cabrera, Lino Novás Calvo, Dora Alonso and Onelio Jorge Cardoso (Casal 1971: 453). As well as such home-produced competition, Cuba's novel writers also faced competition from imported American works in translation (Smorkaloff 1997: 55). Whilst the government appeared to be indifferent, the cultural elite had the power to dictate that imported North American literature was the accepted norm, rather than locally produced material.

As regards publishers, the few in existence (Cultural, Lex, Montero, Martí) were mainly concerned with school texts and technical and professional books (Casal 1971: 455). Most were located in Havana, whose print shops supplied the whole island. Páginas's bookstore was the centre for writers and intellectuals of the 1940s, with the quality of its publications consistently good. Manigua, without funding or a journal, and consisting mainly of writers who published under a common label, was the only publisher based in Santiago de Cuba. Smorkaloff commends the work of three literary and publishing groups (Orígenes, Páginas and Manigua) and includes a complete list of titles published by the Orígenes group, as testimony to their efforts to remedy a situation in which Cuban writers subsidised the publication of their own works (Smorkaloff 1997: 60-62). Distribution of novel titles, however, tended to be limited to friends and the writer's wider literary circle. Most writers of the period had little choice but to get their work published abroad. This was not always a negative move as publishers in Mexico and Buenos Aires provided them with access to wider Latin American markets. For example, Carpentier's *El acoso* (1956) was published in Buenos Aires and his *Guerra del tiempo* (1958) in Mexico.

With such a dearth of publishers, the *tertulia* and the literary journal flourished (Smorkaloff 1997: 49). Cultural output in printed form encompassed newspapers, magazines and literary journals. The role and influence of these informal 'authorities' should not be overlooked: the national press, publishers, critics and cultural elites. In the 1950s Batista was using the proceeds of the lottery to bribe the press at a rate of $1 million per month (Pérez 1988: 304), with the result that the press did not accurately reflect the issues affecting most Cubans. Newspapers mimicked North American styles, and many journalists were American nationals. By the 1950s, *Bohemia*, one of the most widely circulated Cuban magazines, was incorporating comics, detective stories and articles supplied by contributors from the United States (Smorkaloff 1997: 51). American products were advertised in this magazine, often using American film stars, and thus creating a link between the two media. Society pages were an important part of magazines and newspapers, with reports of the Havana Yacht Club or Tennis Club predominating, giving rise to a climate of aspiration. Women's charity clubs held events at which it was important for the wives of leading Cuban businessmen to be seen: Scouts, Guides, Rotary and Lions groups reinforced this network, often providing study scholarships to the United States.

The magazine *Orígenes* was an important outlet for the literary intellectual in 1940s and 1950s Cuba, given the lack of other opportunities. Published between 1944 and 1957, it was produced by the Orígenes group, formed at the end of the 1930s by the poet José Lezama Lima, and included amongst its members Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Virgilio Piñera. Whilst the group catered for the minority, its aims and programme were far-reaching; it ran counter to the prevailing current of 'superficial cosmopolitanism, a world of imported cultural values' (Smorkaloff 1997: 58). As well as the journal, Orígenes published some 23 books between 1945 and 1955, but although the group undoubtedly exerted some influence over the intellectual and literary climate of the time, it would be an exaggeration to claim that its influence was widespread. The interest of members in the complexities of aestheticism alienated them from the general reading public. The group was also criticised for being elitist and escapist, and for adopting a strategy of evasion, thus avoiding confrontation with the socio-political problems of the day. Orígenes member Lorenzo García Vega asserted that 'había una indiferencia total hacia cualquier manifestación intelectual, pero se resentía la labor de nuestra revista' (Barquet 1992: 45). Such criticism was often motivated by *machismo* and provincial morality against homosexual members of the group. However, accusations of escapism were not without foundation, Kapcia argues, since the group did not address black culture or poverty, seeking

inspiration in Europe rather than Cuba (Kapcia 2005: 97). In any case, most Cubans preferred popular American literature to elitist Cuban literary works.

The Orígenes literary current split into two parts: its older members, including founder Lezama Lima and others such as Piñera, privileged the lyrical over social expression, in a bid to 'distance themselves in order to undertake the search for Cubanness, which turns towards not only the roots of nationhood, but also to metaphysical and universal dimensions' (Smith 1997: 239). The second Orígenes group of younger members, including Eliseo Diego, Cintio Vitier and Fina García Marruz, were more politically engaged, producing their own poetry as well as works on the nature of Cuban poetry per se. They sought to produce poetry with more socio-political preoccupations, in a simple language. Jesús Barquet maintained that the group captured the rhythm of the time, the frustration of the failed 1933 Revolution, and the disenchantment with political corruption (Barquet 1992: 49-50). José Rodriguez Feo, co-founder of the *Orígenes* magazine, left the group and started another magazine, *Ciclón* (1955-59), seeking to create a more socially involved publication. Before this, *Nuestro Tiempo* (1951-59) had been started by another cultural group with connections to the Partido Socialista (Casal 1971: 448). The dual nature of Cuban literary output by the 1950s was explained by Kapcia thus 'the only real division was not between canon and avant-garde but between a cultural ethos grounded in political or social commitment and another based on artistic excellence and aestheticism' (Kapcia 2005: 95). He further expressed this as a prose-poetry dichotomy.

Even though conditions for the publication of novels by Cuban writers were not favourable, other types of cultural output were flourishing, providing competition for an already limited literary market. Casal has argued that, despite tendencies by critics to dismiss pre-revolutionary literary output in Cuba as of little value, post-war economic development and rapid business growth actually led to 'a wave of optimism and, consequently, … a desire for new activities that were at the base of the new cultural expansion' (Casal 1971: 428). She has described this new mood as 'effervescence, which continued with relative vigour in spite of Batista's *coup d'état* of 1952' (Casal 1971: 428). It was from this enthusiasm, she has claimed, that both the cinema and theatre movements sprang.

Julio Matas has traced the development of Cuban cinema during the first half of the twentieth century (Matas 1971: 436-438), demonstrating that by the 1940s Cuba's own cinematic efforts were being overshadowed by imported Mexican and Argentinian films, distributed by their

prosperous production companies. Pérez argues that widespread distribution of American films provided a 'perceived common culture' for Cuba's actually quite disparate economic and racial composition (Pérez 1999: 302). Cuban novelists of the 1950s were operating against a background not just of imported North American *film noir*, but also of Italian films made during the 1940s and 1950s, which were exported to North America and thence distributed to Cuba. Such films bore the hallmarks of Neo-realism, with an outdoor location, an emphasis on the social position of the protagonists, and implied social criticism. Some of these traits can also be traced in Cuban novels of the period (see Chapter Four). Furthermore, as Stephen Wilkinson explains, there had been a long tradition of the crime genre in Cuban literature, radio and film, starting in the early 1930s. Some Cuban-made radio series were successfully exported elsewhere in Latin America, providing funding for the first Cuban-produced sound feature film in 1937 (Wilkinson 2000: 101-102)[16].

Theatre and music were also flourishing in the 1950s. Matas, in his overview of Cuban theatre, has argued that the arrival of emigrant intellectuals from Spain during the Civil War enriched Cuba's existing theatre scene (Matas 1971: 428-432), and that by the late 1950s there were several permanent theatres, performing the best of European and North American drama, such as works by Sartre and Genet. Audiences were, however, largely middle class. There was also a flourishing ballet theatre, under the tutelage of Alicia Alonso. By the mid 1950s, however, increasing terrorism and the boycott of public spectacles by Batista hindered the further development of Cuban theatre. Music was perhaps the most widespread popular cultural form, often closely allied to the religious activities in *santería*.

Communal forms of entertainment, particularly television and radio, were becoming increasingly more popular than solitary forms, such as narrative fiction and poetry reading, thus providing further competition for novelists. The popularity of the *radionovela* increased, with radio reaching some six million people in 1956 (Kapcia 2005: 103). Cuba was one of the first countries to acquire television in 1949. However, despite heavy advertising, access to such products was restricted to the wealthy. Radio was more popular than television, a more expensive pursuit, which tended to show *telenovelas* scripted by advertisers (Kapcia 2005: 103). Cuba's 160 radio companies constantly advertised American products (Peréz 1999: 332), and major soap manufacturers owned many of the radio stations, setting their soap operas mainly in Europe or North America, but rarely in Cuba. Guidelines for radio scriptwriters stipulated strong references

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[16] *La serpiente roja* was produced by Felix B. Caignet. It was also the first radio series.

to these familiar genres, meaning that writers had little leeway for their own creativity. Smorkaloff characterises the 1950s climate thus:

> A subcultural industry began to develop, managed by the advertising agencies
> and the US-based transnational corporations which were testing their strategies
> for commercialisation of the continent on Cuba. (Smorkaloff 1997: 49)

Conditions, therefore, were not favourable for the establishment of a flourishing literary scene, and the publications of cultural societies and groups enjoyed only limited circulation and distribution.

Despite Carpentier's output and the innovations shown in the work of Piñera and Labrador Ruiz, the status of the novel in the 1950s was weak. Only Carpentier was widely known outside Cuba, since he adopted more universal themes rather than the intrinsically Cuban, and because he had greater contact with French and other intellectual circles. In Casal's view, 'During the fifties, the number and quality of Cuban novels written probably reached the lowest point in Cuban history' (Casal 1971: 454). She has pointed out that few new novelists emerged during the decade, and that the 1933 Revolution provided the theme for the most representative novels of the period (Casal 1971: 454). Quantity aside, it is nonetheless wrong to conclude that the characteristic of social realism inherent in some of these novels means that they are not worthy of study. Furthermore, novels of the 1950s are quite disparate in character (see Introduction).

It is not surprising that within a climate of gangsterism and violence lasting several years, some Cuban writers in the 1940s and 1950s reflected the *bonchismo* (gangsterism) and social dislocation of the late 1940s (see Chapter Six). Although influenced during the 1950s by imported crime stories from the United States, such as those by Raymond Chandler, this genre has a long history of its own in Cuban literature. As Wilkinson argues, 'there was a relatively highly developed cultivation of the detective narrative in Cuba before revolution' (Wilkinson 2000: 82). Whilst the detective novel, with its strong central police figure pitched against criminal elements in a quest for justice, is not the same as the depiction of rival gangster groups with an often unresolved ending, it is perhaps true, as Wilkinson suggests, that 'by the 1930s Cuban society was so Americanised that the kind of world which Hammett describes fitted the Cuban

reality' (Wilkinson 2000: 110)[17]. He further points out that the preoccupation of these American authors with police corruption was also a very real concern for Cubans in Havana, and that whilst some Cuban novels clearly were adaptations of existing output from North American writers, others contained material which was just as much a reflection of Cuban life and society as it was American.

In the introduction to the 1980 edition of the novel *La trampa*, Dania García Ronda has provided a list of precursors to the Cuban 'gangster' novel: *La generación asesinada* (1934) by Luis Marrero, *Un aprendiz de conspirador* (1937) by Marcelo Salinas, *El pulpo de oro* (1954) by Rafael Esténger, *Los desorientados* (1948) by F.L. Fesser Ferrer and *La noche de Ramón Yendía* (no date given) by Lino Novás Calvo. Juan Marinello added to this list *Los ausentes* by Teté Casuso (no date given), also noting the influence of the Cuban gangster novel genre on the literature of other countries: *Una brizna de paja en el viento* (1952) by the Venezuelan Rómulo Gallegos.

García Ronda has explained that the *bonche* groups were first formed in the secondary schools of La Víbora and Havana, and how Batista used his own infiltrators to corrupt immature members of these groups (Serpa 1980: iv-v). *Bonchismo* took hold in the University of Havana, and other similar groups sprang up outside of centres of education, with some acting in collusion with politicians. The *bonche* members were attracted not to the possibility of seeking vengeance on former *machadistas*, but to: 'extorsionar, chantajear, amenazar y asesinar, para obtener provechos personales' (Serpa 1980: v). As Serpa himself has indicated, favours played an important part in this mechanism: 'exigían "botellas" para sus miembros o para amigos y familiares; llegaron a imponer funcionarios en los organismos públicos' (Serpa 1980: v). García Ronda has neatly summed up the consequences of this for society: 'el ambiente de terror, de inseguridad y de angustia fue creciendo en medio de la descomposición social que vivia el país' (Serpa 1980: vi),

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[17] North American Samuel Dashiell Hammett (1894-1961) is recognized as the first master of hard-boiled detective fiction. His cynical characters and complex plots defined the genre in film, radio and television, in which the private eye series became a staple feature of the entertainment industry.

outlining the escalation of violence during the 1940s, and how governments legitimised gangster activity by co-opting members into their own institutions.

As well as the highly urban gangster genre, the 'rural' setting remained a strong theme during the 1950s, with novels displaying a persistently Romantic view of the country. At the same time, Carpentier was publishing novels which would turn him into the most internationally renowned of Cuban writers. His work incorporated Afro-Cuban themes, the exploration of Latin American history, verbal density in the baroque style, and the new genre of *lo real maravilloso*. Piñera added yet another strand to the literature of the 1950s, taking the tendency towards evasion to the extreme. His dramas, novels and short stories were characterised by 'a fictitious world that parallels reality in order to expose its absurdity' (Martínez 1990: 327). Also detectable in many 1950s novels are the following styles: a journalistic tendency amongst those who started by working for the press, a tendency towards objectivism, in which often tragic events are conveyed dispassionately, and existentialism, with its sense of despair and its questioning of man's position in the world. It is probable that this philosophical and literary strand was known to most writers engaged in literary production at the time. Elements of personal existential despair and paranoia in a society in irredeemable crisis were a major characteristic of the *noir* genre, or *novela negra* (see Chapter Three). According to Seymour Menton, existentialism became a dominant tendency in the 1950s in Cuba. Drawing on Graziella Pogolotti (1965), he has argued that for writers born in the 1920s and 1930s, 'French existentialism was widely read because it called for action and a committed literature' (Menton 1975: 9).

Against a backcloth of social and political dislocation, therefore, some cultural forms flourished along with newer, heavily promoted forms of entertainment. Cinema, theatre and music thrived, although not always intrinsically Cuban in style, as did popular cultural forms, with widespread interest in television, radio and the *radionovela*. There were both popular and literary magazines, but the latter enjoyed only limited circulation. The climate for writers was unfavourable towards the novel form, given the dearth of publishers, the lack of readership, low levels of literacy in some quarters, and the popularity of poetry and the short story. Apart from Carpentier's output, novels of the 1950s are still branded largely 'social realist' by critics, and largely overshadowed by the later Boom writers of the 1960s. Closer inspection of some of these novels, however, shows that the use of spaces by their authors discloses unexplored facets of identities in 1950s Cuba, as will be demonstrated in Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six.

CHAPTER 2: THEORISING LITERARY SPACE

An analysis of space in the four novels selected cannot be conducted without an overview of theories of space, both in terms of spaces in the real world and those represented in literature, since, as has already been indicated at the beginning of the introduction, a multi-disciplinary approach is needed to cover the ground over which social and literary approaches converge. Until the late nineteenth century, the Cartesian view of space prevailed, according to which space was conceived as fixed, static, three dimensional, and determined by time. However, as Joseph Frank indicated, the consideration of space had already attracted thinkers from more artistic disciplines in the eighteenth century, such as German dramatist Gotthold Lessing, who spearheaded the change in man's perception of space and time (Frank 1968: 5). By the second half of the twentieth century, space was increasingly being seen by philosophers, social scientists and geographers as dynamic and continually shifting, rather than static and definable.

According to Edward Soja (Soja 1996: 11), the 'detonation of interest' in space during the 1970s in terms of literature and culture was due in part to two theorists: Jacques Derrida (1976) linked the nature of social space and the organisation of technical, religious, and economic spaces to the act of writing, and Gérard Genette (1980) attempted to deconstruct previously accepted notions of narrative in favour of a spatial approach. By then, philosophers and sociologists were also reflecting on the changing nature of space, viewing it as socially and politically constructed. Soja indicates 'how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology' (Soja 1989: 6). He credits the writings of Michel Foucault and Henri Lefèbvre with challenging previous thinking about space across all disciplines (Soja 1996: 11). Marxist philosopher Henri Lefèbvre's consideration of the history of the perception of space in *The Production of Space*, published in 1974, has had wide repercussions for spatial theory in Anglophone scholarship from the mid 1970s. By the 1980s, 'a cottage industry of socio-spatial Marxism' had developed (Merrifield 2006: 102). A thorough re-evaluation of social and spatial theory followed the publication of the English translation of Lefèbvre's work in 1991, and the popularisation of his work by Soja, who has credited Lefèbvre with exerting more influence than any other scholar in the field, and having produced the most important book ever written about the social and historical significance of human spatiality (Soja 1996: 8). Soja has admitted that Lefèbvre's book is difficult to comprehend, concluding that he composed the book deliberately as a musical fugue, to give it simultaneous spatiality.

Acknowledging the interest in space by philosophers and mathematicians, Lefèbvre has pointed to the unsatisfactory nature of theory concerning space up to the early 1970s, calling for a *science of space* and a more rigorous investigation into what is meant by space. Lefèbvre has noted a 'chaotic flux' of ideas about space over the preceding fifty years: 'We are thus confronted by an indefinable multitude of spaces, geographical, economic, demographic, sociological, ecological, political, commercial, national, continental, global' (Lefèbvre 1991: 7). To Lefèbvre's list of concepts of space in recent years one could add anthropological, architectural, linguistic, literary, psychoanalytical, cinematic and feminist concepts. He has noted that much spatial language deals with contestation, struggle, and productivity, and this is precisely because it mirrors the actual uses and experiences of space (Lefèbvre 1991: 181-8). One might therefore expect spaces in the real world and in literature to contain situations characterised by contestation. Lefèbvre's aim has been to investigate the nature and production of social space, to work towards an inventory of all social spaces, and towards a theory of how spaces are produced. The essence of his argument is that space is a social product and a means of control, power and domination (Lefèbvre 1991: 26).

Lefèbvre's is an essentially Marxist view of society and its use of space, but with an emphasis on the dominance of modern urban society rather than the industrial society of Marx's time. For Lefèbvre, urbanism directs the consumption of space and habitat (Lefèbvre 1991: 349). His work has evolved from an original study on the movement from rural to urban areas, to an examination of the relationship between politics and space in the context of modern capitalism. He has highlighted the change from the view of the city as pitched against the country to one of a dominating centre and dominated periphery, both of which are a result of political forces. Lefèbvre has viewed space as part of the forces of production, but in a broader sense than economic forces alone. Space becomes harnessed like any other force of production by groups in power (Lefèbvre 1991: 132-4).

Space for Lefèbvre is not dead and inert, but organic and alive (Lefèbvre 1991: 34). It is no longer a passive, geographic or geometric container to be measured, but is a highly instrumental, dynamic force. Lefèbvre has classified spaces into three groups: as physical, experienced and perceived (the natural), as produced and used (the social), and as knowledge, conception, and imagination (the abstract). He has proposed a rapprochement between these three realms, claiming that these spheres had suffered at the hands of philosophers and scientists who had considered them as separate domains. Behind conceived, abstract spaces lie the dominant forces

of power, ideology and knowledge (Lefèbvre 1991: 33). Concrete spatial practices for Lefèbvre structure reality in the form of routes and networks, and take the form of concrete visual images, such as monuments, landmarks, paths, boundaries and rivers, serving to aid or deter a person's sense of location. They ensure societal cohesion and continuity. Abstract space, however, the realm of architects and planners, is measurable. Relationships between the three types of spaces are never stable. Natural, physical and social spaces are inevitably crushed by abstract or conceptual space (Lefèbvre 1991: 40). By this, Lefèbvre means that large corporations, banks and business, as well as the forces of law and order, are able to dominate natural and lived social spaces, molding and incorporating people into their grand conceptual visions. Top architects, according to Lefèbvre, always work in accordance with representations of space, as opposed to actual, lived spaces (Lefèbvre 1991: 43).

In Lefèbvre's view, the construction of space owes as much to conceptual realms as to material activities. For example, a cloister space, or convent, is one which grounds a mental space, that of contemplation and theological abstraction (Lefèbvre 1991: 217). He has also analysed national parks as spaces which are 'produced': 'The raw material from which they are produced is nature. They are products of an activity … which extends well beyond them, for these are also political products, and strategic spaces' (Lefèbvre 1991: 84). In other words, a park is conceived and produced through labour, technology and institutions, but its meaning as a space is adapted and transformed as it is perceived and lived by social groups (Lefèbvre 1991: 84). Lefèbvre has added that spaces such as the cloister and the park involve issues of marginality and segregation. Leonard Lutwack has also theorised the park, arguing that the park can be considered as 'the body of a woman in a passive condition, waiting to be enjoyed' (Lutwack 1984: 99) (see Chapters Three and Five).

Lefèbvre signals the importance of meeting places, roads and streets:

> These meeting places animate the street – which is a spontaneous theatre,
> where we are both spectator and spectacle. The street has an informative
> function, a symbolic function, a ludic function. (Lefèbvre 1991: 314-5)

Spaces that are directly lived and experienced in everyday life, which Lefèbvre calls spaces of representation, include the tavern, the post office, the café, or the bedroom. They may be linked to the underground and clandestine side of life. They do not obey rules and are directly

experienced, rather than analysed, by the humans who inhabit them (Lefèbvre 1991: 41). They are felt rather than thought, and they are alive. They 'speak' and possess a centre, for example, the church has an altar, the house a hearth, the tavern a bar. They contain all the action and passion of lived situations (Lefèbvre 1991: 42). For Lefèbvre, lived space is elusive, qualitative, fluid and dynamic, although humans seek to appropriate and dominate such spaces.

Lefèbvre has also introduced the concept of isotopia, which are 'same place' locations, neighbourhoods and local environs, classified according to level or realm, (the political, the religious, the commercial), as opposed to heterotopia, or places that are unusual by their opposition to other spaces. The utopia, however, represent the ideal, the symbolic and the imaginary, such as parks and gardens, or religious buildings. Lefèbvre viewed all three types as part of a conceptual grid which helps to decipher complex spaces, and to distinguish between oppositions and contrasts in space (Lefèbvre 1991: 366). He believed that all urban space is heterotopic and that these types of spaces, together with isotopias and utopias, need to be analysed to understand the modern city (Lefèbvre 1991: 366). Lefèbvre has found a tension between conceptions of space, involving an abstract view tending towards homogeneity, and the various perceptions of space which accentuate their differences.

Although Lefèbvre's work was not conceived from the perspective of literary space in particular, he has reflected on what criteria would make certain literary texts more relevant than others from a spatial point of view, and highlights the difficulty of selection. Any search for space in literary texts, he maintains, will find it everywhere, be it 'enclosed, described, projected, dreamt of, speculated about' (Lefèbvre 1991: 14-15). If his argument that space is socially and politically determined is correct, then consequently the analysis of spaces in literature, especially in realist texts, should reveal aspects of the social and political forces at play in the society portrayed.

Lefèbvre shares some common ground with Foucault, since both have identified that spaces can be categorised into groups, and both have used the term heterotopia to describe sites which are fundamentally different from most others. Foucault has acknowledged that the study of the spatial had been neglected, declaring that space had been treated as dead and immobile throughout history. He believed that time, on the other hand, has been imbued with fecundity and life (Gordon 1980: 70). In his 1986 article 'Of Other Spaces', originally given as a lecture to architects in 1967, Foucault has declared that 'the present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space', as opposed to the nineteenth century which he believed was preoccupied with

history (Foucault 1986: 22). He has claimed that we cannot view spaces as fixed and emplaced; we can only view them in relation to each other as relations of proximity between points or elements, and in terms of series, trees, or grids: 'Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations amongst sites' (Foucault 1986: 23). He has used the analogy of the storage of information on a computer; decisions have to be made as to how to store, access, classify and interpret information. Similarly, we now have to make sense of the relations between literary spaces.

For Foucault, there are certain oppositions of space which remain intact: the private and the public, family and social space, cultural space and useful space, work space and leisure space. Foucault has drawn attention to the way particular spaces function, explaining how external spaces are still strictly delineated. He has listed particular clusters of spaces, including 'sites of temporary relaxation', such as cafés, cinemas, and beaches, and 'closed or semi-closed sites of rest', such as the house, the bedroom, and the bed. The spaces which have interested him most, however, are those which neutralise or invert other sites, perhaps leading us to reflect on why certain sites are created. For example, spaces such as the park, convent or brothel are important because they may function in such a way as to invite comment on society or morality. Like Lefèbvre, such spaces, he believed, contradict all the other sites, and fall into two distinct categories: the utopia and the heterotopia. Utopias are sites which relate by analogy to real spaces in society in either a direct or inverted manner, presenting society in a perfected form. For Foucault, the term 'heterotopia' is the antithesis of utopia, that is, it is a site which represents other real spaces within a culture, but which also contests or inverts them. Heterotopias are present within all cultures, as counter-sites which contest all the other real sites, and include the prison, the convent, the brothel and the motel (Foucault 1986: 24).

Foucault has investigated the question of access to heterotopias, since they are not freely accessible but isolated spaces subject to entry and closure (Foucault 1986: 25). While some, like prisons, are compulsory, others require rites and purifications: the convent is such a place. The park, in contrast, allows free access to the public but is the antithesis of purification; users may indulge in practices which are forbidden elsewhere, or perceived to be immoral. Alternatively, some users may use the park to purge themselves of the pollution, noise and enclosure of the city. The role of spaces of illusion may be to create a space that is more perfect and better arranged than the 'messy' and ill-constructed real version, often performing a compensatory role. Foucault included the brothel in this type of heterotopia.

Foucault's exploration has not met with widespread approval; Lefèbvre criticised Foucault for not being specific enough about what he is referring to in terms of space, and for his failure to bridge the gap between the theoretical and the practical realm of space (Lefèbvre 1991: 4). Soja has emphasised the risk involved in over-analysing Foucault's 'Of Other Spaces', which was never actually published by Foucault, and may have been only a preliminary outline of his ideas, to be superceded by material in his later writings. He has concluded that Foucault's heterotopologies are 'frustratingly incomplete, inconsistent, incoherent' (Soja 1996: 162).

The heterotopia can indeed be seen as too broad a concept, encompassing many different types of public spaces from the cemetery to the cinema, and merely highlighting the multifunctional nature of such spaces. Foucault has, however, drawn attention to the necessity for space to be investigated further, explaining how the identity of spaces is not fixed, how spaces can have a number of functions and become transformed, and hinting at their intrinsic fluidity. He has highlighted the multivalent nature of spaces, their tendency towards subversion, to becoming closed off and limited, and the interchangeable nature of public and private. Furthermore, the concept of the heterotopia draws attention to certain spaces that lie outside of mainstream society, and that lead to reflection on aspects of a social or political nature.

It is possible to draw parallels between the heterotopias described by Lefèbvre and Foucault, and the cultural hybrids elaborated by leading Mexican cultural theorist Néstor García Canclini. What Lefèbvre, Foucault and García Canclini have in common is a shared belief in the existence of sites of special cultural significance, crossroad sites that represent spatially a multiple social requirement. Both heterotopias and cultural hybrids often involve the reordering of the public and private in the urban space. Pointing out that many works of Latin American literature were not actually written within the continent itself, but by writers in voluntary or enforced exile, García Canclini has argued that such exile locations are themselves hybrid places, in which memories of places experienced in Latin America become fused with the lived experience of the new culture. Therefore, literature produced in this context, in García Canclini's view, will be different from that produced in the home country. Furthermore, the portrayal of a city or village remembered from somewhere in Latin America will be reminiscent of that reality in some ways, but will also have been 'rediseñados por patrones cognoscitivos y estéticos adquiribles en Madrid, México, o París' (García Canclini 1990: 306).

García Canclini has further argued that, although modern artists and writers have innovated and altered previous literary models, they have nonetheless continued to draw on referents of legitimacy (García Canclini 1990: 306). For him, all cultures today are border cultures, suffering from, or benefitting from the influence of other cultures (García Canclini 1995: 261). His 'culturas híbridas' are cultures whose original indigenous culture has been subject to influence by a new foreign culture, which may have penetrated so far as to achieve total domination. Latin American countries are the result of the interweaving of indigenous traditions, Catholic colonialism, and modern political, educational, and communicational actions (García Canclini 1995: 46). Hybridity can involve a two-way process of cultural exchange, with the host country influencing the new dominant one. Heterotopias mimic, or are drawn from other recognisable existing cultural sites, yet they are also different from them, offering a contrast, inverting them, or even subverting them.

Place and space

Lefèbvre and Foucault were not alone in theorising space during the 1970s; other theorists in the social sciences considered the idea of place as distinct from space. Edward Relph (1976) has adopted a phenomenological approach to the study of place, in his attempt to identify the variety of ways in which places are experienced, including the identity and creation of places, and the psychological links between people and places. He has distinguished between types of spaces, such as sacred places, and, in common with other critics, distinguished between private and public spaces. He has explored the nature of human behaviour within spaces, from existential, individual, group, objective and self-conscious viewpoints, and in so doing, has drawn attention to the wide variety of spaces and places and the many ways in which humans relate to them.

In a similar vein to that of Relph, Yi-Fu Tuan's work has focussed on how the child relates to space and place, the relationship of the body to places, spaciousness and crowding, awareness of mythical and architectural space and place, and the roles of time, intimacy and homeland. One can detect a parallel here with Lefèbvre's categorisation of spaces as pragmatic or abstract. Tuan has considered the regular paths taken through the domestic home, and stressed the importance of familiar objects and smaller spaces, such as the desk, the sink, and the hearth (Tuan 1977: 182). He has concluded that there are three main types of space: the mythical, the pragmatic, and the abstract or theoretical, and that a place can be classified as a type of object serving to define space, giving it 'geometric personality' (Tuan 1977: 17). Furthermore, he has maintained that

'Objects and places are centres of value, attracting or repelling in various degrees' (Tuan 1977: 18). Tuan's view that space implies motion is significant, because theorists of geography have in more recent times highlighted the dynamic nature of space and its capacity for transformation, as will be explained later in this chapter.

Narratologist Mieke Bal distinguishes between place and space thus:

> The concept of place is related to the physical, mathematically measurable
> shape of spatial dimensions. … Places are linked to certain points of
> perception. These places seen in relation to their perception are called space.
> That point of perception may be a character, which is situated in a space,
> observes it, and reacts to it. (Bal 1997: 133)

She makes a further interesting point about space, in that information concerning space is often repeated as a means of stressing 'the stability of the frame', thus highlighting the transitory nature of the events which occur within it (Bal 1997: 140).

Place is also discussed by Stanton, who takes the view that place denotes a particular town and its characteristics, rather than a generic type of space such as a town square (Stanton 1993: 10). Place does indeed seem to be a more specific term than space. For example, we can distinguish between the general concept of the town square as a *space* as opposed to the particular *place* of the Plaza de Las Armas in Havana. Chris Barker characterises space as absence and place as presence. Place is marked by face-to-face encounters and space by relations between absent others (Barker 2000: 292). He observes that the construction of home as a space only becomes a place through being assigned meaning; home is constructed through social relations which are both internal and external, and constantly shifting in their power relations (Barker 2000: 293). 'Space', then, conjures up a wide range of meanings and images, including the real and the physical, the imagined and the conceptual.

Domestic space

One specific type of place is the domestic home. Gaston Bachelard, a philosopher and poet, considered the way in which space and time operate within the context of the domestic home in *Poetics of Space*, first published in English in 1963. Whilst sociologists such as Tuan (1977) added to the typology of spaces in the domestic home, Bachelard's work represents the classic study of how we experience intimate spaces, more specifically the significance of spaces in the domestic home. Bachelard analysed the way in which humans experience the intimate spaces within the home, showing that people do not live in homogenous and empty spatial contexts, but in spaces which are imbued with intrinsic qualities. He set out to investigate the reciprocal relationship between human habitation and particular shapes and spaces. He considered domestic spaces both internally and externally, from cellar to garret, the implication of corners, keys and locks, spaces within furniture, and spatial shapes such as the nest and the shell. He stressed the importance of the notion of roundness, of the home as the original site of human warmth, its nourishing role, and the key role of the mother in shaping all of this (Bachelard 1994: 14-15).

Bachelard argued that the house in which we are born is particularly important, with its spaces functioning as containers full of memories, delights, horrors and fears, serving as a gateway to understanding metaphors used by our imagination (Bachelard 1994: 47). Space contains compressed time, the time of our pasts, and this is one of the key functions of space (Bachelard 1994: 8). He stressed that the localisation of space and memories is more important than dates in time. Spaces in the home, he argued, are psychologically complex since the home contains memories of the characters who inhabited them, and how they spoke and moved (Bachelard 1994: 14-15). Bachelard, along with Leonard Lutwack (1984: 39), also discussed the verticality of the house, (see Chapter Three), and how the roof gives clues about climate, whilst the cellar reveals dark, subterranean forces (Bachelard 1994: 17-19).

Bachelard, therefore, drew attention to the domestic home as a site of memory and emotion, emphasising the importance of shape and small, intimate spaces. His focus on the significance of spaces within the home will help to elucidate the analysis of the home in two of the novels in this study. In terms of the static versus the dynamic view of space, Bachelard's vision of domestic space at first appears to be a static view, since domestic spaces for him function as containers for past memory and experience. However, it is possible to appreciate the underlying, inherently dynamic nature of this view. Since human experience changes over time, then space as container

of this experience is also subject to evolution and hence fluidity. Although his is not a discussion of domestic spaces as represented in literature, Bachelard's study is nonetheless relevant for the light it sheds on the reading of domestic spaces in novels.

Literary space

At the beginning of the introduction it was established that this thesis would consider the viewpoints of those who have theorised space in the real world as well as those who have examined the representation of space in literature, given the extensive convergence between the two. During the 1970s, several critics had examined the space/time dichotomy in literature: Spencer (1971), Bollnow (1971), Rabkin (1977), Holtz (1977) and Kestner (1978). Jeffrey Smitten and Ann Daghistany have made some telling comments at the beginning of their extensive bibliography on theories of space in literature, as opposed to social or geographic concepts of space:

> A bibliography on this topic can only hope to be illustrative, not definitive.
> The area it must cover is enormous; since space and spatial form are
> properties of narratives written at any time and in any language, the criticism
> the compiler must review is without limits. (Smitten and Daghistany 1981:
> 245)

Including nearly three hundred bibliographical entries, Smitten and Daghistany's book has examined space in the novel from four perspectives: language, narrative structure, reader perception, and the theoretical context of spatial form. The key terms used by writers and critics to talk about space in literature have been briefly outlined in the introduction. They encompass the notions of 'setting', 'space', 'spatial form' and 'spatiality'. Whilst the traditional notion of setting has already been discussed in the introduction, the more recent concept of spatial form needs clarification.

Spatial form

'Spatial form', a term borrowed from the plastic arts, refers to the way in which modernist writers attempted to disrupt the hitherto mainly temporal nature of the novel by making their works more spatial. This was achieved by attempting to slow down narrative time, by juxtaposing the

narrative sequence, and by encouraging readers to construct a mental picture of the actual sequence of events for themselves. Spatial form, therefore, does not refer to actual physical spaces in novels, but rather to the organisation of the narrative structure. 'Spatiality' can be understood as synonymous with spatial form.

The first theorist to open up the debate on 'spatial form' in literature in the twentieth century, and one to whom many subsequent theorists have referred, was Joseph Frank. He had published his seminal essay 'Spatial Form in Modern Literature' in 1945, later incorporated into his book *The Widening Gyre* of 1963. Whilst Frank does not provide his own concrete definition of spatial form, he draws on two sources to help elucidate the term: mid-eighteenth century German dramatist and critic Gotthold Lessing, and Gustav Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary* (1857).

Frank explained how literature came to be seen as spatial, rather than temporal, by some modernist writers, and suggested that modern literature was moving in the direction of spatiality. He considered why the modernist works he had analysed, by Marcel Proust, James Joyce and Djuna Barnes, share structural similarities in their employment of spatial form, declaring that this necessitated an investigation into the relation of art forms to the cultural climates in which they are created. Frank then drew on the country fair scene in *Madame Bovary* to illustrate what he meant by the spatialisation of form in the novel. He explained how 'for the duration of the scene, at least, the time-flow of the narration is halted; attention is fixed on the interplay of relationships within the immobilised time-area' (Frank 1968: 15). In other words, when an event in time is halted for the exploration of its elements, it has been spatialised. Frank considered that Flaubert's handling of the scene was cinematographic, and applied further terms from film analysis to describe Flaubert's method: 'He dissolves sequence by cutting back and forth between the various levels of action' (Frank 1968: 15).

One of the other many critics to have commented on Frank's work over the years is Joseph Kestner, who has considered Frank's contribution to the discussion of spatial form to be deficient because Frank 'is discussing elements of perception, not elements of the artistic product per se' (Kestner 1978: 25). Frank, however, focussed mainly on the relationship between the spatial and temporal in literature, rather than on the actual physical spaces depicted in them.

Spatial form has also been examined by leading critic Northrop Frye, who, unlike Frank, substantiated his arguments with examples from widely known works from Ancient Greek and

Latin literature, Shakespeare and Chaucer, as well as more recent European and North American literature, across many different genres. Frye drew attention to the different ways in which a novel can be considered 'spatial'. In a series of four comprehensive essays in *Anatomy of Criticism*, first published in 1957, he proposed the term 'opsis' with reference to spatial elements in literature, defining it as the spectacular or visible aspect of drama, in terms of the scenery and costume, and the ideally visible or pictorial aspect of other literature (Frye 1971: 367). This refers to the imagery present in the text, supplemented by the reader's imagination and experience.

It is in his second essay, 'Ethical Criticism: Theory of Symbols' that his ideas about spatial form are to be found. In his reformulation of the four-level system of medieval allegory he explained his model of stratifications in literary experience. Pointing out that the word 'level' is merely a term of convenience and not intended to imply any hierarchy or judgement, Frye has explained that these 'levels' are actually clusters of contexts which interrelate (Frye 1971: 73). The relationships between the different 'levels' are given the label 'phases' by Frye, and these 'phases' are classified as literal, descriptive, formal, archetypal and anagogic (Frye 1971: 367). It is the second, or descriptive phase, which is of interest to us here.

In the descriptive phase, the word on the page evokes a visual or spatial image in the mind of the reader. Frye has argued that each level or phase has a close relationship to a certain kind of literature, and he related the descriptive phase most closely to the realistic genre (Frye 1971: 79). He has maintained that the essential narrative form in this case will be that of direct speech, and that 'its main effort will be to give as clear and honest an impression of external reality as is possible with a hypothetical structure' (Frye 1971: 79). For Frye, when the descriptive phase is applied to actual physical spaces in novels, the meaning of spaces is consequently didactic, drawing on the Aristotelian notion of *dianoia*, or 'thought'/theme. Frye has explained that *dianoia* expresses the notion of simultaneity in literature, meaning 'that which is caught by the eye' (Frye 1971: 77). Dianoia is produced by the images, metaphors, diagrams and verbal ambiguities found in the text (Frye 1971: 83). Frye, therefore, has drawn attention to some of the different ways in which the novel may be viewed as spatial. However, he was more concerned with the spatial forces at work between text and reader than with the depiction of actual physical spaces in literature.

Art and literature critic W.J.T. Mitchell published two important articles on spatial form during the 1980s, which taken together, add considerably to our understanding of space. Mitchell found

that Frank's 1945 study was too narrowly limited to modernist works, and proposed a substantial extension of Frank's limited focus, since, he believes, spatial form is a crucial aspect of the experience and interpretation of literature in all ages and cultures (Mitchell 1980: 541). He aims to reformulate Frank's distinctions about literary space by examining the variety of ways whereby time is organised and represented spatially in literary works in general.

Mitchell's second article (1989) has both revised and developed his earlier 1980 work. In it he has highlighted the bias towards the temporal and the anti-visual in western literary theory, and has noted the ambivalence of literary theory towards spatiality in general. He referred to the influence of Aristotle, who claimed that it is 'inartistic' for a writer to create character and events by appeal to the eye, in other words, by means of visual imagery (Mitchell 1989: 91). Mitchell's main premises are that space should be prioritised over time in literature, that space is an essential feature of literary interpretation, and that literary space tells us more about society and history than we would otherwise have known (Mitchell 1980: 567). However, readers are blind, he maintains, to the space of artistic representation, and are over-dependent on the narrator. For example, we readers fail to recognise the ideological nature of spaces in literature, which for Mitchell, need to be stimulated into motion by some external force.

Mitchell has contended that 'a good deal of nonsense can be found marching under the banner of … spatial form or of any other widely used and abused term' (Mitchell 1980: 563). Smitten and Daghistany have offered a useful definition of spatial form:

> 'Spatial form' in its simplest sense designates the techniques by which
> novelists subvert the chronological sequence inherent in narrative. …
> portions of a narrative may be connected without regard to chronology
> through such devices as image patterns, leitmotifs, analogy, and contrast.
> (Smitten and Daghistany 1981: 13)

For Mitchell, the very language of literary criticism is laced with spatial metaphors. Even our temporal language is peppered with spatial imagery, for example, 'long' and 'short' spells of time, and 'intervals' of time (Mitchell 1980: 542). He has noted that the most common metaphor is stratification, known as levels in literature. (Mitchell 1980: 546). We should not be surprised by this, he argued, and we should see pictorial representation as a subset of the linguistic system rather than as distinct from language (Mitchell 1980: 564). Spatial form is our basis for making

history and temporality intelligible, and it has not been accorded its rightful place in literature, when in actual fact we cannot think about literature or anything else without using spatial metaphors (Mitchell 1980: 566). The spatial nature of our language and thought patterns is widely accepted; both Lefèbvre (1991) and George Lakoff (1987) have argued that our very perception of the world is determined by the spatial dimension. Lakoff has illustrated how 'A great many metaphorical models use a spatial domain as their source domain' (Lakoff 1987: 435). However, Mitchell has rejected the idea prevalent among critics that spatial form be treated as 'merely metaphoric', since our very manner of thinking is based on spatial forms that organise our perception (Mitchell 1980: 565).

Eric S. Rabkin contended that 'spatial form is a useful metaphor for focusing our attention on the development of narrative techniques' (Rabkin 1977: 270). Spatialisation, especially the technique of fragmentation, is common in twentieth-century literature, he maintained, because modern writers feel that it revitalised familiar literary forms, and because the reader is able to retrieve a coherent value system in what he may feel to be an increasingly incoherent world.

Spatial form, therefore, would seem to have little to do with the depiction of actual physical spaces in novels. However, Smitten and Daghistany have acknowledged that writers are also concerned with the creation of an effect in the reader's mind, and therefore the images conjured up by descriptions of spaces, even with the scantest of details, must be included in the notion of 'spatial form', which should cover not only objective features of narrative structure but also subjective processes of aesthetic perception (Smitten and Daghistany 1981: 13).

Space as mental construct

Many of the critics who explored spatial form also grappled with the idea of space as a mental construct, that is, the part played by the reader in the construction of literary space (Butor 1964, Spencer 1971, Kestner 1978). This fourth level of spatiality in literature was identified by Frye, and described by Mitchell as: 'A spatial realm that has to be constructed mentally during or after the temporal experience of reading the text but is nonetheless spatial for being a mental construct' (Mitchell 1980: 551). Rejecting Mark Booth's link between oral narratives and the hemispheric theory of the brain[18], Mitchell prefers the stance taken by Cary Nelson, in whose book *The*

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[18] Mark W. Booth connects the presence of spatial patterning in oral literature with the hemispheric theory of the brain in 'The Ballad and the Brain' in *Georgia Review* 32, Summer 1978, pp.371-386.

Incarnate Word: *Literature as Verbal Space* (1973), spatiality in the novel is linked to existing physical structures in the mind of the reader (Mitchell 1980: 562). Consequently the reader will find recognisable patterns in literature, shapes such as the circle, parallel or spiral. If we accept that the reader adds his or her own experience to the visual or spatial image evoked by the text, then this mental image will of course vary.

It is doubtful, however, that conjecture over the contribution of the reader is useful for an analysis of space in the novels under scrutiny in this thesis. The writers of these novels rely on the shared human experience of Cubans with regard to the nature of a café, park, house or school. The issue of mental image is only important insofar as the reader needs to be capable of imagining a café in Havana but precise details are not needed. Whilst non-Cuban readers might need more information to understand indigenous Cuban buildings or locations, such as a *batey* (sugar-mill) as a space, it is also likely that urban-based Cubans would need more information about such a rurally located space.

Liminal space

Physical spaces in literature include liminal, or threshold spaces, the term used by Mikhail Bakhtin. Like Bachelard, Bakhtin addressed the function of spaces both inside and outside the domestic home, but with reference to their representation in literature, considering them as threshold sites where time and place are fused, and which function metaphorically. Thresholds for Bakhtin are chronotopes, a term he used to mean the manner in which temporal and spatial relationships are expressed in literature, and their intrinsic inseparability (Bakhtin 2002: 84). He argued that 'The chronotope is an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring' (Bakhtin 2002: 425-6). His extensive list of metaphoric threshold spaces in the novels he examines demonstrates the breadth of spaces that function as thresholds[19].

Threshold spaces must be considered in conjunction with events and the experiences of characters in a novel, in that such spaces may function positively or negatively, as opportunities or deterrents. The chronotope of the threshold, Bakhtin maintained 'can be combined with the motif

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[19] 'The threshold, the foyer, the corridor, the landing, the stairway, its steps, doors opening onto the stairway, gates to front and back yards, and beyond these, the city: squares, streets, taverns, dens, bridges, gutters' (Bakhtin 1984: 170).

of encounter, but its most fundamental instance is as the chronotope of *crisis* and *break* in a life'
(Bakhtin 2002: 248). The threshold can be both metaphoric and literal; it can be used
metaphorically in language, or it can refer to a decision that can change a life, 'or the
indecisiveness that fails to change a life, the fear to step over the threshold' (Bakhtin 2002: 248).
Bakhtin found the concept of the threshold interesting because it represents the boundary between
the private and the public space. In literature, the threshold chronotope is always metaphorical or
symbolic, he maintained. The chronotope of the road in literature is similarly important because
the road is a space which permits encounters between representatives of all social classes,
religions, nationalities, and ages, who intersect at one spatial and temporal point (Bakhtin 2002:
243).

Theorising space, then, was clearly an important part of Bakhtin's work. His focus, however, was
always on the space-time relationship, whilst the theoretical thrust of this thesis is decidedly
spatial. The idea that everything in the world relates to the time/space dimension now seems self-
evident, and the term "space" assumes an overworked, universal significance. Bakhtin's
considerations on the threshold space, however, are of interest for this study, since thresholds are
key spaces in the novels under consideration. His view that certain threshold spaces function
metaphorically as turning points or moments of crisis provides a productive insight into some of
these spaces.

Space and ideology

Mitchell, on the other hand, is more interested in the link between literary space and ideology. He
aims to provide 'an ideological map' of the concept of space in critical discourse, demonstrating
how 'the space of artistic representation', or space as depicted in literature, should be understood
as a 'pre-inscribed site of ideological conflict' (Mitchell 1989: 95). He concludes that spaces in
literature act as a relay between readers' conceptions of order in the arts and structures of social
power, interest and value (Mitchell 1989: 95). Mitchell, in common with Soja and Lefèbvre, is
not the only critic who believed that the manipulation of space indicates a particular world-view;
cinema critic Myrto Konstantarakos claims that 'Space is not only recorded as a background stage
- its very organisation implies a handling of space, revealing the ideology of the time'
(Konstantarakos 2000: 1). Stanton (1993) highlights the political motivation behind space by
drawing on Simon Varey: 'The spaces created … by architects and those created by the novelists
… express specific ideology and are therefore political' (Varey 1990: 4). Stanton feels that

Varey's comments could be relevant to Latin American literature, pointing out that 'in their creation of spaces, authors reveal a political ideology which in turn can reveal the nature of the characters' relationship to society' (Stanton 1993: 15).

Neither Mitchell nor the other critics cited above, however, have indicated what they actually mean by 'ideology'. Terry Eagleton has explored in depth the many possible definitions of the term, producing a list of sixteen different aspects (Eagleton 1991: 1-2). Since this thesis is not the place for a discussion on the very nature of ideology, it seems appropriate to use one of Kapcia's definitions. If we understand the above critics to mean 'the conventional and long-accepted view of ideology as a set of ideas and beliefs that guide political action and attitudes to the world' (Kapcia 2005: 12), as opposed to any other definition, then it is possible to read some of the spaces in the novels under analysis in this thesis in the light perhaps not so much of 'ideology', but of 'competing discourses within the ideology' (Kapcia 2005: 16) (see Chapters Four and Five).

Mitchell, then, has moved into a more central position the debates over spatiality started by Frank and Frye, and his clarification of Frye's adaptation of the four-level system of medieval allegory helps to provide an understanding of Frye's model. His arguments are clear and accessible, and he provides useful insights into what space can reveal in literature. He has created an air of expectation that a spatial analysis of literature would reveal significant findings for critics. However, Mitchell's work, unlike that of previous theorists, is limited by his lack of examples from literary texts. Furthermore, his affirmation that spatial form cannot reveal the theme of a work is questionable (Mitchell 1980: 563). Spatiality is precisely one of the techniques used by writers to elaborate a theme, as Bal argues: 'in many cases, … space is "thematised": it becomes an object of presentation itself, for its own sake' (Bal 1997: 136). Mitchell leads us to conclude that spatial form, as investigated by Frye, Frank, Spencer, Kestner *et al*, is actually an investigation of narrative structure and its effect on the reader, rather than an exploration of actual physical spaces in novels.

Gendered space and identity

With regard to space, therefore, literary critics have concerned themselves with setting, spatial form, and space as a mental construct. However, it is on the subject of gendered space that literary and non-literary disciplines particularly converge. Investigations by feminist literary

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critics during the 1970s into the place occupied by women writers throughout literary history, highlighted the essentially spatial nature of their position in the canon, as the title of Virginia Woolf's novel, *A Room of One's Own*, testifies (Woolf 1929). The role of the woman writer had been one of marginality and confinement, as argued in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's seminal study *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). In 1977, Elaine Showalter produced her investigation into the history of women writers, entitled *A Literature of Their Own*, in an attempt to reclaim the territory of writing for women. By the late 1970s, French feminist critics such as Hélène Cixous were urging women writers to subvert their oppressed and marginalised position. During the 1980s and 1990s, the space occupied by the woman writer shifted, and writing by formally marginalised, if not silenced, sectors (black, lesbian and 'Third-World' writers), moved from the periphery to the centre of literary study.

Mitchell is one of the few critics to have considered the role of the woman writer with reference to space. Drawing on William Blake's gendered categories of time and space, by which time has been denoted male and space female, a condition which places women in a 'static space of passivity and visual display' (Mitchell 1989: 93), Mitchell has concluded that literary space has been accorded the role of the text's Other, or its negative realm. Literary space had certainly previously played a secondary role to elements of time in literary analysis. Mitchell has also made observations about the relationship between women writers and space, arguing that 'the genre in which women conquer literary space is principally the novel' (Mitchell 1989: 97). In Latin American countries, however, women writers have historically been more successful at writing poetry than novels.

Drawing on Gilbert and Gubar (1979), Mitchell has contended that women writers frequently use a heroine or female narrator figure who sees rather than speaks, functioning in space rather than time (Mitchell 1989: 97). The female-authored novel under analysis in this thesis, *Romelia Vargas*, does indeed contain a female character in the role of observer (see Chapter Five). Women writers, he has further argued, often set their novels within the confines of the inner spaces of domestic architecture, projecting emotions onto paintings, mirrors, windows and external vistas, and focussing on the experience of gazing and speculation (Mitchell 1989: 98-99). This technique has also been used to indicate sexual or racial Otherness, at times using a child narrator who shows by what she sees (Mitchell 1989: 100). Again, both of these features are true of the novel *Romelia Vargas* (see Chapter Five). Mitchell's view reinforces the notion of gendered space as intrinsically static, and not subject to fluidity or open to contestation.

However, it is to a non-literary source that we can turn for further insights into the more fluid nature of gendered spaces in the real world. In *Space, Place and Gender* (1994) feminist geographer Doreen Massey, like Lefèbvre, is dissatisfied with the way the term 'space' is used by theorists. She applauds Lefèbvre's insistence on the importance of lived practices within spaces and their symbolic meaning, rather than their geometry. Also, like Lefèbvre, she views space as constructed from social relations, and in order to understand the spatial, it is necessary to analyse a particular economy and society. Massey sets out to oppose the static view of space as a dimension of no significance compared to time and history (Massey 1994: 3). She particularly opposes the view of political theorist Ernesto Laclau, whose publication *New Reflections on the Revolution of ourTime* (1990), had influences beyond his immediate discipline. Laclau saw the temporal and the spatial as crucial to an understanding of social relations, and believed that the two are diametrically opposed (Laclau 1990: 41). In Laclau's view, it is time, and not space, which is responsible for social dislocation, and it is time which is the dynamic force. Massey criticises Laclau for according space the realm of stasis, and for assigning to the spatial no temporality, and therefore no politics (Massey 1994: 251). Massey wishes to release the spatial from the 'realm of the dead' (Massey 1994: 4), an assignation identified by Foucault. Spatiality is the product of intersecting social relations, and this has in turn led to conceptions of 'place' as essentially open and contested.

Notions of space as enclosure, and time as duration, are now unsettled and redesigned as a field of infinitely experimental configurations. Drawing on Baudrillard (1988), Harvey (1989), Robins (1991) and Jameson (1984), who have all identified the drive towards the re-establishment of a sense of stability through place in the light of the disorientation created by a plethora of images and messages, Massey explains that since the 1980s, several attempts have been made to 'fix the meaning of particular spaces, to enclose them, endow them with fixed identities' (Massey 1994: 4). In this sense, places have been viewed as sites of nostalgia, separated from notions of progress and history. A more open and provisional view of space is needed, taking into account 'the juxtaposition and co-presence there of particular sets of social relations' (Massey 1994: 168). The identity of spaces is unfixed because the social relations which form them are dynamic and changing, and therefore always open to contestation. Furthermore, this identity depends on interactions with forces outside that space or place.

Both politics and academia have viewed place as bounded, singular, fixed, and unproblematic, while Massey prefers to think of spaces as 'open and porous networks of social relations', formed by their interaction with other places (Massey 1994: 121). Furthermore, the dominant image of any place is a matter of contestation and is subject to change over time. Bachelard (1994) had previously argued that spaces are imbued with memory and nostalgia, especially those within the domestic home. There is no doubt that some spaces represent an authentic site of memory for some individuals, but Massey's view is that with increasing globalisation, these spaces are becoming less relevant, with their authenticity in question, since if spaces increasingly do not contain time in stasis, then there is no longer any authenticity of place. Massey does concede that when faced with the disorientation and threat to identity brought about by time-space compression, people may have recourse to place as a site of authenticity (Massey 1994: 122). If this is the case, then what happens to the individual or group caught up in a situation of disorientation and threatened identity when their familiar spaces are also under threat? Characters in some Cuban novels of the 1950s situated in Havana experience this sense of fragmentation and loss described by Massey. Their relationships to the spaces they occupy are explored in Chapter Six.

Massey does not wish to disassociate ideas about the social nature of space and place from issues of gender and debates within feminism (Massey 1994: 2). Time has been wrongly aligned with history, progress, civilisation, science, politics and reason, whilst space has been similarly wrongly aligned with stasis, reproduction, nostalgia, emotion, aesthetics and the body, with passivity and 'depolitisation' (Massey 1994: 6). Massey aims to rescue space from its past alignment with gender relations. Spaces, she claims, reflect how both genders are constructed, and not just women. Space should be seen along with personal identities as multiple, shifting, and possibly unbounded (Massey 1994: 7), and they are 'gendered through and through' varying 'between cultures and over time' (Massey 1994: 186).

Since the early 1990s theorists have focused on spaces beyond the scope of this study: the informational and the global city, cities as cultural branding and the city as symbolism (Castells 1989 and 1994, Soja 1989, Zukin 1995 and Jameson 1991). Massey's concepts of gendered space are most fruitful for the analysis of the novels here. Her study is limited only by the fact that she is not a literary theorist and therefore her examples are remote from the world of literature. Indeed, her own study is limited to the spatial history of British industrial labour and

employment. However, whilst Foucault and others have alluded to spaces as sites of gender power contestation, and to the need to see space as more fluid, Massey is arguably the most successful theorist in articulating the links between gender, history, space and power. Furthermore, whilst many of the spaces considered by Foucault appear in the Cuban novel of the 1950s, it is not the consideration of these sites as heterotopias which produces the richest reading of these texts. Massey's view of space as dynamic, shifting and open to contestation is even more useful for elucidating most of the particular spaces in these novels.

Inasmuch as Massey has argued for a fluid and unfixed view of space, other critics since the early 1990s have proposed a fluid and flexible view of gender and sexual identity (Rubin 1984, Butler 1990, Bristow 1997). Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) is a landmark in the evolution of the theory of gender and sexuality. She draws attention to the difference between sex as referring to biological characteristics, and sexuality and gender which are both socio-historical, cultural constructions. There is no fixed link between the sex of a person at birth and their subsequent gender orientation. A person's gender identity is a product of complex socio-cultural processes, and not a fixed, programmed set of genetic characteristics. The classic opposition between the genders is hereby deconstructed. Most controversially, Butler argues that 'there is no reason to assume that genders ought to remain as two' (Butler 1990: 6).

Foucault argued that sex is an act in which humans have always engaged, but which, when constructed as sexuality, is subject to disciplinary control by governments and groups in positions of power (Foucault 1990). The discourse concerning sexuality had started, he argued, in the eighteenth century, and developed further in the nineteenth. Moreover, he argued, 'sexuality' applied to human beings dates only from the 1840s. Bristow (1997) points out that according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*[20], the first recorded use of the word 'sexuality' appears in 1836, referring to both the quality of being sexual and to engaging in sexual activity. He further notes that the words homosexuality and heterosexuality first appeared as late as 1892 in the English language with the translation of an Austrian scientific study (Bristow 1997: 4). Drawing on Weeks (1986), he further argues that the use of the term sexuality is at any time and place a historical construction (Bristow 1997: 5). Sexuality, therefore, needs to be understood in its own specific socio-historical context.

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[20] Simpson, J. A. and Weiner, E. S. C. (1989) *Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. XV, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edition, pp.116-117.

Within the social sciences in recent years, then, the shift from an historically-based, time-rooted approach to space to one which privileges geographical factors cannot be denied. Debates over the relative importance of the temporal versus the spatial in science and philosophy, and over the static versus the dynamic view of space in geography and sociology, have been transferred to the arts and literature. The publication of *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (2004) by Phil Hubbard *et al*, the quarterly publication *Space and Culture*[21]*,* produced by Carleton University since 1997, and international conferences such as that held in Amsterdam in 1998 on the 'Semiotics of Space and Culture' attest to the central position now occupied by the theory of space in cultural studies. Philip Wegner goes as far as to argue that literary and cultural texts reflect changes in actual spatial practices and are able to register changing sensibilities before they enter fully into explicit public discourse (Wegner 2002: 186).

The critical theory of literature has been concerned with periodising space as Romantic or Realist, Modernist or Postmodernist, and correlating it to historical periods. Physical space has not received the attention which characterisation and narrative structure have enjoyed. Furthermore, space has moved from the general, static notion of 'setting' in terms of identification within a specific location and time, to embrace the wider concepts of exterior versus interior spaces, public and private spaces, static versus dynamic spaces, and embedded spaces. It appears that the spatial in literary analysis is only now beginning to overcome its traditional secondary position to studies concerning narrative structure and time, characterisation, and the expression of gender and identity issues. Where spatial theory has been applied to literature, it has focussed on nineteenth-century European social realism, modernist texts, and studies of later North American and European writers. Only two studies of spatial elements in Cuban literature have been produced (Stanton 1993 and Vásquez 1996), both of which examine the work of Carpentier, Stanton's drawing on Latin American theorist Fernando Aínsa and his concept of outward versus inward tendencies in narrative strategy, and Vásquez making reference in theoretical terms to Roberto González Echevarría's view of verticality as signifier of the desire for transcendence (Vásquez 1996: 32).

It should now be clear that most of the theorising of space in literature has been concerned with the nature of spatial form, rather than the function of actual spaces depicted in novels, and that spatial form refers to the structures used by writers to organise the events, themes and

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[21] *Space and culture: international journal of social spaces*. London & Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

characterisation of their novels, under the general banner of spatial form or spatiality. Few have examined the actual physical spaces depicted in novels; Bachelard seems to be unique amongst theorists in his focus on physical spaces as depicted in the home within literature. René Wellek and Austin Warren discussed the broader notion of settings rather than specific physical spaces. It is non-literary theorists who have focussed more on the nature and function of physical spaces, some on a general spatial level (Lefèbvre, Soja and Jameson), others in terms of specific spaces and places (Relph, Tuan, and Foucault), and Massey in terms of gendered spaces.

Where critics have discussed actual spaces represented in literature, these spaces have been generally divided into the following binaries, although this is not an exhaustive list: public, private and secret, domestic and social, work and leisure, functional and cultural, old and modern, and interior and exterior spaces. Smaller, but often more significant spaces, have been identified as embedded in larger spaces, whilst certain other spaces occupy borderline or liminal positions. Embedded interior spaces of this kind include corridors and hallways, whilst balconies and verandahs, and porches and patios constitute liminal spaces. Whilst a typology of spaces in novels has not been hitherto formalised, critics have theorised some of the types of spaces to be found in the novels in this thesis: the domestic interior, the park, and the spaces of the country in comparison to the city. Theoretical perspectives on these particular spaces will be evaluated in Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six where appropriate.

CHAPTER 3: *EL ACOSO* (1956) BY ALEJO CARPENTIER

In the Introduction it was stated that spaces in Carpentier's *El acoso* (1956) should be examined first, given that this is the only novel about which any previous studies have been conducted from the point of view of space. It is also part of the literary canon of the period, and can therefore be used as a springboard for the analysis of the other three lesser-known novels in terms of methodology. Whilst the two existing studies by Stanton (1993) and Vásquez (1996) are extensive in scope, they do not do justice to the issues of sexual identity and masculinity that are such a key revelation emerging from the analysis of space in this novel.

Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980) completed this short novel in voluntary exile in Caracas. It was first published in Buenos Aires in 1956, although several fragments had appeared in *Orígenes* in 1954, and republished two years later alongside three short stories in the collection *Guerra del tiempo*. Most critics set the novel at the end of the Machado dictatorship in 1933 (Pogolotti [1958], Mócega González [1975], Schwarz [1988]), although others have acknowledged the references to historical events that occurred in the early 1940s (González Echevarría [1977], Sánchez [1975], Chao [1984] and Collard [1991]), such as the actual death of a man in the courtyard adjacent to the university theatre, when Carpentier himself was dealing with sound equipment for the production of *Coeforas* by Aeschylus in the university theatre in the early 1940s. Ramón Chao has proposed this event as the very kernel of the story (Chao 1984: 110). Other events with a historical basis in the novel include the execution by the Directorio Estudiantil of José Soler, a student activist in the 1930s, and an assassination from the late 1940s.

Several critics have focused on the historical accuracy of the novel's events, referring to the actual people and press reports which provided the sources for the plot (Sánchez [1975], Chaves-Abad [1983] and Oviedo [1978]). Sánchez has noted the similarity between certain passages in *El acoso* and North American gangster films, commenting that the photographic nature of some of the scenes is not surprising given that Carpentier worked with the help of press clippings about gangster incidents in Havana (Sánchez 1975: 421). He has identified the exact press articles used by Carpentier whilst working in Paris, containing reports of the struggle by university students to oppose the regime from the 1920s to the 1950s, including the murder of politician Vásquez Bello in 1932, and the murder of university professor Ramiro Valdés Daussá in 1940. Whilst most critics agree that the novel is most representative of the early 1930s, it is probable that Carpentier has also drawn on events from the late 1940s. Indeed, in 1953 he said in an interview that the

novel is set 'in Havana today' (González Echevarría 1977: 210). The fact that most of the characters have no name, however, creates an impression of timelessness and universality, with the result that the novel's exact temporal location is difficult to pin down to any one particular decade.

The novel is concerned with a young, nameless, ex-student of architecture who dropped out of university to join a more violent faction of the Communist Party than the one to which he had previously belonged. He has no clear political standpoint, merely seeking to be heroic. After assassinating the opponent of his leader, known as the *Alto Personaje*, he is captured and betrays his former comrades under threat of torture. During this period he was held in a Spanish fortress in Havana. The *acosado* is now on the run from his own faction, remaining for days in a hiding place (the Mirador) provided by the old woman who used to be his childhood nanny back home in the provinces. It is there that he undergoes a religious conversion, shortly after which she dies. On the run again after her wake, he seeks refuge in a concert hall in which, ironically, Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony is being played.

The narrative concerning the *acosado* is intertwined with that of the concert hall *taquillero* (ticket seller), also unnamed, who, like the *acosado*, originated from a provincial village. Apart from the concert hall location, their movements coincide because they both visit the same prostitute, Estrella, they both know the *acosado*'s old nanny, and both draw on similar memories of life in the provinces. They both have memories of village funerals. Like the *acosado*, the *taquillero* has also come to Havana from the provinces to study. He has spent weeks studying the Beethoven Symphony in preparation for the concert, but leaves the hall to visit Estrella during the performance. The two mens' lives are thus interlinked through the music, and also through spatial configurations. Frances Wyers Weber suggested that the two protagonists themselves represent space and time: 'the student of architecture (the organisation of spatial relations) and the student of music (the organisation of temporal progression)' (Wyers Weber 1963: 447). The terrified *acosado* is killed by his pursuers as the performance ends, but not until much has been revealed (by means of interior monologue) about his whereabouts whilst on the run for the six days prior to his death in the concert hall.

The novel is divided into three parts which are in turn divided into eighteen small sections without titles, with Part Two by far the biggest part. Patrick Collard maintains that Carpentier had drawn on his ample knowledge of musical structure for the narrative, in that these sections mimic

the sonata form (Collard 1991: 25). The narrative structure is fragmentary and non-chronological, with repeated visits to the same locations, with the first part situated in the concert hall and returning there at the end of the novel within the time frame of the exact 46-minute length of the Symphony. The second part concentrates on the period two weeks prior to the concert in the life of the *acosado*, including recollections of his childhood, whilst the third part fuses the lives of the two protagonists, providing a recapitulation of the events, the denouement and the *acosado*'s death. It is vital that the reader is able to piece together these three parts and rearrange the actual sequence of events. The narrative voice switches unannounced between the mind of both the *taquillero* and that of the *acosado*, who assume the roles of narrator through interior monologue. Thematic patterns and leitmotifs help to provide unity and coherence. The novel's major themes are betrayal, temptation, and the impossibility of achieving the sublime and the heroic through either music or religion. The domination of time, the predominance of corporality, the decline of architectural form, and an existentialist approach to decisive acts are also features of this novel.

Specialist vocabulary pervades the novel, relating to music, architecture, religion, and Latin phrases. The extremely long sentences and lack of paragraphing at times creates a tense and breathless pace. Very often the focalisation changes without introduction, leaving the reader unclear as to whose thoughts are being relayed by means of interior monologue. The novel contains elements of the novela negra and existentialism, adding to the atmosphere of turmoil and confusion. The intertextual use of the Symphony allows for the exploitation of repetition in the narrative and provides an ironic comment on what constitutes the 'heroic', as does the Greek tragedy *Electra* being shown at the university theatre.

The considerable criticism on *El acoso*, some twenty articles or sections of books, is not surprising, given that this novel is very much a challenging, writerly text, one which breaks away from the established codes of conventional realism, requires a lot of work on the part of the reader, and offers plentiful scope for analysis along a variety of axes (leitmotifs, textual signs and intertextuality, architecture, and time and space). Critical evaluation of the novel ranges from its designation by Labrador Ruiz as 'una obra maestra' (Cairo 1993: 225) to Juan Marinello's view that it is of interest to only a small number of specialists. Referring to the author, Marinello says: 'ha escrito un libro para gente del oficio; para el lector moliente carece de asas aprehensibles' (Marinello 1977: 232). Marinello has also criticised Carpentier for his lack of realism: 'La primordial equivocación … está en creer que el medio – el *habitat* – nada supone en la narración' (Marinello 1977: 231-232). Carpentier should have focused on the specifically Cuban, Marinello

has maintained, and not the universal. Yet when spaces in the novel are analysed, there is indeed enough detail to situate these particular places in Havana. Of several critics who have pinpointed the location for the novel as Havana, Yolanda Izquierdo is perhaps the one who lists the most comprehensive number, citing Carpentier's own references. Amongst them are el Teatro Amadeo Roldán, el Mercado Único, and la Avenida de los Presidentes (Izquierdo 2002: 95).

As María-José Chaves-Abad (1983) has pointed out, the rupture of chronology serves to represent the chaos of the period, the changes of government and the fragmentation of reality (see Chapter One). These critics have argued that such events provoked Carpentier to see certain historical constants which form a pessimistic cyclical view of history, leading man into disillusionment and the impossibility of escape. José Miguel Oviedo (1978) has commented on the particularly visual quality of the novel and its success in conveying the drama of the press reports.

Critics have also noted the overt themes of the anti-hero and betrayal (Giacoman [1970], Wyers Weber [1963] and González-Echevarría [1977]), and how the *acosado* is the type of terrorist who is not politically engaged, seeking personal glory and kudos, firstly through political activism and then through religion. They explain how the use of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony provides an ironic backcloth to the *acosado*'s motives and actions. Emil Volek (1970) has provided a detailed analysis of the structure of the Symphony and how it functions as a narrative framework. Closely linked to the theme of betrayal is guilt. Helmy Giacoman (1970) has noted how the *acosado* turns to alcohol to alleviate his guilt after the assassination of his victim.

Steven Boldy (1990) has discussed the architecture which is such a prevalent feature of the novel, arguing that the evident decay and decomposition of certain buildings alludes to the very deconstruction and disintegration of society in the anti-Machado struggle (Boldy 1990: 620). For Boldy, architecture reproduces most of the functions of the novel: limitation, opposition, transposition and combination. Whilst González Echevarría has noted how the many types of texts (the biography of Beethoven, the prayer book, press reports and Latin inscriptions) function as betrayal to the protagonists (González Echevarría 1977: 202), Boldy includes buildings and their parts in his consideration of the importance of hypertexts in the creation of meaning. For Carpentier, he claims, such texts need not originate from a literary source; they can be taken from sex, art and religion (Boldy 1990: 619). For Wyers Weber, the *acosado*'s move from one building to another and the disintegration of familiar architecture signifies loss of meaning and degeneration (Wyers Weber 1963: 444).

Religious references are an important part of the novel in that one of the *acosado*'s hiding places is a church, and his last few days coincide with Holy Week and its significant rites. The *acosado's* desire for religious conversion marks another attempt to assign a meaning to his hitherto futile life, after abandoning the study of architecture and political activism. Wyers Weber argued that the many motifs in the novel provide unity in an otherwise fractured and initially confusing narrative structure (Wyers Weber 1963: 441): the banknote, the Latin quotation, the Beethoven biography and the acne-scarred neck of the *acosado's* victim.

In terms of the spatial aspects of this novel, most critics have focused on spatial form rather than actual physical spaces (Serra [1972], Talvet [1980], Mócega González [1975] and González Echevarría [1977]). They note the repetition, circularity and parallelisms of the narrative structure, the breadth of the space plane in terms of the different locations in the city and the provincial dimension, as opposed to the narrowness of the time plane (the 46 minute *Eroica* Symphony). Jüri Talvet has argued that the novel has 'a limited temporal dimension, a stretched-out spatial dimension' (Talvet 1980: 105) and that the limited space of the novel reinforces its drama because the protagonists undergo interior change. For Irene-Maria von Koerber, drawing on Mario Benedetti (1971), the novel marks 'a new dimension in Latin American urban narrative' (von Koerber 1999: 412). It resembles, she claims, the *écriture* style of the 1950s new narrative of Alain Robbe-Grillet, in that both his work and *El acoso* are not about solving a crime despite their crime elements. Like the early new novel, *El acoso* is structured along geometric lines and involves the reader in a restructuring process.

Serra (1972) and González Echevarría (1977) have discussed the importance of other senses as well as the visual, the lack of dialogue and the prevalence of interior monologue. The novel's autobiographical elements have been analysed by Portuondo (1957) and González Echevarría (1977), whilst Cairo notes the prevalence of binaries (Cairo 1993): life / death, flight / persecution and objectivity / subjectivity. Rita de Maeseneer (2003) highlights the difficult position of the reader, who in her view builds resentment and ultimately acts as judge.

One of the most important elements of the novel, as noted by several critics (de Maeseneer [2003], Serra [1972], Talvet [1980], Giacoman [1970] and Wyers Weber [1963]) is the existential predicament of the protagonist. The *acosado* is homeless in a hostile world. He embarks on a true existential act in a bid to become the kind of positive, engaged character he has so far failed to be. In practice, however, motives grow confused and the 'act' becomes devalued. Like the character

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Hugo in Sartre's *Les mains sales* (1948), the *acosado* is a young middle class intellectual who joined the Communists out of dislike for his own family and class, and out of admiration for the Party. Not entirely accepted by his comrades, he seeks to perform an act which will earn him their respect. However, in performing the assassination, his motives become confused and his subsequent betrayal of his colleagues negates his claim to heroism. The tragedy of the *acosado* is framed by the Greek tragedy *Electra* at the university theatre. He is not 'engaged' in the Sartrean sense, but acts out of self-interest. Like Orestes in the Greek play, he does not eat or wash and deteriorates physically (Giacoman 1970: 375-377). Both believe themselves to be on a lofty mission of which neither is worthy. Also like Orestes, the *acosado* attacks his victims from behind. Giacoman has argued that he betrayed himself long before he betrayed his fellow activists. What he really wanted to find in the city was fine clothes and girls, not a place to study or be politically active (Giacoman 1970: 369).

In tandem with the physical deterioration noted by Giacoman, critics have drawn attention to the independence of the body as a hallmark of objectivism (Wyers Weber 1963: 445). Boldy concludes that the *acosado*'s final demise in the concert hall auditorium occurs in a space which takes him back to his birth. He notes the references to fluids and the possibility of rebirth (Boldy 1990: 622). Mócega González and González Echevarría are two of the few critics who examine sex and the body in the novel. Mócega González (1975) has argued that prostitute Estrella assigns a female role to her two male clients, thereby reducing their masculinity and power.

In her Jungian reading of the novel, Miriam Adelstein (1990) argues for a deeply psychological reading, as opposed to a socio-political one. She contends that Estrella is the anima of the *acosado,* that the *taquillero* is the *acosado's* shadow, and that both characters demonstrate how the irrational is in constant conflict with the rational self. Irene von Koerber contends that the *acosado*'s whole spatial journey is one of self-discovery (von Koerber 1999: 429-430).

González Echevarría (1977) has pursued the aspects of birth, death and sexuality in the novel, and it is he more than any other critic who has explored the link between some spaces in the novel and birth and death. This aspect of his work will be examined in the section on the church later in this chapter. González Echevarría has further noted that there is a no man's land between the two women in the novel, leaving both the *acosado* and the *taquillero* feeling abandoned by their two centres of comfort (González Echevarría 1977: 198). It is as if the *acosado* were still a little boy, with the two women, despite occupying subservient roles in the adult world, and despite being intellectually and economically less wealthy than the man, as his secure female parents. Indicated

by the ill-fitting suit made by his father, an activity echoed by the dressmakers in the Mirador, González Echevarría has also argued that the *acosado* has a body fixation. He lives under the threat of petrification, with Estrella as the Medusa, herself threatened with death by stoning (González Echevarría 1977: 204-205). He has already experienced the fear of castration at the hands of his captors in the fortress, and this, together with his existing Oedipal fear over his manhood, means that he never engages properly with his own actions and motivations. For González Echevarría, the *acosado*'s sexuality is the rehearsal of a deferred death. It is my contention, however, that the real theme of the novel is the crisis of sexual identity and masculinity in the protagonist and that this crisis is revealed through the novel's physical spaces.

Previous studies of space in *El acoso*

There are only two studies on space in the Cuban novel, and they are both on Carpentier's *El acoso*. Stanton (1993) considers *El acoso* as one of four of Carpentier's novels, whilst Carmen Vásquez (1996) examines interior and exterior spaces in this one novel. Vásquez comments on the contrast between the urban and the rural dimensions of *El acoso*, and how the character of the old nanny, who had looked after the *acosado* as a boy back in the *campo* and who shelters him whilst on the run as an adult in the city, unites the two environments (Vásquez 1996). She acknowledges the importance of spatio-temporal elements in the narrative structure, as well as the significance of verticality. She argues that interior spaces function as external spaces and vice versa, concluding that in Carpentier's novel 'No hay distinción pues entre la geografía de los exteriores de La Habana y la de sus interiores', and that this is a technique which highlights the hostility and tension of the earlier period of the *machadato*: 'Todo se convierte entonces en representación de caos, de asfixia, de violencia' (Vásquez 1996: 35).

Vásquez is concerned with the broader geographical spaces of the country versus the city. She also treats spaces in the novel in terms of their relationship with each other, be they interior or exterior. Her study is useful for the interconnectedness of spaces, however, she does not dwell on each interior space, with the result that the focus is on changes of space rather than what each space tells us about the *acosado*'s physical and mental changes. This thesis explores precisely those issues of personal change and identity, including sexual identity and masculinity.

Stanton compares Carpentier's use of space in four of his novels to the treatment of space by other canonical Latin American novelists[22], explaining that Carpentier's main consideration concerning these four novels is the spatial relationship between Latin America and Europe. She is interested in his search for meaning on a universal level: 'Carpentier has experimented with a variety of narrative spaces, but always with the purpose of establishing a Latin American identity that is at once unique and universal' (Stanton 1993: 193). Her thesis draws on the work of Fernando Aínsa with regard to the use of space by Latin American novelists. Aínsa divides Latin American narrative into two groups: novels which move inward to the interior of the continent in a centripetal movement, and those which move outward in a centrifugal movement to the cities and ports, in a deliberate attempt to receive foreign influences (Aínsa 1986: 205-223). According to Aínsa, it is often through confrontation with space in some form that the individual or group encounters his own identity or a transformation thereof (Aínsa 1986: 205). Stanton argues that space for Carpentier is the means by which authenticity, self-knowledge, and future direction are discovered; spaces are to be read as sign-systems by the protagonists in Carpentier's works. Stanton claims that Carpentier used space to 'create his narratives, and to relate that spatial aesthetic to the search for identity which is a cornerstone of this author's work' (Stanton 1993: 12). Her overarching focus is on Carpentier's search for a Latin American identity as opposed to a European one, using the spatial relationship between Latin America and Europe in her considerations, as well as the smaller physical spaces within each novel.

Drawing on theories of the Gothic in literature, Stanton explores the distance between people and particular locations, the characters' movement through space, and the urban/rural dimension. For her, *El acoso* is a 'spatially limited novel', with an intricate spatial configuration, symbolic or archetypal in nature (Stanton 1993: 185). Spaces in *El acoso* are, she claims, those of the city. They are confined and alienating, bringing betrayal, solitude and loss of identity. Yet the city can also be a place of enlightenment, she argues. The city and the province are expressed as polar opposites in the novel, with the move from *pueblo* to Havana a version of the movement away from one's origin. Both the *acosado* and the *taquillero* are haunted by memories of the life they left behind and the values instilled in them there. For Stanton, the *acosado*'s nightmarish chase through the city is a physical, spatial representation of his inner torment over betraying his fellow revolutionaries (Stanton 1993: 183). Drawing on Aínsa's theory of centrifugal movement away from the original locus of identity, the *pueblo* for both protagonists in *El acoso* represents

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[22] *El arpa y la sombra* (1979), *Concierto barroco* (1973), *La consagración de la primavera* (1978) and *El acoso* (1956).

'barbarie', whilst the 'civilización' offered by the city is accompanied by many temptations that contradict the values of the province (Stanton 1993: 183-184). In her view, Carpentier emphasises the negative nature of the city through detailed and highly descriptive accounts of its spaces, including streets, monuments, churches, the theatre and a variety of other buildings. Stanton argues that the whole city itself becomes a protagonist, a living labyrinth in which inhabitants must find protective spaces (Stanton 1993: 184).

Confinement in *El acoso* is also expressed by boundaries in the novel: framed views, vertical and horizontal conceptions of space, proximity versus distance, and interior and exterior spaces. Estrella and the old nanny are always portrayed in confined spaces. The repetition of limited spaces and progressively smaller spaces pulls individuals down into a vortex, leading to concentricity in the narrative structure. Concentricity is also achieved by intertextuality, via the lives of Beethoven and Christ. The spatial notion of the vortex will be explored in the novel *La trampa* (see Chapter Six).

Both Stanton and Vásquez mention the performance of the Greek play at the university theatre. It is useful to consider this play as it sheds light on how the *acosado* relates to other spaces in the novel. The theatre is an extradiegetic space that is indirectly conveyed when the *acosado* overhears voices on the loudspeakers as he walks past the building. The performance is the Greek tragedy *Electra* by Sophocles, with the theme of the heroic and the sublime. These are heights to which the *acosado* aspires, but which he will never reach. The performance in the theatre casts an ironic comment on the *acosado*, because like Orestes in the tragedy, he spends several days without food, blaming others for forcing him to commit murder. Orestes killed his mother, whilst the *acosado* can be said to have killed off his old nanny. As Boldy argues, the *acosado* places himself in the star role of Orestes when he is actually in the position of the condemned Aegysthus (Boldy 1990: 616). Giacoman has pointed out that the actual dialogue overheard by the *acosado* in the theatre is precisely the part in which the dead vow to avenge themselves on their pursuers (Giacoman 1970: 375).

This mother-fixated, misguided political activist can hardly be called 'heroic'. The *acosado* has no strong male role model; his father had made him an ill-fitting suit before he came to the city, which could be read as an indication of a poor, uncomfortable body image, and a potentially negative view of the self. It is the very intertextuality of the Sophocles play that sheds light on the narrative, and not the actual physical space of the theatre itself. It does not therefore matter that

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the *acosado* does not actually set foot in the theatre. As in the Greek play, the *acosado*'s life and death is a tragedy. His death is fated to happen, in the same way as the protagonists on the stage perform pre-ordained actions.

Vásquez and Stanton have paved the way for further spatial analysis of Cuban novels of the 1950s. The rest of this chapter explores what Stanton and Vásquez have to say about the spaces in the novel, and then explores precisely those issues of personal change, sexual identity and masculinity which were not the focus of Vásquez's study, and which have been treated only in part by Stanton. In the rest of the thesis I will show that a spatial analysis of three lesser-known novels reveals that sexual identity and masculinity can be as problematic as they are in *El acoso*. The alternation of spaces, which forms much of the basis of Vásquez's study, can be applied to the other three novels, as can Stanton's concentration on restricted, confined spaces and what this tells us about the characters' mental state. Stanton explores the link between space and self-identity, and this is useful for the analysis of spaces in other novels. She rejects the idea that spaces can be static in this novel (Stanton 1996: 62). The notion of stasis, however, is useful for a particular room in the house in *Romelia Vargas* (see Chapter Five).

The concert hall

Vásquez and Stanton have both examined the concert hall as a space. Since it is the *taquillero*'s place of work, their focus in the analysis of the concert hall is inevitably on him rather than on the *acosado*, although parallels between them are drawn. Vásquez argues that the *taquillero* is an observer of interiors and exteriors, of the concert hall interior as well as the street and park. He also reads about someone else's life, in the form of the Beethoven biography, rather than living his own life. The *taquillero*'s booth resembles a prison cell: 'se hall[a] encerrado aprisionado, como en una celda carcelaria' (34)[23], an echo of the *acosado's* period of imprisonment. His exclusion from the concert is highlighted by the cage-like nature of the ticket booth with its bars, described as 'del ancho de una gaveta' (7). Indeed, he is referred to as 'Detrás de una reja como los monos' (6). A curtain inside the booth further marks him off from the public, and it also hinders his reading of the biography of Beethoven as it flaps too close to the pages. Stanton notes the impression of intense claustrophobia afforded by this miniature space (Stanton 1993: 32).

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[23] All references to *El acoso* are taken from the 1976 edition: Carpentier, A. (1976) *El acoso*. Buenos Aires: Calicanto Editorial. 1st publ. 1956 Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, also publ. 1958 in *Guerra del tiempo: tres relatos y una novela*. Mexico: Compañía General de Ediciones.

Just as much as the *taquillero* is an outsider, prevented from seeing the orchestra in the concert hall, so the *acosado* fails to live up to the image of a truly 'engaged' terrorist. Like the *taquillero*, the *acosado* also gave up his studies. They both lead a false life, an 'inauthentic' one in Sartrean terms. Vásquez notes that the *acosado* is called '*el emplazado*' in the concert hall as if to denote this as his final place of rest. The word *sala* indicates a home, marking his return to his rightful 'home', which is also his place of death. She emphasizes that he dies alone, a traitor, with the *Eroica* funeral march as his requiem (Vásquez 1996: 34).

For Stanton, the concert hall, like the theatre, is an architectural space in which order reigns over nature, and which provides a self-reflective space (Stanton 1993: 57). The concert hall functions in a similar way to the university theatre, in that the protagonists are framed by doorways and windows, as if they were presented on a stage with views framed like snapshot photographs in the press (Stanton 1993: 31). The clientele are very close to each other in the foyer but there are barriers between them and the *taquillero*. The different social classes are separated by doors and bars. The counter space is minuscule, rendering the *taquillero* framed, limited, degraded, excluded and animal-like. Whilst he looks outward from the ticket booth, he nonetheless maintains an inward focus. The doors are closed to the *taquillero*, who, unlike the often unappreciative, wealthy middle class audience, cannot buy into culture and cross the boundary into the auditorium (Stanton 1993: 35). The experiences of spatiality and confinement, expulsion and flight all serve to alienate him. The two protagonists exist and move in close proximity but still lead distant, unrelated lives even though their paths cross many times, reinforcing their alienation (Stanton 1993: 31-2). Stanton comments that the protagonists both experience flashbacks to the rural village as a mental escape from the enclosures of the city. For them, the city becomes a prison. Stanton points out that the concert hall provides a safe haven for the *acosado* as long as the audience is present, and that it becomes an enclosure, which traps him when they leave, resulting in his death lying in a fetal position under a theatre seat (Stanton 1993: 22).

Stanton also argues that the *taquillero*'s experience of women is as a voyeur. Firstly he viewed the widow back in his village through a gap in the wall, secondly he viewed the woman in the fox-fur stole through the ticket booth frame, and finally his relationship with Estrella is not that of a real life relationship. This alienation, reinforced through space, reveals a basic emotional distance from women. All of these women represent something else: the widow represents death,

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the woman in the fox-fur stole emphasizes class difference, and Estrella has to be financially bought, since she provides a service.

Further to what Stanton and Vásquez cover there are a number of other important aspects arising from this space. The novel starts and ends inside the concert hall, for which little physical description is given, apart from the fact that there is clearly a main hall, a grand staircase, a foyer and a ticket office. This is undoubtedly one of Havana's premier concert halls, given the apparent wealth of the women clad in their fur stoles, despite the heat. It is left to the reader to imagine the type of décor within such a space. The concert hall is first and foremost a public space that affords little privacy. It is normally a place of relaxation and leisure, where people come to hear music played by top orchestras. This concert hall, however, will prove to be a trap for the *acosado* and ultimately his tomb. It is portrayed in terms of confinement, with the public 'rodeados de una lluvia que demoraba en el acunado de los toldos' (5), the *taquillero* confined to his booth, and the woman in the fox stole 'que acababa de desceñirse de la molestia de una prenda muy íntima' (6), glad to be rid of the restrictions of her undergarment.

Not only does the *taquillero* observe the women in the foyer from his confined space, he can also see across the park to the old colonial mansion with its Mirador, the old lady who lives there, and the modern building adjacent which contains his own small rented room. He can see a funeral wake in progress on the Mirador of the mansion, but does not know that this is for the old woman he knows there, nor that her death has precipitated the *acosado*'s flight and that he will shortly arrive at the concert hall. Her death is one of many portents of the *acosado*'s death. Furthermore, we gain access to other spaces extradiegetically through the thoughts of the *taquillero*: the widow on whom he used to spy through a hole in the wall as she took her bath back home in his provincial village, the description of a funeral wake in a room there, prostitute Estrella's home, and even Beethoven's house in Germany. The *taquillero* is also influenced by the smells of rain-soaked vegetation from the adjacent park, as are the members of the concert audience during the interval. The focus is on the atmosphere, the people and the weather. The heady, sexually-charged ambiance is conveyed using vocabulary of the senses, as the audience enjoys the freshness of the smells from the park, as they take the air on the front steps:

> Permanecían allí, enracimados, por respirar el olor a mojado, a verde de
> álamos, a gramas regadas, que refrescaba los rostros sudorosos, mezclándose

con alientos de tierra y de cortezas cuyas resquebrajaduras se cerraban al

cabo de la larga sequía. (5)

For the *acosado*, the concert hall is also a confined, restricted space. He feels in danger of losing control in 'esta inmovilidad a que estoy condenado' (12). Far from the usual place of joy and relaxation, the concert hall at first functions as a short-lived refuge from his pursuers, but then it becomes a place of entrapment. Initially the focus is on the *acosado*'s body and sensations as he hides from his pursuers, frozen with fear. These thoughts are conveyed at great length through interior monologue, with descriptions of many different physical sensations, external and internal. Sweating profusely, he notices that the man in the seat in front of him has an acne-scarred neck, just like the man he assassinated. The *acosado*'s inner focus on his body creates a deceleration and in time, a prolongation of his agony.

He moves from a focus on his inner body to an intense study of the materials around him: the different seats, some with red covering, and the railings and the curtains, particularly their intense red colour. His thoughts then travel back to the materials that surrounded him at the Mirador, thus providing a spatial link. This time he thinks about the smell of the dust there, the tacks on the floor, the chair legs and roof tiles. These items are visually and sensually linked, for example, the red velvet cushions for sewing at the Mirador are stuck with pins, echoing the red carpet of the concert hall, but also reminiscent of the voodoo practice of sticking pins into dolls in a bid to cause death. This may be the basis of the claim that the old black nanny is linked to black magic (González Echevarría 1977: 190). Although still in the concert hall, but with his focus on the floor of the Mirador, his mind wanders further back in time and space to the shacks of his childhood village, the boards, the hens and the drainpipes, before returning to the sounds of the music in the concert hall.

The second time that the narrative is set in the concert hall it is the consciousness, or thought process, of the *acosado* that continues from where it left off previously in Part One, before the narrative travelled back in time to events earlier than the concert performance. This is evident when his First Communion is mentioned for the first time on page 16 and then again on page 91. Like the *taquillero*, whilst listening to the Symphony the *acosado* also remembers a funeral back home in the country, another portent of his own imminent death. He feels a certain pre-destiny about his fate: 'Repartidos están los papeles en este Teatro' (15), believing that it was God who assigned him his role. He compares the behaviour of the concert hall audience to the congregation

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of a church after the *Ite misa est* [24], and this, together with his recognition that the concert hall has the five doors of a cathedral, links the concert hall auditorium to the church in which the *acosado* previously sought sanctuary. Volek has argued that 'La Sala de Conciertos se convierte en una iglesia mundana' (Volek 1970: 426). Furthermore, as Boldy indicates, 'The order of the parts of the symphony is the same as the order of the Mass' (Boldy 1990: 619).

The concert hall is also linked to another space, the Mirador, inside which the *acosado* refers to himself as curled up like a dog. In the concert hall he anticipates his demise: 'Cerrarán las cinco puertas con cerrojos, con candados, y me echaré sobre la alfombra roja del palco aquel … ovillado como un perro' (94). Boldy provides further insight into the relevance of the red carpet in the concert hall, in that it functions as a soft, organic, womb-like space (Boldy 1990: 622). Bal argues that 'Tactile perceptions usually have little spatial significance. ... Tactile perception is often used in a story to indicate the material, the substance of objects' (Bal 1997:134). In this case it is precisely the tactile quality of the carpet, along with its colour, that links the three spaces of the concert hall, the Mirador and the church. However, as will be shown in the analysis of other spaces, the notion of any return to one's origins and birth as solution to alienation and pursuit offers no solace; the *acosado* is shot as if his flesh were one and the same as the red carpet.

The park

Whilst Vásquez understandably does not discuss the park in her focused study of the interiors and exteriors of buildings in the novel, Stanton includes comments about the park alongside her treatment of the adjacent concert hall. Drawing on Lutwack (1984), and how art and sex are linked in the space of the park, she indicates the sensual lure of the park and its association with the concept of mother earth, fertility, and the Garden of Eden (Lutwack 1984: 37-8). Lutwack likens parks to a woman's body: 'The garden is the body of a woman in a passive condition, waiting to be enjoyed' (Lutwack 1984: 99) It is the *taquillero* who provides the link between the concert hall and the park, in that the sensuality of the park as he gazes out from his booth reminds him of Estrella. Prompted by the sight of the woman in the fox-fur stole, he had already been thinking of the widow back in his home village and his sexual initiation there. It is likely that this is the type of connection made in the *taquillero*'s mind between the park and Estrella. However, Lutwack also argues that the park can function as a trap (Lutwack 1984: 203). The park here

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[24] The concluding formula of mass in Latin, the signal to the congregation that they are now dismissed.

certainly entices the *taquillero* away from his mission to listen to the whole symphony. (The park in terms of a trap in other novels will be further discussed in Chapters Five and Six). Stanton makes a phallic reading of the park as a bridge linking the *taquillero* and Estrella, (Stanton 1993: 36), but it could also be read as a bridge between the two men, who share the same prostitute. The limited space of the ticket booth is thus linked to the more inviting and relaxing space of Estrella's apartment via the park (Stanton 1993: 36).

Lutwack also points out the association in the Christian tradition between the garden (or park) and the Christian notions of the Virgin Mary as representing the sublime (Lutwack 1984: 96). There is here a three-fold link between the park, the woman Estrella, and the sublime to which both the *taquillero* and the *acosado* so desperately aspire. Linkng the park to nature and sexuality, the music student is distracted from the immediate task of appreciating the Symphony.

The Mirador

Vásquez notes that the Mirador is part of a house in a state of deterioration and reduced circumstances (Vásquez 1996: 31), after a reversal of economic conditions has taken place. It always appears with a capital 'M', as if to denote its own existence or essence. This may be an indication that buildings are more important than people; they will certainly last longer than the protagonist. Vásquez argues that the verticality of the Mirador is an indication of transcendence, given that it is here that the *acosado* undergoes his religious conversion. In common with Vásquez, Stanton argues that the Mirador represents a lost utopia (Stanton 1993: 32). The old nanny represents a form of lost nirvana for the *acosado*. His village of origin is lost to him, and his ambition of glory through terrorism has failed (Stanton 1993: 32). For the *acosado*, the Mirador is a degrading space for its protagonist since he is housed in the former maids' quarters. The old nanny's confinement restricts him even more, since he has to lock himself out of Mirador and can only come in when the old nanny's niece is not visiting. He is able to 'milk' his old nanny for the scraps of food which are intended for her, literally suckling the life out of her (Stanotn 1993: 51).

It is in the Mirador that the *acosado* sees his new image in a mirror; he is gaunt, furrowed and dirty, making him unrecognizable to his enemies (Stanton 1993: 24), but more significantly, also to himself. He is very conscious of his body, and suffers from obsession, narcissism, distortion and the feeling of being a prisoner in his own body (53). The use of this mirroring and narcissism,

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together with the repetition of character, locates the space of the self not in a room or location, but in the objects and other people around him. He sees himself reflected in liturgy, biography, in his terrorist colleagues and even in his own past. The sense of enclosure reinforces his inward-looking perspective and his need to arrive at self-understanding. His lowly position relative to the elevated height of the Mirador spatially reinforces his self-degradation, leading Stanton to conclude that 'His abjection is spatialised' (Stanton 1993: 33).

There are certain other aspects of the Mirador as a space that should be considered. If the concert hall is a space that functions as a trap or tomb, then the Mirador, whilst supposedly functioning as a secure hiding place, becomes a site of guilt, shame, fear and abjection. Whilst on the run from his own gang, the *acosado* has retreated to the place he used to rent when he first arrived in the city, the Mirador of the once refined colonial house, (La Casa del Mirador), where his former childhood nanny now lives. The Mirador, or belvedere, is an unusual space, defined by González Echevarría as 'an open, roofed gallery in an upper story, built for giving a view of the scenery' (González Echevarría 1977: 195). He has further explained that this construction originated in port cities, allowing a mariner's relatives to see ships at a distance, and that the Mirador was often surrounded by an open balcony called a 'widow's walk'. This female-gendered space casts the *acosado* in an ironic light, given that his search for glory amongst his fellow male activists has led to his flight back to his childhood nurse, with whom he now lies cowering in fear. Furthermore, as a female-gendered space the Mirador is also a place of decay and imminent departure, as the old nanny lies sick and unable to eat. The concept of the macho occupying a female-gendered space which is linked to both birth and death will also be explored in *La trampa* (see Chapter Six).

With access via a spiral staircase, the verticality conveyed by the Mirador space is echoed in the many descriptions of columns in the city that pervade the novel. Theorised by both Bachelard (1994) and Lutwack (1984), verticality serves several functions in literature, including, as is the case here, the desire for transcendence towards God. As Lutwack further notes, 'stairs symbolically afford a passage from one mode of existence to another' (Lutwack 1984: 39). In this novel the meaning of verticality in architectural terms is the *acosado*'s desire for transcendence. This presents another irony, since, rejected by the church and hunted down and dying like a dog in the concert hall, the novel clearly offers no reassurance from a welcoming God. The idea of transcendence expressed through architecture is just another illusion. Estrella, with the name of

the star, constitutes another high point but far from offering a route to the sublime, she becomes a source of guilt and betrayal and represents reality.

Embedded in the large Casa, the Mirador is partly a private inner space but it is also an exterior space, locked from the outside. It is divided into an exterior space and a more hidden, unobserved interior space: 'durante el día tenía que permanecer dentro del Mirador, para evitar el riesgo de que lo vieran desde la azotea, tertulia de lavanderas, desahogo de niños' (27). It is a space from which a view of the harbour and other buildings is afforded, but it can be viewed from elsewhere. It occupies a marginal, borderzone space, which is both private and public. The *taquillero* can see the Mirador from his room in the adjacent modern building, and he can also see it from the ticket booth where he works at the concert hall. The function of the Mirador is reminiscent of Foucault's Panopticon, in that anyone looking outside from the Mirador is able to view a full panorama. It is a place of surveillance, an observation point, but like the prison inmates in Foucault's model, the *acosado* himself lives in danger of being observed from outside (Foucault 1995: 195-228).

The whole house has an air of decay: 'aquel destartalado Mirador de casa hidalga venida a menos' (26), and its materials, once solid, are now almost spent: 'cuyo mármol grisáceo y desgastado como lápida de cementerio conservaba un remoto frescor, entre tanto ladrillo calenturiento, cerrado por los muritos de piedra' (26). The comparison with a tombstone is one of many portents of death in the novel. The erosion of former architectural glory can be read as the decline of colonial power, the most blatant example in this novel being La Casa de la Gestión, which will be discussed later in this chapter. The *acosado* stares out from the Mirador into the streets, taking care not to be seen by anyone on the terrace of the modern building. Noting the 'vasos romanos y urnas cinerarios' (29), his appraisal of the architecture signals the death knell of the classical style, and again, anticipates his own death: 'Se asistía, de portal en portal, a la agonía de los últimos órdenes clásicos usados en la época' (29). When his old nanny falls ill, these portents of death prove to be significant. As well as a place of refuge and security for the *acosado*, the Mirador now becomes a sick bay for his nanny. When the old nanny dies, his flight from the Mirador is precipitated, leading in turn to his death.

The Mirador is a space that for the *acosado* represents a return to his origins, a memory of his rural childhood contained in the city. When he steals the old woman's food as she sleeps, this reconnects him with the time when she was his childhood nanny. Bachelard's argument (1994)

that the home is the container of the memory of the individual's maternal relationship is relevant here, despite the fact that this is not the *acosado*'s actual home (see Chapter Two). It is clear from the analysis of this space that the flight back to the maternal home does not actually have to take place in the original home, but this can happen in a representation of that home, and involving a representative of the mother figure. The familiar objects listed by Bachelard as important in this process are here to be found in the *acosado*'s old trunk, in which he keeps his student books and other objects from the past. Bachelard did not include a discussion of the sexual nature of the comfort afforded by the maternal home, yet here the *acosado*'s close relationship with the black nanny as a child is echoed in his preference for the black body of the prostitute Estrella.

It is in the hiding place of the Mirador that we gain access to the *acosado*'s recent past during the previous week or so, and also to his more distant past in the provinces. His main purpose in coming to the city was to seek freedom from the cloistered confines of his home town, in the mistaken belief that there would be no 'ventanas enrejadas, celosías, ni comadres noticiosas' (30). Yet here he is confined to the Mirador, in mortal fear of arousing suspicion. Further irony is provided when he undertakes what he believes to be a religious conversion. Inspired by the old woman's mundane act in lighting a cigar, and in a bid to reconcile his guilt over the murderous acts he has committed, given that his quest for heroism has failed, and as his political appetite wanes, he now seeks the attainment of the sublime through religion. To this end, he embarks on a four day fast in a bid for purification of body and soul: 'Ofreció a Dios la vaciedad de su vientre, como un primer paso hacia la purificación' (35).

The abstinence from food leads him to focus on his body, his sweat, thinness, and even his penis, which appears to be ennervated, adding a touch of satire to the portrayal of the *acosado*. This adds to the notions of irony already set up by the use of the 'heroic' Symphony, which he can hear emanating from the *taquillero*'s flat, and his rapid conversion from terrorism to religion. His now obsessive focus on the effect of the fast on his body is emphasised by the presence of a mirror in the Mirador. The Mirador is by its very name a self-reflective type of space. He feels a separation from his own body, an echo of the focus on the *taquillero*'s hands as if separated from his body in the ticket booth. Imprisoned in his own body, the fast has led him to a heightened awareness of his immediate surroundings. He is very aware of lights, sounds, and any movement created by insects, all of which exacerbate his torture: 'un insecto se pusiera a rascar detrás de la puerta. ... los grillos que se daban a cantar dentro del baúl' (35). Another effect of this is to slow down the temporal flow of the narrative in favour of its spatialisation, yet conversely his thought

processes are rapid and convey a sense of desperation. He becomes irritated and more nervous at the slightest sound, and focuses on the minutiae of his surroundings. As the *acosado* fantasises over the foods he used to eat as a child, he considers the unlikely materials available for consumption in the Mirador: 'Madera, barro, hollín' (37). Even the water he drinks from the tap tastes of soot, leaving him portrayed in animal terms: 'le hundía el vientre, ..., arqueándole el espinazo, como el de un perro que espumarajea el veneno' (37).

The Mirador is linked to the university theatre because of the comparison between the *acosado* and the character Orestes in the Greek tragedy *Electra*, which the *acosado* overhears. As Giacoman has pointed out, both embark on a fast, Orestes after the death of his mother and the *acosado* after the death of his old nanny (Giacoman 1970: 375). But this is no epiphany; he merely substitutes his quest for heroism through violence with a means of relieving his guilt through religion. Once the old woman is dead, the *acosado*'s thoughts turn to leaving the Mirador, but he is terrified of being outside on the streets, of being seen in public places:

> Habría que entregarse a la libertad – a la calle, a la multitud, a las miradas-
> que era como verse emplazado. … Sería el abandono de la cama antes del
> sueño cumplido, el andar a la sombra, con miedo al eco de sus propios pasos.
> (44)

For the *acosado*, the streets and places like the café are prisons or traps which he must avoid. This notion of outside spaces as traps, a key theme of existentialism, is reinforced once he is outside after attending the old woman's wake, when he sees turkeys straining to look through the bars of their cage: 'las jaulas por cuyas rejillas pasaban los pavos sus cabezas de tulipán polvoriento' (48).

The functions of the Mirador as a space, therefore, are several: temporary escape from pursuit, the comfort of the mother figure, and a space for religious conversion. However, instead of offering a reminder of the warmth and comfort of his rural origins, the Mirador leads to the negation of the *acosado*'s physical being and to the self-deception of his religious conversion. The transition from security to entrapment in the Mirador can be neatly encapsulated by Lutwack in his theorisation of spaces: 'small enclosures may be sought-after refuges, wombs where the spirit may be reborn, or they may be prisons, the place of despair and death' (Lutwack 1984: 35). Yet as Andrew Bush argues, this womb shrivels with the demise of the mother figure in the persona

of the old nanny (Bush 1980: 169). As a tower-like structure at the top of a building, the Mirador functions symbolically as the *acosado*'s quest for transcendence, but the actual physical decay of the whole building is a sign of the *acosado*'s demise. The remnants of his childhood as represented here in the city offer no solace. It is primarily the Mirador's function as representing his place of origin that stimulates his self-analysis, and his subsequent crisis.

Estrella's apartment

Vásquez notes that Estrella's apartment is in a building which contains no clocks, and that this denotes the stoppage of time. One can add that the space of her apartment is closely linked to time in that for the protagonists this space signifies time out from their predicaments outside, and their respective pursuits of music and evading the terrorist avengers. The *acosado* is reduced to *'el hombre'* in this space, an even more anonymous appellation than the *acosado*. Estrella on the other hand is the only character with a real name, which, as Stanton notes, is a spatial one (Stanton 1993: 47).

For Stanton, Estrella is envisioned very much in terms of the 'space' she occupies. Her apartment is very inviting and enclosed from world. It constitutes a womb-like nirvana situation for the two men, a parallel with the mother-son relationship experienced by the *acosado* and the nanny (Stanton 1993: 40). Estrella keeps a constant state of order in her apartment, an order which is coveted by her visitors. The objects in her apartment offer security through familiarity, and in my view, because they remain static: the canaries, the dog, the stain, the soap and the bucket of water. This familiarity is another demonstration of the need shared by both men for a return to the security of their childhood; children too delight in refinding familiar objects. Stanton argues that Estrella is also linked to the idea of the vortex, fearing for her own fall from paradise in the event of being ousted from her abode by the authorities if they suspect her of collaborating with the terrorist (Stanton 1993: 46).

Stanton comments on how the *taquillero*'s intimacy with women is always related to enclosure (Stanton 1993: 42). He withdraws from the exterior world to seek protection in the form of a woman. (He even makes the old nanny suffering up in Mirador into a saintly figure, reminding himself to make her an offering of sweets). Estrella is also sanctified, in that the statue of the Virgin in her flat contrasts with her role as a prostitute. For Stanton, Estrella represents sin, the city and the present, whilst the old nanny signifies salvation, the village and the past.

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The space of Estrella's apartment needs further exploration. Estrella is a static figure, visited and appreciated like a statue, and only straying from her neighbourhood when persuaded to run an errand for the *acosado*. The old nanny is also static, supporting Wyers Weber's (1963) view that the novel is in part static. Estrella's apartment, like the Mirador, is initially a safe and nurturing space for the *acosado*. The home of a prostitute is a space which is difficult to define. Operating on the margins of mainstream society, her home is a private domain which is open to the public but which houses several intimate relationships. Prostitution is a marginal occupation, being both a public and a private activity. The *acosado* may only stay during the night, reflected in Estrella's name (star), and can only ever be her client, not her lover. Estrella is very comfortable with her role as a prostitute in her own home, at least throughout most of the novel. A few rapid impressions, rather than detailed descriptions, demonstrate that this domesticated space is homely, with decorative plates and several contented animals. The bucket of rainwater for washing her hair is one of several domestic touches much welcomed by her visitors. They are reassured by the impression of permanence and security afforded by these objects, especially with the hostile weather outside.

Estrella is not a person who strays far from her home, and knows very little about the rest of the city outside of her locality. She defines herself by her immediate surroundings, and feels respected by others in the neighbourhood, even taking the precaution of putting a cloth over the statue of the Virgin in her apartment whenever she has a customer. She is definitely in charge of her own domain and proud of her enterprise, taking the lead in her relationships with men, as Boldy demonstrates: 'invertía las situaciones, haciendo desempeñar al hombre el papel de la hembra' (Boldy 1990: 618). Although a distinctly female-gendered space with Estrella calling the shots, this is not initially one of Massey's shifting and dynamic spaces in terms of gender (Massey 1994). In fact it is a static space, involving little change, which is part of the attraction for her customers. Even when Estrella begins to doubt her own self-worth, it is still she who commands power. This space also demonstrates a further nuance to Massey's gendered theory of space, in that gender may be assigned to one person by another.

For the *taquillero*, Estrella's apartment provides a release for his sexual tension, a contrast to his other more lofty passion for the attainment of the sublime through music. For the *acosado*, Estrella's apartment represents safety, refuge, relief and calm. It is a womb-like place of nurture where he can reconnect with his uncomplicated origins through the memory of his mother,

represented by Estrella, and it is therefore linked to the Mirador, which has the same initial function for the *acosado*. Vásquez notes how the *acosado*'s name changes to *el cubierto* when he first spends time in Estrella's room (Vásquez 1996: 32). This will be linked to the church and concert hall, which are also described in womb-like terms. Bachelard drew attention to the maternal home as our original site of memory (Bachelard 1994: viii) (see Chapter Two), but here we can see further implications. Like the old nanny, Estrella represents another mother figure and her home represents his original home. Yet there are also signs in the apartment that provide an echo of other, less comforting spaces: the canaries are confined in their cages, Estrella worries that she will be sent to the womens' prison, and the *taquillero* recalls the rockbound, enclosed nature of his home town. His memories of his home town are of a sinister, dangerous place, as he simultaneously enquires about Estrella's previous visitor, the *acosado*. The implication here is that the attempt to return to the womb is a futile pursuit, and that a yearning to recreate the security of one's relationship with a mother or mother figure will only result in prolonged neurosis. This is reinforced when Estrella takes control towards the end, assigning him the female role and undermining his masculinity.

With such portents of doom, this space cannot remain idyllic for long. On his final visit the *acosado* fails to satisfy Estrella, leading to frustration for him and a crisis in confidence for her. Once the apartment begins to attract unwanted attention from the *acosado*'s pursuers, by whom Estrella claims to have been 'interrogated', her home is no longer a safe haven for the *acosado*. He does not know that her claims are exaggerated. Much as he betrayed a comrade in the fortress, Estrella discloses that she has done the same to him. As for her, making connections between newspaper articles she has read, the *acosado*'s hiding place in the Mirador, his fears and solitude and her profession, she now begins to doubt her status, and instead of being able to separate her mind from her body and feel proud of her services, she feels the full impact of the word *puta*: 'Pero ahora, al saber de aquel miedo, de aquel hambre, de aquella soledad en agonía, la palabra se hinchaba de abyección' (53). Whereas previously she had felt herself to be: 'correcta en sus tratos, puntual en sus compromisos, generosa ante la necesidad ajena' (53), she now feels debased because of her disloyal behaviour in accommodating the *acosado*. Whilst before she enjoyed her sexuality, she now refers to her body in the third person, in an attempt to distance herself from it. The *acosado*'s sense of abjection stems from his desire for religious cleansing and purity in the pursuit of religion, in an effort to absolve his guilt over the murder, whereas Estrella's abjection stems from her betrayal of her client.

The *acosado*, however, continues to feel safe in her home despite her admission about the interrogations, and sends her with a message to the man for whom he previously worked, in a bid to get help. When the taxi driver knocks on the door about the validity of the bank note given him by Estrella, the *acosado* escapes through the window in panic, adding to the number of spaces from which he has already fled. Landing in a heap of rubbish only adds to his sense of being cast out of society. Similarly, the *taquillero* must pass through an equally distasteful place when Estrella tells him to leave; the other side of her apartment from the approach via the lovely park is a sordid market, with rotting vegetation and awful smells, similar to the market depicted in *Romelia Vargas* (see Chapter Five). The market reflects his now dejected mood, whereas before he had felt elated, and the caged animals in the market are an echo of the *taquillero*'s confined booth (41). The market provides a sharp contrast for the *taquillero* to the beauty and sensuality of the park near the concert hall, and these two different visions of nature converge in his mind. Estrella's apartment, therefore, is now an unsafe space for the *acosado*, whereas originally it was a place of refuge and nurture for both men.

The church

Another space in which the *acosado* seeks refuge is the church. Unlike the other three novels in this thesis, the church is one of the significant spaces in *El acoso*. The church is another space into which the *acosado* flees with high hopes, this time in a bid to pursue his new goal of religious commitment, as well as to claim sanctuary. A church is a space that does not require a large amount of descriptive detail for it to be recognised as a particular space. Vásquez points out that the *acosado* is named 'el arrodillado' once in the church, and that spaces in the church evoke exteriors and not interiors (34). This, she argues, evokes the idea of expulsion. In other words, despite seeking asylum within the church, the physical building is constructed in the novel as if it were inside out, or without walls 'en vez de evocar interiores, albergues, evocan exteriores' (Vásquez 1996: 34). After the *acosado* has left the church he goes to the old wooden swimming baths where he used to meet the *becario* from his home village. The baths are now dilapidated and obsolete, like the now deceased *becario*. Having left his firearm there and now defenseless, the *acosado* seeks shelter from the torrential rain in a café where he is recognised by his pursuers.

González Echavarría argues that for the *acosado* 'Sexuality is not a rebirth but a redeath, a stroking of the body' (González Echevarría 1977: 201). However, despite referring to the *acosado's* entry into the church and offering a translation of that whole passage, (González

Echevarría 1977: 193), he does not spell out the connection between the protagonist's desire for rebirth through religious transendence and the clearly Freudian nature of the elements in that passage:

> Y, de súbito, se abrieron las puertas de la nave, a cuyo altar resplandeciente
> de cirios conducía un camino de alfombras encarnadas. … pasó bajo la ojiva
> de uno de sus pórticos laterales, y se detuvo, deslumbrado, al pie de un pilar
> cuya piedra rezumaba el incienso. Las manos buscaron el frescor del agua
> bendita, llevándola a la frente y a la boca. (80)

The *acosado* is welcomed into the church as if into a haven, the doors part like the birth canal, and the interior is a womb-like red, an echo of the red carpet in the concert hall. The stone column is a reminder of his male gender. The water is also associated with the idea of birth. Yet his very need to return to his pre-birth state and seek sanctuary in his origins is evidence that he has never established himself, and is still mother-fixated. Consequently he is attracted back towards his childhood nanny, and her echo in Estrella (the old nanny is black and Estrella is *mulata*).

Like the concert hall and theatre, the church is a public space, but it provides access to a private spiritual domain. Furthermore, the church can function as a threshold space, providing at the very least comfort, and theoretically access to the sublime, to Heaven and salvation. The church in *El acoso* is described as a space of beauty, full of light and colour: 'Se le encendían los vitrales; se le prendían las púrpuras y los verdes del rosetón mayor' (80). Like the carpet in the concert hall auditorium, the aisle carpet is a strong red colour, which will lead a wedding party to the altar, whilst the carpet in the concert hall will be the *acosado*'s death bed. The three spaces of the Mirador, Concert Hall and church are thus linked by the colour red. Mistaken for a guest, he is forced to witness the wedding. He had entered the church to confess and find asylum; instead he must witness an event he will never be part of himself.

The *acosado* is an outsider, forever barred from forming a normal family relationship on account of his involvement with violence and terrorism. Not only that, he is barred from confession when the priest tells him to return the following day. Ironically, the one confined space that might have helped the *acosado*, the confessional box, is not accessible to him. The confessional box has an echo in the *taquillero*'s ticket booth. The *acosado* must undergo further deprivations when the

priest, suspicious of the origin of the religious book carried by the *acosado*, tells him to fast ahead of confession. The impression of the church as a type of space is one of beauty, but it is not an inclusive space. It does not accommodate those who function outside the established norms of family life. Like Bakhtin, Massey does not appear to have considered the church within her arguments concerning space, yet it is a unique type of space, usually run by men yet largely frequented by women, and altering little in its activities over long periods of time. The church, then, like all the other spaces in the novel, cannot ultimately offer the *acosado* the sanctuary and forgiveness he needs.

In conclusion, Stanton and Vásquez have instigated a spatial approach to the analysis of *El acoso*, and González Echevarría has identified that the *acosado*'s trajectory is a voyage back to his own birth and subsequent rebirth. This chapter has drawn these three key studies together to argue that space reveals a crisis of sexual identity and masculinity in the protagonist, brought about by terrorist political activity and his search for personal glory.

Vásquez argues that the Casa de la Gestión represents a geographical and temporal space that has already disappeared. The walls have crumbled, leaving the remnants of only one dilapidated room. Much of the building has been reclaimed by nature, and there is a sign: 'Se regalan escombros' (72), indicating the building's loss of function. Similarly, in my view, there is not much left of the *acosado*'s life after turning traitor on his comrades. He has become a shadow of himself, and whilst the house loses its walls, he loses his freedom. Temporarily labelled *el libertado* in the narrative when released from prison, he savours the tastes and smell of the café before returning to be signified as *el acosado* once he has been spotted by his pursuers. The Casa has now converted to a building of exteriors, with no inner features or function. The *acosado*, likewise, has no inner life, identity or essence.

Drawing on Volek (1970), Vásquez shows how the *acosado* spends progressively less time in each location. Volek had argued that the increasingly frequent changes of name signify the frequency of the changes of spaces towards the end of the novel: *el amparado*, *el emplazado*, *el libertado*, *el fugitivo* (Volek 1970: 423-424). The alternation between interior space and street also accelerates along with the frequency of the *acosado*'s changes of name, and with each he becomes more vulnerable: 'Las denominaciones se alteran según el lugar donde éste se encuentra' (Vásquez 1996: 31). Boldy has added that: 'The move from one building to another is one of degeneration, caricature, loss of meaning' (Boldy 1990: 620). The implication of this is

that the spaces he inhabits conspire to move the protagonist towards an inevitable fate, as echoed by the Greek tragedy. Stanton argues that the city itself is a protagonist (Stanton 1993: 184), whilst Mercedes Rein offered the view that if the village represents lost purity, the city implies 'una profusión de vida sucia, enferma, demoníaca' (Rein 1974: 139). In other words, the city represents degeneracy, and its spaces as portrayed in this novel exert a malignant power of their own.

A further dimension is added by Stanton, who notes the whirlpool effect of these progressively smaller spaces, in that characters are pulled down into a vortex (Stanton 1993: 21). Spaces in this novel, therefore, contain an inherent movement, velocity, and malignant power. González Echevarría notes that the *acosado* is thrown out of all the houses in which he attempts to hide (González Echevarría 1977: 195). Wyers Weber, on the other hand, found that parallelisms in the novel reinforce the way in which 'The use of co-existing embodiments of a single theme reinforces the novel's static quality' (Wyers Weber 1963: 444). There is a certain static quality in terms of repetition and inescapability, but the overriding feeling is of movement and whirlwind.

Serra has elaborated on the detailed descriptions that are reserved for the exteriors of buildings (Serra 1972: 171-4). Interior spaces, on the other hand, are described in sensory terms, particularly smell and colour. Spaces in this novel are linked through the mind and actions of both the *acosado* and the *taquillero*, as they reflect on previous experiences and make emotional connections between the spaces. Spaces are initially secure sites that become shifting, unsafe and ultimately dangerous. They are negatively-charged locations that lead to increasing closure, rather than openings into new possibilities. They work against man's desires and ambitions, as restricting factors reinforcing his existential dilemma. The concert hall, the Mirador, Estrella's apartment and the church all shift from positive to negative spaces for the protagonists, and the theatre play offers a tragic commentary on these other spaces. Spaces that could function as thresholds to new heights of experience ultimately fail.

Masculine identity in *El acoso* is undermined by the feminine through the use of spaces. The *taquillero*'s space in the concert hall is small, confined, and womb-like, and he is unnerved by the sensual gestures of the woman in the fox stole, whose presence dominates what had been a neutral space. The *acosado*'s hiding place in the Mirador is a female-gendered space, as is Estrella's apartment. The park, whilst in theory a genderless thoroughfare and space of relaxation for all, is perceived by the two protagonists as a female-gendered space by virtue of its plants,

scents and sensuality. Masculinity is shown to be on shifting, uncertain ground. That the *acosado* and the *taquillero* both pay for sex and do not have a healthy relationship with a woman other than Estrella is another indication of their weakness in terms of masculinity. These are not legitimate relationships of mutual attraction, but merely sex for money. The *taquillero* does, however, visit Estrella for reasons of male sexual drive whereas the *acosado* seeks shelter, security, comfort and nurture there.

Two of the spaces are strongly female-gendered, yet the old nanny's power wanes as she dies, and even Estrella loses power as the narrative unfolds, leaving her with an uncertain future. Whilst the novel might appear to be 'a static and almost allegorical depiction of Betrayal in its various modes and incarnations' (Wyers Weber 1963: 440), spaces in the novel actually perform a dynamic function. However, the usually positive associations we make with the dynamic are here subverted, because they are dynamic in a negative sense, bringing increasing danger and ultimately death.

Whilst Stanton and González Echevarría both comment on particular buildings, the torrential rain, and notions of birth, what they do not spell out sufficiently is the importance of water in connection with the *acosado*. The Mirador has a view of the sea, the old wooden swimming baths were once full of water, and the statue of Neptune is another link to the sea. At one point the *acosado* is referred to as *el arrojado* (270). Furthermore, all the spaces in the novel are linked by water: the concert-goers are cooled by the heavy rain during the interval, the very purpose of the Mirador is to provide a view of the sea, the church requires the newly converted to be baptised, and bodily fluids are exchanged at Estrella's apartment. Moreover, the once water-filled swimming baths are empty and rotting, the old nanny's milk and womb has dried up, the walls of La Casa de la Gestión have crumbled, and another parallel character, the *becario* from the *acosado*'s home village, is dead. This theme of obsolescence implies that the *acosado*, as a glory-seeking, misguided activist, is also soon to become obsolete. The novel can thus be read as an indictment of revolutionary activity for misguided reasons.

The frequent use of water imagery, the *acosado*'s obsession with his appearance in the Mirador and his concern over his penis brought about by his fear of castration under torture in the fortress, which recalled his original subconscious Oedipal fear, the phallic imagery of the church and the inversion of gender in Estrella's apartment, all lead to the *acosado*'s crisis of masculinity, a hitherto unacknowledged and important theme in this novel. I will now show that sexual identity

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and masculinity are similarly unstable in two of the three other Cuban novels analysed in this thesis.

CHAPTER 4: *LOS VALEDONTES* (1953) BY ALCIDES IZNAGA

Whereas *El acoso* is a fast-paced, urban-based novel whose spaces are hostile to the protagonist, *Los Valedontes* offers a complete contrast. This rural-based novel reflects the painfully slow pace and stagnation of life in the countryside. In *El acoso* the analysis of spaces reveals that sexual identity is unstable and undefined. The *acosado*'s very masculinity, the core of his whole persona, is variable and elusive, with the result that he lacks inner confidence and seeks stability from external factors such as political activism and religion. The protagonist of *Los Valedontes*, however, is in no such dilemma; Valedonte controls the land, the economy and the mill workers, as well as local politics. He shares power with the military over local affairs and the control of spaces. Whilst *El acoso* is focalised through the turmoil of the protagonist's mind, the narrative stance in *Los Valedontes* follows the traditions of realism with an omniscient narrator.

The author, Alcides Iznaga (1914-1999), studied at the University of Havana. He was a teacher during the 1940s and 50s in provincial Cuba, based in his hometown of Cienfuegos and also Matanzas. He published poetry and short stories, and worked for several literary magazines: *Bohemia, Orígenes, Juventud Rebelde* and *Lunes de Revolución.* A member of the literary current Orígenes, he published the novel *Los Valedontes* in 1953 in Havana; the author himself paid for the first edition of 500 copies, there being few publishing houses in Cuba in the 1950s. The novel narrowly missed winning the Concurso de Novela of 1952, accorded by the Ministerio de Educación; it was beaten by the next novel to be analysed in this thesis, *Romelia Vargas* by Surama Ferrer (see Chapter Five).

Los Valedontes was written in 1947 and set during Ramón Grau San Martín's second period in office (1944-48) (see Chapter One). In contrast to other Cuban novels of the 1950s, mainly characterised by their urban settings and gangster themes, *Los Valedontes* is set in a rural environment. Narrated in the third person, the novel tracks the train journey of an initially nameless, temporary teacher to new surroundings, from the city of Cienfuegos to the rural town of Combatora, and thence on horseback to the smaller town of Surqueño. The teacher arrives at the Magdalita *batey*, or sugar mill community, where he is introduced to his new school and its pupils. By the time the teacher arrives at the school roughly one third of the way through the novel, he has seen the extremely poor conditions at the *batey*, become aware of local views on the value of education and world politics, met the military chief Fajardo and the *batey* owner Valedonte, and observed their mutual struggle for power. From this point onwards, the novel's

key events, such as preparations for the local election, the fiesta, and the trip made by cattle farmer Rojas to Havana, are juxtaposed with descriptions of the local flora and fauna, the increasingly hostile weather, the appalling conditions of work at the *batey*, and discussions amongst the workers about Cuban and international politics and economics.

Highly episodic, indeed fragmented in structure and narrative flow, the novel is divided into 56 short sections, separated only by an extra blank line in the text. Each short part, often only a couple of lines and depicting aspects of the countryside, functions like the stitches in a tapestry in the creation of the whole picture. Furthermore, the many short sections increase the possibility for contrast and emphasis, a strategy which is amply exploited in the narrative. Physical space functions cumulatively, through an accumulation of smaller spaces, a pattern which follows the conventions of traditional social realism and the *costumbrista* genre, a particular type of realist literature prevalent in the 1930s, which, responding to political instability and corruption, idealised rural customs. Of the novels in this study, it is *Los Valedontes* which most closely follows the conventions of the realist genre. Social events are described in detail, and character description is reinforced by analogy with the environment. The vegetation in particular is described, demonstrating the intrinsic fecundity of this environment.

> Un bosquecillo, … con sobrevivientes eucaliptos, mamoncillos, anones,
> chirimoyas, mangos, caimitos, nísperos, canisteles, ciruelas, marañones, una
> salvadera gigante y un delicioso jagüey de horizontales ramas. (52)[25]

However, the inclusion of the cinema, visited by one of the characters on his trip to the city, provides a glimpse into the modern world of the city beyond the confines of this rural environment, and contrasts with the spaces in the country. One of the aspects of Stanton's spatial analysis of *El acoso* is the focus on the urban versus the rural spatial dimension, and the effect of the two environments on the character of the protagonists. This focus is also useful for an analysis of *Los Valedontes*. The link made by Stanton between space and identity is also valuable here, but not so the aspect of flight from one space to another. Of even less relevance is the focus adopted by Vásquez on the exteriors versus the interiors of buildings, since the exteriors of buildings are described in only the scantest of terms in *Los Valedontes*. Other critics (Cardoso [1952], García Vega [1960], Casal [1975] and Domínguez [1987]) have examined this novel in terms either of its

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[25] All references to *Los Valedontes* are taken from the 1981 edition: Iznaga, A. (1981) *Los Valedontes*. Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas. 1st ed. 1953 Editorial Letras Cubanas.

narrative structure and linguistic style, or in terms of class, race and gender. By ignoring any investigation into the nature of physical spaces in the novel, these critics have overlooked the possibility that this rural novel may be a more accurate reflection of conditions in Cuba at large than the urban-based gangster novel with its mimicry of imported genres.

The narrative uses two types of linguistic register to colour the reading of the *batey* as a space; it varies between the erudite and at times poetic stance of the narrator and an uneducated register in the dialogue of the locals. The use of the local accent reinforces the authenticity of their portrayal: 'Dispué… bueno, ninguno de ustede [*sic*] nació ayer por la tarde, pa que por lo menos' (118). The more formal and literary language of the narrative voice provides a contrast with the simplicity and banality of the lives of the country dwellers. Grammatical structures are not those of everyday speech, but of an educated and lofty tone:

> Inquietábale la distancia y presunta incomunicación, pues jamás pensaba en
> la enfermedad fulminante, … obsesionábale adentrarse en aquel ámbito rural
> que parecíale de tal vastedad que no podría volverse de él (20).

Gender roles in this novel are traditional and dominated by the notion of machismo. For example, when the new teacher is invited to a local fiesta, the local army commander Fajardo tries to pair him off with his own girlfriend, much to the teacher's distaste. Whilst it is not surprising that landowner Valedonte had enjoyed the services of prostitutes when he lived in the city as a student, spaces in this novel will demonstrate that conditions in the rural environment are not as different from the city as might be expected. Women represented in most traditional realist novels demonstrate submissiveness and modesty. However, Domínguez notes the exception to the norm, in the form of 'The strong, problem-solving female (who) appears occasionally …, reflecting an undeniable social reality' (Domínguez 1987: 44). She explains how a woman might be 'pushed into the role of head of household', becoming 'a strong, active character who managed to earn a living for herself and her children' (Domínguez 1987: 44). Such a female character, she contends, is Juana la Isleña in *Los Valedontes*. Juana and her daughters cut sugar cane alongside the men. Another female character in Domínguez's typology is the 'mujer hombruna' (masculine woman), who, being perceived as deviant by society, 'is frequently criticised and ridiculed … thus the "mujer hombruna" in *Los Valedontes* was rejected in the small town' (Domínguez 1987: 44*).

The train

The use of the train as a classic realist device allows the reader to identify with the teacher as a newcomer to the environment. This device also serves as a link between different spaces in the novel, enabling the narrator to describe first impressions of a place and characters in a seemingly natural way, and it also means that the educated reader is likely to identify with the teacher's viewpoint towards his new surroundings. Furthermore the train, normally associated with the city, industry and modernity, reinforces the isolation of the countryside given the infrequent train service. Whilst in this rural location the train represents modernity, or as close as modernity gets here, it is nonetheless an aged, run-down specimen, hinting that nobody from the city is in a rush to access rural Cuba. Any expectation of a rapid sequence of places and experiences is quickly dispelled as the train pulls laboriously out of the station: 'Un pitazo deshizo la inquieta inmovilidad del tren' (9). Already there is a hint that only lack of progress, inertia and stagnation will be found in this environment.

On his journey the teacher sees the countryside through the frame of the carriage window, as if observing a moving image. The train, therefore, offers a view outwards towards the station building, platform, the station staff, and its waiting passengers, as well as inwards to the people inside the train. Furthermore, the train itself bears certain spatial characteristics. Foucault offered some insights into the train as:

> An extraordinary bundle of relations because it is something through which
> one goes, it is also something by means of which one can go from one point
> to another, and then it is also something that goes by. (Foucault 1986: 23-24)

This train travels though time as well as space, because as well as departing at one time and arriving at another, it travels back in time to an age already surpassed in the city. The railway line is spatially significant in its own right in that it links two completely different environments, the city and the village, inviting comparison between the two. The train also functions as a potential threshold. Bakhtin theorised the nature of the threshold thus: 'the chronotope of the *threshold*, … combined with the motif of encounter, but its most fundamental instance is as the chronotope of *crisis* and *break* in life' (Bakhtin 2002: 248) (see Chapter Two). The transfer from city to countryside provides the opportunity for thresholds to be crossed and for personal transformations to take place. The teacher does indeed cross the physical threshold from city, modernity and

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comfort, to the poverty, backwardness and discomfort of the countryside, but any expectation that the teacher might undergo personal transformation through his experience in this rural location is not confirmed. The *apeadero* is a literal threshold for the teacher; he has stepped off the train, but remains on the platform, at the frontier of two very different worlds, and once on the platform, he is regarded with suspicion by those at the station, reinforcing his isolation: 'Los transeúntes campesinos escudriñábanle su vestuario y figura, extraños allí' (10).

The neglect of the countryside is borne out by the station as a wider semantic space into which the train moves; the station acts as a threshold offering a window into the world beyond it, since all passengers must pass through the station to gain access to this world. The neglect at the station is a foretaste of conditions in the wider rural environment beyond: 'La estación, con papeles estrujados en el suelo, ... era el desamparo y carencia, de poblado pobre' (9). The train, then, and by extension the station, is a spatial device which functions like a camera lens, enabling a particular environment to be viewed, and providing a foretaste of the final space to be analysed in this novel, the cinema.

Apart from the train, which is a unique type of space, three particular physical spaces are important in this novel: the *batey*, or sugar-mill, the restaurant and the cinema. All but the cinema are firmly positioned in a rural context; they are controlled by the twofold powers of the local *colono* Valedonte and the military. The more modern space of the cinema is situated away from the rural setting in the city, but it is linked to the rural economy by cattle farmer Rojas and his trip to the city hospital. He extends the journey made by the teacher by leaving the rural environment and visiting Havana, taking the narrative outside the confines of the *batey* and thereby offering a contrast to the rural milieu. He subsequently returns to the rural setting, completing the circle that began when the teacher arrived by train from the city. Interestingly, the reader is given access to the country through a person from the city, and to the city through the eyes of a farmer. However, whilst the teacher's viewpoint offers only a limited focus, cast more in terms of observations, that of the farmer in the city provides a fuller perspective, complete with his personal and emotional reactions to what he sees.

The *batey*

If the train functions as a dynamic spatial device which enables the teacher, and hence the reader, to gain an introduction to the rural environment, setting up expectations of thresholds and the

possibility of new experiences, then the *batey*, defined as 'ancillary installations that formed agro-industrial complexes in the middle of the countryside' (Segre *et al* 1997: 91), at Magdalita functions as synecdoche, representing many other such sugar-processing plants in rural Cuba. In contrast to the train, the *batey* is a far from dynamic space. It stands for tradition, the colonial legacy of power relations, dependence on sugar, and the stability of the status quo. The stasis of the *batey* is reinforced by the first description of it, which comes as a surprise to the reader. Instead of the anticipated picture of poverty, dust and misery, the *batey* is closely linked to the natural environment around it, and portrayed in a more poetic light than might be expected:

> En Magdalita descollaba un Molino rojo almagre, momentáneamente
> estático, como la espesa vegetación que arqueaba inmediata al *batey*.
> Montañosa muralla de cúmulos blanqueaba al Este. El mediodía,
> transparente, pesado, quieto, dormido. (33)

Time stands still and weighs heavily here. Time is decelerated to create a stronger focus on space, in the manner identified by Frank, who called this the spatialisation of form in the novel. He explained how 'for the duration of the scene, at least, the time-flow of the narration is halted; attention is fixed on the interplay of relationships within the immobilised time-area' (Frank 1968: 15) (see Chapter Two).

The *batey* consists of a collection of buildings which form the *batey* community, retaining their basic layout long after the abolition of slavery[26]. This *batey* contains the house of the owner Valedonte, the mill itself, a forge, a restaurant, a school, and various former slave quarters for some of the mill workers. The square in the centre of the *batey* contains two huge *ceiba* trees, which stand like two giant guards: 'En medio de la plaza de tierra del batey, un pozo de enladrillado brocal y dos ceibos como atalayos colosales' (52). Through this image, it is as if the community were being observed by some great dominant power. This notion of surveillance is appropriate, given the control exerted by the military, and by the landowner Valedonte. Furthermore, the two guard-like trees stand either side of the main water supply to the *batey* community, which provides an essential lifeline, as if exerting a sort of metaphorical control.

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[26] *Bateys* were as a rule set amidst a group of buildings 'consisting of the *casa de vivienda*, the house of the owner (or his administrator), some small houses for the salaried workers, a kitchen, and a nursery and a hospital for the slaves; there would also be a carpenter's shop, a blacksmith's forge, a cooper's shed, stables, perhaps a distillery to make *aguadiente* […] and lodgings for the slaves, usually […] a group of little primitive houses' (Thomas 1998: 29).

However, water is not the only service being controlled; Eustaquio Ponto, one of Valedonte's employees, is responsible for the one telephone line linking Magdalita with Surqueño, the nearest town. Ponto makes sure that all messages are conveyed to Valedonte, who is kept constantly informed about what is going on there.

The *batey* is a space in which people are subordinated to an antiquated colonial power structure, in the form of the military and landowning oligarchy. It was indeed the military that controlled education in rural Cuba, overseeing the *escuelas cívico-militares*. This was a policy instigated by Batista during the 1930s[27] (see Chapter One). There clearly is no particular policy for rural schools as distinct from those in the city, indicating that the education of those in the countryside is not a high priority, and that rural areas are more controlled and repressive. The transfer of control over the school leaves Valedonte outraged at not being consulted in advance over the renaming of the school *escuela cívico-rural*. This situation highlights the inherent power struggle between the military and the rural chiefs. Theirs is a reciprocal marriage of convenience and condescension, but one which is susceptible to periodic conflict. Valedonte warns a young corporal: 'Si te inmiscuyes en lo mío - advirtió una vez Valedonte a un cabo que ejercitaba la autoridad -, te quito el unifome' (63).

Valedonte is proud to have created straight and geometrical sugar cane fields unaided by modern machinery, and using, one assumes, only local manpower: 'Yo mismo he dirigido sus trazados, sin ayuda de agrimensores' (53). This echoes the geometrical formation and rigidity of the town of Surqueño and its park. The focus on straightness, rigidity and precision is a reflection of the discipline and order imposed by the landowner himself, allowing for no flexibility or individuality. The plantation is an ordered, static space, which attempts to fix and confine natural space, and the workers, many of them seasonal, are inextricably tied into the system of land ownership by one individual who is able to exploit local resources to his advantage, free of scrutiny by local or national government. The focus on space here provides an implicit criticism of capitalism. Lefèbvre explored the relationship between politics and space in the context of modern capitalism, highlighting the change from the view of the city as pitched against the country to one of a dominating centre and dominated periphery, both of which are a result of political forces (see Chapter Two). He viewed space as part of the forces of production, but in a broader sense than economic forces alone. Space becomes harnessed like any other force of production by groups in power (Lefèbvre 1991: 132-4). In this case it is Valedonte as sugar-mill

[27] Lasting until 1946, soldiers were often charged with actual teaching in schools.

owner who has harnessed the rural space. Furthermore, in a system of patriarchy the space is inevitably male-gendered.

The focus on deep underground forces affecting the lives of men above ground is another spatial aspect in this novel. With the onset of the drought the whole community is in danger of extermination as flora and fauna perish: 'Se siente la inminencia de la petrificación de la tierra y muerte de las plantas y los animales' (83). Humans are also affected in this way; Dositeo, the restaurant owner, smiles as if turned to stone: 'En el semblante, aquella especie de sonrisa petrificada' (88). Aligned thus with the animal kingdom, it is as if man has become another animal in need of food and water. Moreover, it is as if the very life-blood of the earth, its water, were being dried up. Personified, the earth screams for water: 'De las heridas de la tierra brota el grito mudamente estentórico: ¡¡agua, agua!!' (85). Devoid of water, earth, plants, animals and humans are made static, dry and dead. Neglected by government and with no other source of assistance, it is possible to conceive that people in this community, fed on ritual and superstition, would call upon supernatural forces.

The subterranean image is continued at the *batey*; Tomás Tobío, the *segundo de mayordomía* at Magdalita, is also portrayed with reference to these forces: 'Magdalita lo había compulsado a la altura de una personalidad subterránea' (79). The spatial oxymoron of height and depth conveys a touch of irony here. Tobío represents for the teacher exactly the hidden potential latent in this community: 'una personalidad ..., que el maestro hubiera gustado atraer a la superficie; era una pérdida más; probablemente ignorada por él mismo' (79-80). The *batey*, therefore, is a space which denies its inhabitants their potential, so much so that they themselves remain unaware of it. Furthermore, these forces of nature which operate against man hark back to the naturalism of nineteenth-century European literature. David Baguley argues that features of this genre include 'threatening metaphors of underground forces that can erupt, plague-like, invading the well-being of bourgeois society' (Baguley 1992: 7).

Contrast with the surrounding countryside affects the reading of the *batey* space. The teacher wakes up after his first night to 'la gloria del campo' (47). The *batey* is situated within an intrinsically beautiful environment, which is in danger of being destroyed by a combination of the ravages of the climate and over-exploitation by man. The natural world in which the *batey* is situated is portrayed in highly colourful, vivid and sensual terms:

> En las inmediaciones del *batey* se yerguen yagrumas, barías, bugambilias y
> las grises techumbres de los bohíos sitiados por las cañas. Olor de tierra y
> vegetación impregnan el ámbito. La blancura de los cúmulos, el azul neto del
> cielo, la luz del sol, los colores de las reses que pastan. (83)

This environment is replete with the smell of earth and plants, exuding a bounty which does not seem to be available to the inhabitants. Despite its intrinsic natural beauty, this rural environment provides a hostile location for man and animals. Furthermore, the use of the present tense adds to the impression of permanency intrinsic to this environment. Again, this romanticised vision of the countryside is not substantiated by the actual conditions there. In the first part of the novel the countryside is depicted like a painting, as if to exalt the beauty and poetry of the place: 'En el tapiz de los pastizales fulgen al sol hilos áureos, fulge la pelambre baya, ébano, carmelita y blanca del reserío y resuenan quejumbrosos mugidos' (52). The writer is mimicking the exaltation of the *campo* by Cuban Romantic poets such as Heredia, only to reveal the hidden irony of such a poetic vision in the face of the desperate reality of life in this environment. Nature is cast as the good, industry, in this case the sugar mill, as the bad. The preconceived vision of the countryside as rural idyll is exalted, a vision held by people in the city perhaps, and perpetrated by poets. This novel shatters that vision, and provides a rude awakening to those who dwell under such misconceptions. Once the drought has set in, the *campo* loses its beauty and becomes a desolate and potentially dangerous place. The countryside around the *batey* becomes a place of death, with crippling weather conditions on a Biblical scale, and the earth itself turning to stone:

> Cierta porción de lamedal de los pastizales aledaña al arroyo, último reducto
> húmedo, endurécese pétreamente. El ganado empobrece de carnes. Y no es
> factible trasladarle porque la sequía enlobreguece el país, y tampoco puede
> proveérsele adecuadamente de caña o cogollo. Amarillo está el vasto campo
> llano; seco el viento que levanta polvaredas. (84)

The *batey* space is given further meaning by contrast with the city; the poor conditions of the mill-workers are highlighted by the contrast with the description of Valedonte and his friend Gabino's earlier days as students in Havana. The city is here portrayed as a site of plenty, hedonism and sexual pleasure: 'En tanto abonaba en la ciudad su parcela sensual, placer, fiestas, en uno de cuyos salones de tardos danzones' (108). In contrast, the conversations between Gabino and the *batey* workers show the chronic lack of basic facilities available to the community.

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Talking to Gregorio and others about the lack of medicines available to the rural poor and their insufficient diet, Gabino points out that: 'No se come carne, y los potreros están aborrotao de reses; ni pescao, y la costa, repleta de peje; ni pan, ni frutas ni ensaladas ni aves. La leche, por temporada, y escasamente' (112)[28].

Some of the mostly illiterate workers, who sign their names by means of their fingerprints, are aware of better conditions in North America: 'De la tangana de Chicago le salieron las ocho horas al obrero - dijo Gabino' (114). Conditions of work at the *batey* are appalling, with the working day as long as seventeen hours during harvest time, and unlike the factories in the city which have undergone some improvement, this work force has no union, or channel for complaint. These discussions reveal that there is no electricity, dentist or vet, communications are inadequate, and washing facilities for the mill workers are minimal. Whilst there is no official channel for conflict, the *batey* is a space in which dissent against the government and opposition to the conditions of the mill workers *can* be voiced. One discussion continues over several pages, providing a searing indictment of the government of the day, that of the *Auténticos* under Grau San Martín (1944-48) (see Chapter One).

The government is sustained by an 'old boy network' and a system of vote-rigging. Clemente makes a joke about the mill workers' lack of power in the face of a corrupt government which has: 'una hoja de servicios infame' (117). He jokes that the concept of 'poder adquisitivo' cannot be applied in Cuba because: 'poder adquisitivo es también otro choteo: "poder"; ¡pero no podemos nada!' (116). Protest is futile: 'Si usté protesta - … - es anarquista, nazi-fascista, comunista, ¡cualquier cosa, menos un ciudadano que quiere una nación decente!' (118). One group of locals analyses various Cuban presidents during the first half of the twentieth century, concluding that they were all '¡una calamidá!' (117). Some, they point out, would not have become president without the backing of the United States, while others may be good doctors or generals, but this does not mean they are fit to govern: 'Doctores o generales; bueno, ¿y qué? ... esos que le han ido arriba a la Presidencia, ¡sin conocer los asuntos de la República; na más que por mandar!' (118)[29].

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[28] Sugar plantations were customarily divided into two sections: the cane area (*cañaveral*), and the *potrero*, the larger reserve area kept for vegetables and pasturage for oxen (Thomas 1998: 29).
[29] This is undoubtedly a reference to Carlos Loveira's novel of 1920, *Generales y doctores*, which predated several Cuban Presidents who had either a legal or military background. The *doctores* of the novel's title actually refers to lawyers rather than medical doctors.

The sugar-mill workers, fuelled by hunger, harbour a silent, inner resentment. This is emphasised by the layout of the actual text, using the technique of isolating a portion of text by creating double spaces either side. The following comment is isolated in this way:

> A la anochecida, los macheteros, hambrientos, retornaban taciturnos al bohío,
>
> con la protesta sorda y callada quemando adentro, aunque la tiñosa lúgubre
>
> del hambre aletease sobre el cielo de Magdalita. (131)

This technique points to the anticipation of future protest and change. The community feels neglected and abandoned, with the result that this resentment periodically wells up, breaking through the stoic tolerance of the inhabitants to manifest itself in the political propaganda of the nearest town, Surqueño. The following comment is also textually isolated:

> ¡Nuestro futuro alcalde habrá de marchar al mejoramiento de la masa
>
> campesina; ese elemento valioso y olvidado. Es realmente punible el
>
> abandono del guajiro, la desatención del campo, fuente de riquezas! (76)

The *batey*, therefore, can be read in terms of a space in which an opposing discourse to Valedonte and rural hegemony can be voiced. It offers an indictment of the government's abuse of power, its corruption, its disastrous succession of presidents, the power of land and *batey* owners, and the virtual famine conditions of the rural poor[30]. These country-dwellers perceive politics as a bigger industry than sugar cane: 'Y la industria importante de la República, más, que la del azúcar, la colosal industria de la política' (138). Sugar is produced even if not needed, in order to sustain existing channels of power. Massey states that 'the spatial is integral to the production of history, and thus to the possibility of politics' (Massey 1994: 269). In other words, if the *batey* workers were to revolt, they might, allied to other groups, alter the course of history. At the moment, however, the disgruntled workers are powerless to bring about change to the existing order. Whilst the climate clearly seriously affects life in the countryside, it is government neglect which has most affected people here.

The *batey* is hence a symbolic space with several functions in this narrative: it demonstrates the contrast between the idealised image of life in the country portrayed in literature, and the harsh

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[30] Whilst Cuba's recent presidents are not actually named, they are described in sufficient detail to make it obvious who they are on page 118 of the novel: Machado, Batista, Céspedes and Grau.

reality of life there, which is anything but poetic. Belief in the code of 'agrarianism', by which 'the essence of the "real" nation was to be found in its countryside, its rural dwellers, or in certain undefined or general rural "values"' (Kapcia 2000: 13) is hereby dispelled. The *batey* reveals the gap in lifestyle and wealth between those running the country community and those who have to work in it, and the unfair distribution of resources. The contrast is acute between the bounty of nature outside and the scarcity of resources within, the domination by nature outside and attempts to control it by man. The *batey* appears to be out of place and less permanent, in disharmony with the landscape, yet there is an implication that the *batey* featured in the novel represents many others throughout Cuba. It is not just this Valedonte who is feared and revered; he has many other family members in equally powerful positions elsewhere in the country, who spread this climate of repression and exploitation. As Don Pancho explains: 'no es solamente el Valedonte de aquí. ¡Regó el diablo un sebateyero en la Isla, y completico se ha dao! A dondequiera topa usté con un bicho de esos…..son ¡Los Valedontes!' (135).

The restaurant

Ramona's restaurant is one of two embedded spaces within the *batey*, the other being the very neglected school building which only operates on a seasonal basis because its pupils work in the cane fields for part of the year. Facilities are very poor and the building constitutes a health hazard for the children. Whilst the school itself does not offer revelations beyond the obvious depiction of a neglected rural education system, it does help to enhance the reading of the restaurant. Embedded spaces are interesting because they may affect the reading of the larger space in which they are situated, offering a contrast, or reinforcing existing meanings. Whilst the restaurant might on the surface appear to be a place where locals go to eat and take respite from the daily grind of working at the *batey*, it actually conceals a more sinister spatial function, one which illustrates how even the very morality and integrity of the community is tied into the plantation economy. The teacher is taken to Ramona's restaurant after viewing the school building from outside and before gaining access to its interior. Run by Ramona and her husband Dositeo, the restaurant is as clean and well maintained as the school is dirty and neglected, offering a strong contrast. Here at least the locals have a pleasant social gathering space. The restaurant is a well-constructed establishment, standing out from all the rest in the neighbourhood: 'Casa diferenciada del bohío campesino: pisos de cemento, paredes de tablas, dormitorios humanos, limpieza' (45). Described, like the buildings in Combatora, in the format of a list, the features of the restaurant are swiftly summarised. This is a departure from the classic

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realist tradition of describing spaces in detail, as if to denote that it is what actually happens in this space which is important, and not what these places look like.

Ramona is an affable hostess, serving food of a better standard than elsewhere. In one café visited by the teacher and Benito en route to Magdalita, there was not even any coffee. Here, the meal consists of: 'sopa, albóndigas, arroz, "domésticos", sin sazones dañinas, y boniatillo' (46). Evidently then, within the *batey* community there is at least one place where standards are kept high and food is relatively abundant. Furthermore, the restaurant is also a home for Ramona, Dositeo and their four children, offering an image of warmth and nurture, which can then be extended to their visitors. Ramona is cast in impersonal, animal-like terms: 'La adiposidad insinuaba la inminencia de sus estragos. … Los dientes, menudos, con una línea áurea. El recortado cabello, … recordaba el plumaje de la gallina riza' (48).

This changing view of Ramona mirrors the very different picture of the restaurant viewed from within, as opposed to the impression given from outside. Indeed, when the restaurant features again some forty pages later in the novel, things have changed dramatically; Ramona's sudden weight gain has altered the balance of her relationship with her husband, and the household does not seem to be running as smoothly as before: 'Con la súbita obesidad de Ramona se había dislocado el péndulo hogareño y no marchaban convenientemente los asuntos' (88). Quite how she suddenly puts on weight in the middle of virtual famine conditions is at first a mystery - she may have more access to food because of the restaurant and the black market. An explanation of the change in their relationship emerges: her change in body size has affected the couple's relationship with Valedonte, who was accustomed to taking a siesta in the couple's bed: 'pues Valedonte no dispensaba ya siquiera el honor de sestear en el lecho de los cónyunges, como antes aconteciera' (88). Given that the family's relationship has been linked to Valedonte in this way all along, then it is not difficult to understand why the restaurant is more prosperous than other local businesses.

Ramona had been a beauty and was used to complying with Valedonte's *droit du seigneur*, but he has recently ceased to visit. She puts on make-up to try to improve her appearance, only managing to look ridiculous with over-large earrings. However, encouraged by her reflection in the mirror, her confidence grows: 'El nato optimismo femenino encargóse de que las ojeadas finales de refilón al espejo, infundiesen ciertas seguridades' (90). The tone here is ironic, if not mysogenistic, and it is questionable whether the narrator is right to ascribe an innate optimism to

women over their appearance. Whilst Valedonte normally exudes power and authority, he feels his virility on the wane: 'Sentía él que la tensión de la sangre se le desmoronaba' (91). Ramona, meanwhile, feels obliged to beg Valedonte to let them stay in this rented accommodation, although her husband had recently failed to vote for Valedonte in local elections. Valedonte begins to succumb to her charms but regains his self control: '¡Qué diablos -pensó- , no se puede ser flojo; duro hay que ser ante estas pantomimas, verdaderas trampas de las mujeres!' (92). This whole scene in which Valedonte and Ramona vie for sexual dominance is protracted over two pages, turning the restaurant into a space in which power is contested between the two, with neither gaining the upper hand: 'En aquellos instantes, tan interminables, era autónomo el sexo' (91). Here, however, sex itself is an actant, with both parties vying for possession of sexual control. The restaurant is plainly a site of gender power contestation, along the lines proposed by Massey. She stresses the importance of the connection of space and place with gender, and the construction of gender relations (Massey 1994: 257). The threat imposed by Valedonte in turn threatens the balance of life for this family. In fact, he holds the key to their very survival.

Ramona's plight remains unresolved at this point in the narrative, but the return to the space of the restaurant at the very end of the novel provides a deeper insight into the ways in which rural society functions. Ramona's daughter Gudelia, convinced that she is ill, has refused to attend school. After a spell away she returns transformed into a beauty. It soon becomes clear that Ramona's predicament over Valedonte and what he sees as his sexual rights is to be resolved by the exploitation of her daughter. Not yet fifteen, Gudelia has matured physically but remains extremely shy. It seems that Valedonte wants once again to exercise his *droit du seigneur* but this time over Gudelia instead of her mother, in an effort to stave off his own rapidly approaching old age: '"Abominable vejez, tengo que olvidarme de ti"' (160). Both parents collude with handing over their daughter to Valedonte; whilst Ramona is relieved that she no longer has to prostitute herself to Valedonte, Dositeo's headache betrays his discomfort with the situation.

Gudelia offers no resistance, remaining passive but reddening with embarrassment. As the three adults engage in superficial conversation, avoiding any actual discussion of Valedonte's new rights over Gudelia, it is clear that the couple's hopes for a better future and the avoidance of eviction lie with their daughter. The building rented by Ramona and Dositeo for their accommodation and restaurant business was, and continues to be, nothing less than a private brothel. A space which might have offered nurture to the family's children and customers is actually a site of domestic rupture and abuse, a space which Valedonte has made his second

home, whilst at the same time maintaining his actual home as a showcase for his position as *colono* and sugar producer, and as a fitting place within which, ironically, to raise his own daughter. The restaurant has become a place in which gender power is contested, with Valedonte as eventual victor. This once female-dominated space is now under male rule, with two generations of females made to comply. Ramona was an adult when she made the decision to comply with Valedonte, but Gudelia, although at fifteen considered a consenting adult, has no say in the matter. Furthermore, any Romantic vision of the countryside as a place of purity and moral rejuvenation is negated by the restaurant as a symbolic space in this novel.

The restaurant thus performs two functions, operating at the crossroads between the public face of the hostelry, and the private space of the family's home within. It denotes the couple's better lifestyle in comparison to other establishments, and is a space in which their changing relationship with Valedonte is disclosed. The placing of the restaurant for the final time at the very end of the novel drives home the extent of the exploitation of the rural community in furthering the needs of those few who are in power. Furthermore, the restaurant can also be read as a metaphor for colonisation, as Valedonte exploits the labour, bodies and souls of his employees. Beneath the apparent prosperity of the restaurant lies corruption and exploitation, where the occupants are robbed of their moral dignity and integrity, in much the same way as the colonised are deprived of theirs. The *batey*, therefore, contains two embedded sites which complement each other; the school and the restaurant both fail to provide a nurturing space in which children can grow and flourish. Instead, children are used and abused in both the school and the restaurant.

The cinema

Whilst the train, the *batey* and the restaurant are all part of the rural environment, the final space of importance in this novel, the cinema, is located in the capital city. The transition from rural to urban environment is achieved when cattle farmer Rojas continues the journey which was started by the teacher, who travelled from the city into the rural location; Rojas now takes the focus outwards again to the city and specifically to the physical space of the cinema. When Rojas subsequently returns to the rural location of Magdalita, the chronotope of the journey is reversed. The sudden change of location to the city, defined by its tall, closely situated buildings, stands in contrast to the previous section located at Magdalita in which the *santería* leader Simplicio, in his role as local doctor, has been examining Rojas. The immense leap from rural *santería* to urban

sophistication is indicated by the change in focalisation from simple, direct, first person dialogue to a denser narrative form conveyed in the third person. The previously sick Rojas already feels disorientated before he enters the cinema. Accustomed to the flatness of the horizontal rural landscape, Rojas feels overwhelmed by the hostile, vertically defined space of the city: 'sentía el agobio de un mundo vertiginoso y extraordinario, nada afín a él, ni simpático' (99). He is nauseated by the claustrophobia of the city, together with his impressions of its pursuits and vices, its American-influenced cinema, shopping, consumerism and prostitution.

Once in the cinema, Rojas watches a western on screen. His response to the portrayal of the cowboy on the screen is ironic. The film elevates the role of cowboy to a position of great importance, setting the characters in a magnificent and grandiose landscape: 'el cine que la [la profesión] engrandecía con scenarios de colinas, ríos, desfiladeros, llanuras' (101). Yet this is the Hollywood version of the reality of life for the American cowboy, which was a tougher existence than that shown on screen. The Texan cowboys in this film are well-dressed, heroic figures: 'ceñidos pantalones, botines, coloreadas camisas' (101). Such a portrayal contrasts greatly with the reality of life for the cattle breeder at Magdalita, where the drought has dried up the rivers and cattle and people are anything but healthy. Ironically too, Rojas is enraptured by the image of the countryside he sees on the screen, an idealised and beautified version of the reality faced by American cowboys, and very different to the landscape familiar to Rojas, especially later in the novel when drought and hurricane set in.

Christian Metz has encapsulated the cinema-goer's response to the screen thus: 'Films … spontaneously appeal to his sense of belief – never, of course, entirely' (Metz 1974: 4). Yet Rojas does entirely believe in the portrayal of the cowboy on screen as real. Furthermore, he recognises himself in this glamourised portrayal. It is through the space of the cinema, therefore, that an implied criticism of American cultural influence on Cuba is being made. Metz has argued that it is from a deep commonality amongst all cultures that the concept of genre is derived: 'As for connotation, which plays a major role in all aesthetic languages, its significate is the literary or cinematic "style," "genre" (the epic, the western, etc.)' (Metz 1974: 97). Rojas recognises the formula of the western and readily relates it to his own circumstances.

Foucault noted that the cinema is a three-dimensional space, 'at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space' (Foucault 1986: 25). For Foucault, such sites are heterotopic because they reenact and invite comment on the reality

they depict. As spaces, therefore, cinemas offer many interesting spatial perspectives. They are unnatural, contrived spaces and they are also public spaces in which individuals are isolated from their fellow spectators, yet they remain confined, rather like on a train. The darkness during the film emphasises their privacy further. Like Ramona's restaurant, therefore, the cinema functions on both a public and a private level. It is a space which denotes modernity, yet films set in former historical periods may be shown. Furthermore, the films may be set in a rural environment, depicting lives far removed from the contemporary urban setting in which the cinema is located. Cinema screens can function as mirrors reflecting or distorting society, representing true or fictionalised versions of other worlds and times, and are hence a powerful tool for the reflection and imparting of worldviews.

It is difficult to imagine Rojas working like these screen cowboys in the drought-stricken region of Magdalita, yet he appears to recognise himself represented on the screen, when in the film a cowboy tames a bull on a ranch. He feels transformed by what he has seen, valuing for the first time his own profession as cattle breeder: 'Cuando abandonó el cine sentíase transfigurado, hasta entonces no sabía que era, cual si se hubiese visto por fuera la profesión que descubrió mediante el cine' (101). Rojas' thoughts after seeing the film are conveyed using a series of exclamations, reflecting the type of dialogue conveyed in the film: '¡Sentirse uno igual a esos hombres de lazo y caballo formidable, ejecutores de galopadas escalofriantes, descensos peligrosos y derribos de toros! … sintió deseos de gritar: ¡Soy montero!' (102). This conforms to the notion of identity with the screen character, as encouraged by North American film directors.

Rojas adopts the very language used in this fictionalised version of another culture's view of the cowboy's life conveyed spatially through the cinema screen. Bakhtin emphasised the role of spaces which act as thresholds, or sites for potential change. The cinema screen acts here as the ultimate threshold space as it provides access to other worlds, or in this case to another version of Rojas' world. It is thus a site of potential transformation. It is a means for Cubans to look outwards and be educated about other places, or to be manipulated and deceived, but it brings with it the danger that Cuban culture and identity will be marginalised by another culture which will impose its own order and social mores onto the intrinsically Cuban. Therefore, as well as allowing Cubans to look outwards and experience a new culture, the threshold of the cinema enables a foreign culture to enter and alter the character of Cuban life and culture.

Rojas is indeed transformed by what he has seen on the cinema screen, experiencing an epiphanic moment; that night he forgets to take the pills given to him at the clinic, so taken is he with the image of the cowboy. Unable to sleep, he sees himself dressed as a North American cowboy, and goes shopping to buy an outfit the next day. The shop assistant immediately recognises that he is from the countryside, despite his efforts to appear more sophisticated: 'La gente, cuando no es del lugar, se conoce por la manera de vestir y caminar, y hasta de hablar. Usté es del campo…' (103). Rojas wonders whether he should haggle for a price reduction in the shop, and whether this is appropriate behaviour for a cowboy such as he: 'Rojas meditó si debía o no pedir rebaja: "Eso quita condición; es uso de mujeres, y un vaquero es lo más macho."' (103). Forgetting about the item his wife asked him to purchase, he is even tempted to buy a pair of spurs to complement his new outfit. He tells the indifferent ironmonger that he is '¡el Montero de Magdalita!' (104), betraying his newly found grandiosity and delusion. His is the only character transformation in the novel, but one which has taken place through a fictionalised version of reality in the space of the cinema.

Once back at the *batey* Rojas puts on his new cowboy outfit and makes himself look ridiculous by chasing a cow. It is ironic that he has been doing the job of 'cowboy' or cattle-breeder all along, without needing to don the garb of the Hollywood version of the cowboy. The space of the cinema, whilst far-removed geographically from the cattle farm, is continued semiotically as the audience's gaze now turns on Rojas as protagonist. Observed by a large number of children and local spectators eager for entertainment, as he attempts to tame the stubborn cow, he becomes embarrassed as the scene dissolves into farce: 'El pintoresco vaquero, con conciencia de su situación de inminente ridiculez, ordenó por fin a Mocho' (107). The idea that Cubans should emulate North American cowboys is portrayed in a ridiculous light in the narrative. The subtext here is that Cubans have their own identity and do not need to look elsewhere, yet they are blind to this and keen to aspire to North American role models.

Whilst the novel can be regarded as unadventurous in its portrayal of the other spaces in the novel, it is innovative in his use of the cinema as a space. The narrative style of *Los Valedontes* generally follows the conventions of traditional social realism and the *costumbrista* genre, with its focus on detail. However, the use of the cinema with its capacity for self-reflection is a more modern aspect of the novel. In addition, the tension already created between the squalour of the *batey* conditions, represented by social realism, and the beauty of the countryside, portrayed in more romantic terms, is continued as the fantasy world of the cinema is entered. Through Rojas'

trip to the city, the cinema invites a comparison between the urban and the rural, and highlights the problems and shortcomings of each. While acknowledging the harsh reality of survival in the countryside, it suggests that people in the rural environment lead a more authentically Cuban life, albeit miserable, while those in the city fall prey to false vanities in their emulation of American trends. Rojas, although a country-dweller, is also seduced into the unreal world portrayed by the cinema screen.

In conclusion, whilst generally a fairly unremarkable novel, a spatial reading reveals that *Los Valedontes* is a more interesting and skilful work than we might otherwise have thought. This seemingly typical, realist portrayal of conditions in the Cuban countryside in the mid 1940s is not just a reflection of rural poverty in the social realist genre, about a teacher travelling from the city to take up a temporary post in a rural location. This analysis of physical spaces reveals not only an underlying critique of the neglect of those who inhabit the countryside, but also that physical spaces are controlling, dehumanising, repressive, and even morally degenerate. They are used to expose the government's serious neglect of rural Cuba. The unpredictable climate should be the only real danger to the countryside; instead, it exacerbates existing deprivations. Although a cyclone has uprooted trees, it left the *batey* and school buildings intact, a possible sign that this community can survive the ravages of the climate, but that other forces, such as government neglect and even forces from underground, can create more damage. The novel urges Cubans to look to their own natural resources to create improvements for people in the countryside, rather than buying into the culture of a dominant foreign power. Furthermore, the analysis of spaces not only provides an insight into the urban/rural dimension highlighted by Stanton in her thesis on space in *El acoso*, as revealed through the train and the cinema, it also shows, through the spaces of the *batey* and the restaurant, that conventional gender roles remain constant and that identities are stable. It is this aspect of gender and sexual relations that is confirmed though the analysis of space in this novel.

CHAPTER 5: *ROMELIA VARGAS* (1952) BY SURAMA FERRER

Whilst *Los Valedontes* is almost wholly situated within a rural context, *Romelia Vargas* is essentially urban in nature. This novel is set some fifteen years before *Los Valedontes* in the early 1930s, immediately prior to the 1933 Revolution which resulted in the downfall of the dictator Machado (see Chapter One). The novel overlaps in time with *El acoso*, although that novel also refers to events in the 1940s and 1950s. Cairo has drawn attention to the two different temporal planes of the novel, a present time in or beyond 1940, the year in which the novel was written, from which past events are narrated, and a past time between 1925 and 1933 (Cairo 1993: 188).

Born in 1923 the author, Surama Ferrer, worked for the Ministry of Culture during the early 1950s, travelling in the United States and collaborating on various literary journals. She also published a collection of short stories[31], and left Cuba for Puerto Rico in 1961, where her subsequent activities remain a mystery. The novel won three national prizes in manuscript form in 1950, and was subsequently published in Havana in 1952, when it won the Concurso de Novela.

Despite sharing the setting of Havana with *El acoso*, the two novels are entirely different in genre terms. *Romelia Vargas* is a most unusual novel in that it defies classification, given that it lacks the representative quality of the social realist genre, with its notion of continuity and daily repetition, or the features of *costumbrismo*, *novela negra,* existential, or any other recognisable genre. Although its settings are often clandestine, taking place at night, it does not share with *El acoso* the hallmarks of the gangster novel. To today's readers, the novel has a feminist resonance, given the position of the protagonist as head of a revolutionary group, the direct call to the reader to applaud Romelia in her mission, and Romelia's refusal to succumb to the trauma of rape. As a female-authored novel, the inclusion of the rape scene as a pivotal event in the novel may have contributed to the novel's neglect. The scene may have offered too great a challenge to both readers and critics. Susana Montero (1989) has included *Romelia Vargas* in her analysis of Cuban women's writing during the thirty-year period before the Revolution. Montero, Casal and Cairo, notably all women critics, are the only Cuban critics to have even looked at this female-authored novel, and apart from Domínguez, Judith Lax (1961) appears to be alone in examining the pre-revolutionary Cuban novel from outside Cuba so soon after the revolution.

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[31] Ferrer, S. (1953) *El girasol enfermo. Cuentos*. Havana: Impresora Mundial, S.A.

The use of space as an analytical tool in *Los Valedontes* shows that, in the case of that novel, identities remain stable, functioning along traditional lines. Spaces in *Romelia Vargas* also provide insights into issues of identity, but this time, identities are not only shown through space to be unstable; the very sexual identities of some characters are open to question. Stanton's 1993 thesis is an appropriate starting point for the analysis of spaces in *Romelia Vargas*, since her work focuses very much on the link between space and identity. In *El acoso,* as has been shown, the spaces inhabited by the fugitive demonstrate his search for his origins, and for the identity he never formed in the first place. Romelia, however, is convinced of her own identity. It has been forged in opposition to that of her father, as will be demonstrated in the space of the house. Her identity, however, is violently challenged by her fellow revolutionary Lucas, in the space of the park. Furthermore, the identities of both her sister and her brother Jesús appear, through the analysis of spaces, to be profoundly unstable at the start of the novel. However, as the narrative progresses both characters undergo a personal transformation and emerge with their identities intact, as the ensuing spatial analysis will show. Interestingly, the house provides a wider context concerning the notion of identity; Cuba itself is shown to be fighting to assert itself in the face of a repressive dictator, in the guise of Romelia's resistance to her Spanish father's disapproval of all things Cuban. The other spatial topics highlighted in Stanton's thesis, flight and the urban/rural dimension, are not useful for the analysis of *Romelia Vargas*, and nor is Vásquez's focus on the exteriors and interiors of buildings.

The narrative is given an added dimension by the fact that it is told by a young white upper-class female narrator, who is only six years old at the beginning of the novel, and remains nameless throughout. Her narrative voice is familiar and intimate towards the implied reader; she often addresses the reader directly, asking many rhetorical questions. However, she is not always present as a character, and it is not clear whether her voice is one and the same as the textual narrator. The protagonist, Romelia, daughter of a Spanish father and a Cuban mother, is a young, *mulata*, city office worker who recruits new members for the revolutionary cause by night in a local park[32]. It was not unusual for women from the lower classes to work outside the home, and nor was it uncommon for Cuban women to participate in revolutionary activity (see Chapter One). Romelia is the sole breadwinner for her invalid father, her pious sister Piedad, and her

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[32] Cairo has identified Romelia and her fellow revolutionary activists as belonging to the ABC cellular revolutionary group, founded in 1928: '[…] Romelia, la protagonista, que es la 'heroína' abecedaria A-27 [...]' (Cairo 1993: 188).

brother Jesús. Their mother had died some time before the start of the narrative and her mother's relatives subsequently disowned the father and children. Now motherless, and with a father who seems to despise them, the Vargas children feel like orphans within their own home: 'ellos no tuvieron más que orfandad' (39)[33]. Both Romelia's siblings and her father deplore her involvement with the revolutionary cause, fearing for their own safety. With time, the embittered father dies and Romelia's brother is finally persuaded to join the organisation.

The Vargas household is situated in what was once a prestigious location in a residential district on the outskirts of Havana, with hills and country views. The family appears to have been part of the once affluent bourgeoisie, though even in the past they struggled financially and went hungry beneath a veneer of respectability. The novel explores Romelia's relationships with the members of her family and fellow revolutionaries, and her quest to bring down Machado. With the death of Romelia's father, the Vargas household becomes a weapons store and a hideout for meetings and the recovery of wounded revolutionaries. Romelia's sister, Piedad, falls in love with Hostilio, an injured revolutionary with a middle-class background, who supplies the organisation with funds from his wealthy family. The house eventually comes under suspicion by the authorities, who kill Romelia's brother. Events develop into the general strike of 1933 and the overthrow of Machado. The final pages of the novel depict scenes of jubilation on the streets of Havana, as crowds celebrate the fall of the dictator, amid looting from the houses of well-known *machadistas,* and Romelia dies on the 12th of August 1933 amongst the crowds in Maceo Park.

Any reading of the character Romelia will inevitably be influenced by the author's introduction to the novel immediately before the narrative starts, which eulogises Romelia as 'la mujer de una Cuba futura', and states that 'En realidad no sé cuándo la mujer cubana dejará de ser un manojo de margaritas' (21). The reader is addressed directly and warned not to expect a portrayal of an ineffective, vain and middle class woman, but:

> Una mujer carente de atractivos externos, aunque poderosamente rica en
> valores subjetivos, invisibles e intocables para aquellos que ven sólo en la
> mujer un oasis de frivolidad y de efímeras dichas. (19)

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[33] All references to *Romelia Vargas* are taken from the 1952 edition.

The postscript at the end of the novel, dated 1940, reinforces the introduction by heralding Romelia as the ideal revolutionary woman, the woman of Cuba's future, living and ultimately dying for the Revolution, and sacrificing herself in martyrdom.

The novel's main themes include Cuba's colonial past versus its revolutionary future, whether and how to become a revolutionary, the city as sick and degenerate, and racial injustice. Susana Montero claims that the problems of individual characters merge into the collective, and that this is the novel's main theme: 'cualquier otro conflicto individual entre ellos, … se diluye, al transcurrir la acción, en el conflicto colectivo, eje central del argumento' (Montero 1989:18). Neither Montero nor other critics (Lax [1961], Casal [1975], Domínguez [1987] and Cairo [1993]) have considered space in this novel; they have been more concerned to examine character stereotypes and their responses to revolution. However, when spaces are considered in detail, an alternative reading emerges; it is the individual rather than the collective that is clearly the novel's main concern.

Physical space in the novel is split between the Vargas household, with its internal ideological differences and arguments, the external setting of the park, and the real events beyond it in the city. The novel constructs four important physical spaces: the market area of the city, the park, the hill, and the Vargas house, with the house occupying by far the greatest share of textual space. Whilst public spaces in the novel are shown to play host to the private, private spaces are at times invaded by the public domain. Furthermore, smaller embedded settings within larger settings serve particular spatial functions. It is appropriate to begin with the outer framework of the city, containing the market, and work inwards via the park and the hill to an examination of the house, and thence to the embedded spaces within.

The market

The streets around the market in this novel are dangerous places in which life hangs in the balance, in a state of acute poverty and imminent collapse: 'Algunas calles … todavía dormían, aplastadas por el hambre, por el miedo a la existencia precaria' (109). The personification of the market streets as crushed by hunger and fear provides a hostile environment for any humans who have to live here. Although in theory a public space, there is little impression of human agency. It is this very absence of human agency that drives home the powerlessness of people to change these conditions.

Beyond the immediate area of the market, the streets are riddled with sick and vice-driven people: 'Las calles suburbanas sin asfaltar, mansión de los pobres; de los indigentes lacerados de sífiles y tuberculosis; de las prostitutas impúberes, devoraron sus figuras angulosas' (111). That these streets should be described as the mansion of the poor is a bitter irony, given the reality of conditions here. Overcrowding and poor sanitation around the market hint at an environment severely neglected by the authorities. The prostitution of prepubescent children adds weight to the vision of degeneracy. The message also being conveyed here is that society is degenerate under the tyranny of Machado, both in the city and in the country.

In a far more vivid description than that provided of the market in *El acoso* (see Chapter Three), animal, vegetable, mineral and human elements are here fused: 'A esa hora ya la gigantesca podredumbre vegetal, animal y humana, del Mercado bullía en un ambiente de hortalizas y pescado, de vapores de gasolina y rastros de estiércol' (109). The words 'gigantesca' and 'bullía' convey a sense of abundance, yet it is clear that this abundance is one of decay and rot. City-dwellers in this area have no more access to the resources on their doorstep than the country-dwellers in *Los Valedontes*. Placed in the text immediately after the revolutionaries' meeting, the portrayal of the market area, with its juxtaposition of abject poverty, degeneracy and imminent collapse, yet with the obvious abundance in resources and human enterprise, suggests an economic mechanism which is clearly benefiting only a few. When Romelia and her brother emerge onto the public space of the streets near the market, they are deeply affected by the conditions: 'hostilizados por la pestilencia del Mercado' (109). The use of the word 'pestilencia' has a sinister connotation, implying the possibility of mass human contagion. Yet this is the 1930s, and not the Middle Ages.

The market symbolises the misery and anxiety eating away at the people: 'el Mercado de aquel día era una muestra más de miseria y de la angustia que roía el pueblo' (110). Even when produce is reduced in price at the end of the day people are still unable to afford it: 'la baratura de los alimentos era un sarcasmo contra el hambre y el nulo poder adquisitivo del pueblo' (110). The lack of 'poder adquisitivo' experienced by the inhabitants of the market area is shared with the *batey* workers in *Los Valedontes*. Neither group has the power to be part of an economy which demands a certain standard of living before food can be bought. As we have seen in *Los Valedontes*, the Cuban countryside offers a huge wealth of natural resources (plants, crops and animals), but these are denied to the poor whether they inhabit the country or the city. Connecting

the market to the countryside, the central highway is portrayed as a large black snake, with connotations of malice and poison:

> Venían cubiertos del polvo de toda la República; se habían arrastrado con sus
> llantas mugrientas por la gran serpiente negra de la Central, trayendo a
> cuestas los frutos del agro cubano. (110)

The flourishing black market operating here adds to the vision of degeneracy.

The focalisation of the scene changes from that of the textual narrator to the particular gaze of Romelia. She looks away from the space of the market to the outline of the Spanish-built fortresses beyond, and curses the current regime: 'No pudo evitar maldecir el túmulo de piedra' (110). It is clear that Romelia associates the current regime with Cuba's history of Spanish domination, and that she despises both. This change of spatial focus from the market in the foreground to the fortress beyond creates a link between the poverty and squalour of the market and the treatment by the authorities of those who seek to oppose the regime in a bid to improve conditions for the poor. The fortress, built during the colonial period to keep out invading forces, is now used to repress its own people, those who disagree with the regime. In the spaces of both the fortress and the market, there is no challenge to those in power, no active contestation of authority. The fortress is used by the Machado regime to efface the very identity of its prisoners, most of them opponents of the regime, by robbing them of their Cuban identity: 'En sus patios se abatió a balazos a los rebeldes y se les enterró luego en la greda caliza de las laderas, empeñándose sus asesinos en borrar la identidad de sus víctimas' (110). The entombment of those imprisoned within the fortress is echoed by the lack of escape for those who inhabit the market area, who are similarly condemned to death by a lack of good nutrition and unclean living conditions.

The wider space of the market area and surrounding streets invites a reading in cinematic terms. The figures of Romelia and her brother move along, small and isolated, dwarfed by the backdrop of the market and city in the distance, to the sound of a lone dog barking, and accompanied by the noise from the wheels of a gypsy wagon passing by. The long shot, often filmed from above, is a technique used in neo-realism. This film-like scene creates an air of loneliness and homelessness, and the image of the brother and sister walking alone, hand in hand, is a foretaste of their future as orphans after their father has died. The two Spanish fortresses with their tall towers can be seen

as representing, spatially, their dominating, repressive Spanish parentage. It is as if an imaginary camera were tracking backwards and higher, making Romelia and her brother appear small and insignificant within the wider, dominating panorama of the city, which affords them no shelter, and emphasises their vulnerability. The noxious sensory influence of the city does not stop at the market; even when Romelia and her brother are at some distance from the market, a reddish dust shrouds their heads: 'Otra nube de polvo rojizo, denso, amortajó sus cabezas, ya muy lejos del Mercado' (111). The use of the verb 'amortajar' is highly effective, implying that the market's influence is deadly.

The market, therefore, with the fortress beyond it, represents the Cuban economic condition at the beginning of the 1930s; the fruits of people's labour from all over Cuba are brought to the market, yet those who have toiled to grow and prepare these items are not able to consume them. Neither country nor city-dwellers have access to this produce, which is brought to market and simply rots. The market, then, is the antithesis of a site supplying the life-blood of the community. It is characterised by sickness, decay, vice and moral degeneracy. The location of the market against the backdrop of the fortress adds considerably to the effectiveness of the market as a space. The implication here is that an alternative social model is needed to replace the failing capitalist system.

The park

If the market is the space which reveals the rotten underbelly of Cuban society, then it is in the local park that a radical solution is being planned. Parks are spaces of a special nature; they are ambiguous, ill-defined zones, neither urban nor rural, and they sometimes permit behaviour which would not normally be socially acceptable. They are also zones of transition between more socially defined spaces. Furthermore, they are contrived, semi-domesticated spaces, yet they attempt to recreate an oasis of the natural world within the city. Parks seem to define their own rules, being less well policed than the city's streets and squares.

The park in this novel is such a space where social and political protest is voiced, a space in which the future of a new Cuba is imagined and planned. It is thus an enabling, progressive, and exciting space. Yet it also harbours the danger of the untamed and the unexpected. Established like all municipal parks as a public area, this park also functions as a private, secret space. Whilst most parks in Cuban cities at this time were quite small, often glorified squares, this park is

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larger, given the scale of the trees and shrubbery, and the revolutionaries are able to meet in secrecy. Unlike the park in *El acoso*, this park must be fictitious, since there was no park in Havana in the early 1930s that was sufficiently big enough to hide nefarious activity. The park in *Romelia Vargas* is more like the tropical environment described by Segre *et al*, situated on the banks of the Almendares river (see Chapter One).

The revolutionaries use the park because it gives them the opportunity to meet in clandestine circumstances outside of social and, more importantly, political, constraints. In the event of discovery in the park, they would be able to disperse quickly, under cover of darkness. Hawthorn makes a useful distinction between indoor and outdoor space: the domestic space represents 'society, the artificial, restraint', whilst the outdoor environment, especially in a 'wild or undomesticated setting' has connotations of 'pre-social impulses, the natural, the outpouring of feeling' (Hawthorn 2001: 109). Zukin has argued that a park can also be:

> A testing ground of subtle and not so subtle strategies of control; … a microcosm of the simultaneous development of cultural strategies and security forces as means of negotiating social diversity. (Zukin 1995: 261)

The park in this novel is shown to be a space where disruption to the established social and political order is being planned. Mitchell argues that space as depicted in literature should be understood as a 'pre-inscribed site of ideological conflict', and that these spaces act as a relay between our conceptions of order in the arts, and structures of social power, interest and value (Mitchell 1989: 95) (see Chapter Two). This park can therefore be seen as a space into which an ideological subtext is firmly inscribed, in the politics of revolution.

However, politics and ideology aside, Romelia's night-time visits to the park to meet her comrades provides the setting for the exploration of the relationship between the pursuit of the revolutionary goal and the demands of the sexual body. Like the park in *El acoso*, this park is associated with sexual temptation and danger, but unlike that one, this park has a far less clear-cut use of space. Her visit follows a section in the novel that is located in the Vargas house, where Romelia's siblings accuse her of being a machine with no feelings or sexuality. Romelia's responses to the atmosphere in the park will show that her brother and sister are wrong, and that she is highly receptive to sensual stimuli. This change is gradually brought about by an alteration in the physical environment around her as she approaches the park. She passes from the regular

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and relatively well-maintained pavements of the streets to a less well-manicured zone, into which nature has begun to encroach: 'Cuando la calle se hacía intransitable por la invasión de la yerba y las piedras, Romelia acogía el paso a las aceras maltrechas' (79). Tree roots have disturbed the man-made superstructure of the concrete pavements, as nature erupts from below, a portent of the release of Romelia's own emotions and sexuality, and symbolic of the latent revolution simmering beneath the fragile hold of society: 'El pavimiento se levantaba obligado a entrabrirse para dar respiro a las raíces de los álamos' (79). In common with *Los Valedontes*, forces from underground betray this novel's naturalistic tendency.

At first however, in response to this 'requerimiento imperioso del renacer tras la lluvia' (79), Romelia refuses to give way to anything other than her revolutionary ideal. Her instincts are likened to an untamed colt: 'Sus instintos eran potros sin desbravar; pero alejados largo tiempo ha [*sic*], en praderas de abstinencia y mortificación carnal' (79). The image of the colt has a double function here: it is impossible for Romelia to tame her own drives, and it is also impossible to prevent the groundswell of revolution, symbolised earlier by the tree roots bursting through through the pavement. The expression 'mortificación carnal' conjures up an image of both life and death, creating tensions in Romelia. She buries her emotions, but they could break loose at any time, like the seeds of revolution being sown within the embedded space of the park. The use of the term 'selva' indicates that human conscience and willpower are not completely in control, that the primitive may erupt at any time, and that the park is where Man's real nature is manifested.

The embedded space of the circular *quiosco* provides a contrast to the rigid linear geometry of the park and a hint that nature or natural instincts will prevail over man's attempts to control his fellow men: 'La enredadera de bugambilia que cubría el techo de vigas del recinto había descendido envolviendo por completo el quiosco de marmól' (80). Bougainvillea is an invasive creeper which is capable of covering a building, demonstrating how nature can take over a man-made structure. Furthermore, its lush, exotic, brightly coloured flowers epitomise sensuality. Romelia enters the circular space of the *quiosco* by parting the curtain of bougainvillea obscuring its entrance: 'Con las manos recorrió la cortina de ramas de la bugamvilia colgante' (80). Her entrance into the *quiosco* is couched in sexual imagery; the repetition of the word 'penetró' will resound later after her sexual encounter with Lucas. The small building is made of marble, a smooth sensuous material, but one which is also linked to death through its association with

statues and tombs. Furthermore, upon entering, she encounters the other members of the revolutionary cell, all of whom are male.

Continuing with the domestic theme, the floor of the *quiosco* is likened to a carpet made of leaves: 'Bajo sus pies la yerba formaba con las hojas muertas una alfombra desigual' (80). When Romelia shakes hands with new black recruit Lucas, she flinches at this physical contact: 'La mujer se sustrajo a lo íntimo del saludo, al roce de las palmas tibias, de planos desnudos' (81). Again, this rubbing action has sexual overtones in the light of what is to come. Once the meeting begins the language reverts to a more impersonal, prosaic form, away from the lyrical. The space of the *quiosco* is now the locus of discussion on repression, press censorship, race issues and revolutionary activities, such as the planting of bombs. Romelia enjoys the unquestioning allegiance of all twelve existing members of the group, but her role as leader, a role traditionally occupied by a man, will not be accepted by Lucas.

Romelia's senses have so far been awakened by the vegetation, humidity and atmosphere of the park, but she has managed to quell these feelings ahead of attending the meeting. After the meeting, however, her senses receive a rude awakening. The park is the setting for an extraordinary and shocking scene in the novel; the rape of Romelia by new recruit Lucas. He confronts her directly after the meeting, challenging her power to refuse his sexual advances. He is unable to view Romelia in a position of authority: 'Usted no es mi jefe, usted es una mujer y yo estoy hambriento de una mujer' (87). Romelia's reactions to the ensuing rape are puzzling and unsettling; she is not afraid and looks through the foliage to the sky beyond, feeling the immensity of nature, and offering little resistance: 'Defendiéndose débilmente, sin quejidos, se refugió de nuevo en la inmensidad de la abertura, más allá del techo enramado' (88). The tensions experienced earlier between the wild and the tame, and between flesh and mortification, are reiterated here in the opposition between hot and cold, life and death. Furthermore, although the revolutionaries are intent on creating political change, the response by Lucas to Romelia as his leader shows that gender and racial issues may not be part of their, or at least his, agenda.

After the rape, so fundamental is the change which has taken place in Romelia in the park that she is likened to Christ resurrected: 'Resurrecta, Romelia entreabrió los ojos. Contempló extática el cielo, fundiéndose insensiblemente a su inmensidad, eufórica, en pleno florecimiento de placer' (89). Her experience in the park culminates in a feeling of wholeness and satisfaction. According to Bal, 'rape of women is allegorically related to invasion and destruction of space' (Bal 1997:

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135). Yet Romelia feels anything but invaded, and far from reacting adversely to the invasion of her inner space, or to the immediate space of the park around her, she feels all the more at one with her surroundings, experiencing feelings bordering on ecstasy. Heavily influenced by the atmosphere in the park and the natural surroundings, she has yielded to the pleasure of the contact with the man, but appears to suffer no emotional or physical trauma. As the weaker party physically, she does not feel that she was to blame. She was merely subject to 'la pasión insana de un hombre' (89), but deep down she feels she has betrayed her principles. Judith Lax is right to suggest that Romelia found herself in 'a situation that involves more intellectual than emotional stress' (Lax 1961: 212).

It is not clear what the author intended with the rape scene. Romelia's reaction is clearly unsettling for the reader and could help to explain the novel's lack of critical attention. Interestingly, only female critics have commented on the novel at all. The primitiveness of the violent sexual act set within the context of the natural and untamed space of the park affords an effective contrast with the more intellectual and ideologically based activity that takes place during the meeting. Romelia's reaction is shocking because as readers we experience discomfort over her apparent ecstasy, instead of the trauma we anticipate. It is possible that the author wanted to show that women can overcome abuse by men with their spirit intact, moving on with important projects. Women's attitudes and reactions to rape have often been ambivalent. Indeed, fantasy over rape can be traced in romantic novels from around 1920 through to the 1950s and beyond. Acknowledging that theorising rape is a very difficult task, Sharon Stockton argues that 'Representations of rape, even when explicitly condemnatory of the rapist and sympathetic toward the victim, can nonetheless quite easily serve to reinforce the patriarchal status quo' (Stockton 2006: 182). By having her protagonist react in such a non-conventional way, Ferrer provides, in Romelia's reaction and recovery, a positive feminist response to the abuse of women. Either that or Ferrer has gone to extremes to demonstrate that the call to serve the revolution is a positive force so strong that it can overcome the trauma of rape.

Romelia Vargas is an ambivalent novel in several other ways: Romelia's position on the hilltop affords her a position of power that would not normally be associated with a poor *mulata*. Romelia is unusual in being an active female revolutionary who performs a recruitment function. She is, however, shown to be as subordinated to male power as contemporary women in other roles. The relationship between Romelia and her siblings towards their father is similarly ambivalent. Virginia Domínguez has argued that in the novel of the 1950s: 'Power was strongly

associated with masculinity; a macho did not take orders from a woman; he refused to acknowledge or respect women in positions of power' (Domínguez 1987: 42). Lucas conforms to this stereotype; he is unable to take orders from Romelia, even in the name of the revolution, seeing her authority as an affront to his *machismo*. The park can be examined in the light of Massey's argument that space is gendered and persistently contested (Massey 1994: 168). It constitutes a space in which normal gendered power relations are disrupted, in that a group of male revolutionaries are placed in the unusual position of being under the leadership of a woman. When Lucas refuses to accept this, Romelia's role as a woman in control of this space is threatened, and, with the rape, the domination of space reverts to male control.

Apart from gender, there is also a class and race implication here because in Cuba's racial hierarchy, the black person would be placed below the *mulato* (see Chapter One). In this scene, however, the established social order is disrupted, as the black man dominates the *mulata*. Romelia's experience in the park leads her to consider the racial difference between herself and Lucas, implying that gender differences were more ingrained and important than race:

> Uno, hombre negro. La otra, mujer blanca. Uno despreciado, vilipendiado
> hasta la saciedad por el hecho biológico de su pigmentación. La otra superior
> por el inverso del hecho biológico. (90)

Lucas sees Romelia as superior in racial terms but inferior in gender terms. He thus feels empowered to dominate her. Mythology has also linked blackness with a high sexual drive; the blacker the skin the more sexual the individual is held to be, and the fact that Lucas is black, and that he instigated the assault, reinforces this. The issue of race is all the more poignant because it has already been discussed by the revolutionaries at their meeting in the house in the city immediately before the meeting in the park, and the government's failure to achieve or even address racial integration has been highlighted.

The park is a rich and interesting space which therefore operates on a variety of levels: political, class, racial, gender and sexual. It is in the park that Romelia is able to give vent to her beliefs and persuade others of her convictions. Her eloquence and magnetic quality as a speaker are allowed to flourish there. She dreams of a new, tolerant, multi-racial Cuba, one in which there should be no discrimination on economic, racial or gender grounds: 'Iguales el negro y el pobre. La mujer y el hombre. En un plano ideal de la igualdad' (179). Romelia's dreams of racial

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equality are as yet a fantasy within the context of the space of the park which does not represent a forum for dissent within society. Her sexual encounter with Lucas leads her to deplore society's condemnation of mixed race relationships, and to view this as detrimental to society: 'Aquella distancia racial entre los dos sucedía solo en el engranaje artificial e ineficaz de la política social, errónea, de su tiempo' (90). Only Cuba's youth can achieve this, she believes. Furthermore, Romelia is not happy with merely recruiting. It is not enough to talk and spread revolutionary fervour; she wants to act and create change.

In the park external perceptions of skin colour and beauty are reduced to an irrelevance. Forces in Lucas and indeed in Romelia are activated, which would otherwise remain suppressed within society's codes of behaviour. However, gender difference remains a major stumbling block to the pursuit of revolutionary goals. With the focus on lack of control and natural forces, there is an implication that revolution too is something primitive and primeval, something which acts against the order of society. The message conveyed here seems to be that it is impossible to suppress all human drives for the revolutionary cause, including the urge towards sexual domination. Later in the novel Romelia will acknowledge that although both tyrants and revolutionaries take refuge in sexual activity, she does not wish to be part of this trend. Yet she is unable to resolve the resulting conflict of emotions. She wants to be able to stand apart from this general human experience and believes that her one and only sexual encounter will nourish her from now on: 'Como si la satisfacción a medias del instinto - una vez, es cierto - la mantuviera eternamente saturada de delicia sexual' (155-156).

If the market offers only degeneracy, ill health and moral and physical decline, then the park functions as a space in which an alternative future for Cuba can be imagined. Furthermore, plans for achieving this alternative can be made within this relatively safe zone outside of society's laws and restrictions. It can be conceived in Massey's words, as a space which is 'full of power and symbolism, … of solidarity and co-operation' (Massey 1994: 265). As a marginal space, however, the park is also a dangerous location, a place in which lawlessness, instinctive behaviour and violent acts may take place. Whereas Lutwack's view of the park as a trap (see Chapter Two) is appropriate to the park in this novel, his model of the park as a passive, reclining woman, so relevant to the link between the park and Estrella in *El acoso*, in no way applies to Romelia. This park symbolises the dichotomies of legal/illegal, wild/domesticated, and civilisation/barbarism. It is a space which allows major social upheaval to be contemplated and planned, functioning as a space in which the revolution can begin to exist, racial equality can be

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contemplated, and human worth need not be measured by class, race or aesthetics. Gender domination and subordination, however, remains a major issue in need of revue; rape can hardly be classed as liberation. The rape brings about a crisis in Romelia's sexual identity, but this is a productive crisis in that it leads to her decision that sex should not figure prevalently in her life. She wishes her identity to be associated with revolution and not with sexuality. The park, therefore, is ultimately a dangerous space but one in which such dangers can be overcome, as Romelia's reaction to the rape indicates.

The hill

The hill, in contrast, is a location which offers Romelia space for solitary contemplation, and which emphasises her position of power and leadership. The unspecific location of the hill and the lack of details about the view from the top draws attention to Romelia herself and her physical features, thereby continuing the theme of the hierarchy of colour and race started in the park. The hill as a space is the least detailed of the four major spaces identified in the novel, yet it sets the ideological framework and disrupts racial stereotypes from the outset. The hill, like the park, is public and highly visible, and situated near the house. From here the city can be viewed objectively, and reflected on, away from the immediacy of events within it.

Romelia's lofty position is reinforced by focalisation through the six-year-old character narrator, who first approaches Romelia from below as she climbs the hill. It is clear that this narrator holds Romelia in considerable esteem, despite the differences in age, colour and class. She looks up at Romelia from the hem of her skirt: 'Más arriba de la falda larga una blusa roja: más arriba aún, una cabeza de muñeca vieja, de melena ceniza, sin peinar, y una doble hilera de dientes blancos, enormes' (26). Her language is simple and child-like, focusing on shape and colour. Furthermore, her gaze alights on individual items of clothing and parts of the body, depersonalising Romelia: 'Y de la doble fila de dientes blancos enormes, entreabierta, salió una voz' (26). The narrator's retrospective viewpoint is dominated by the shape and colour of the hill rather than a more adult perspective which might have focused on its location and the view from the top.

The hill as the site of the first encounter between Romelia and the white narrator operates as a crossroads for the encounter between two races and classes. The inversion of racial hierarchy on the hill leads the reader to contemplate the positions occupied by the different races in wider Cuban society. Few other circumstances or social spaces would permit *mulato* superiority over

white. It is significant that this is a space which is outside the more heavily frequented areas of the city, where such an inversion would be unusual. Unlike in the park, where the politics of gender and revolution are at play, the hill is more significant in terms of race and class.

As the opening space to the novel, the hill is very important because the title of this first chapter invites intertextual reflection before the narrative begins. Cubans familiar with their own nineteenth-century literature might make the link with the nineteenth-century novel *Cecilia Valdés* by Villaverde (see Introduction). The full title of the novel is *Cecilia Valdés, o, La Loma del Ángel: Novela de Costumbres Cubanas*, and the first chapter in *this* novel is 'La loma y la casa'. The very name Romelia Vargas bears something of a syllabic resonance with Cecilia Valdés, highlighted by the child narrator at the beginning of the novel, when she spells out and repeats Romelia's name. The narrator also mentions a *mulata* in her class called Hortensia Valdés, as if to drive home the link back to Cecilia. With this intertextual reference in mind, one might compare the character of Romelia to the ostracised and ultimately tragic figure of Cecilia. Cecilia is a tragic figure because she is firstly unable to marry the man she loves owing to her race and lowly social position, and secondly because the man is killed at his wedding to a white, upper class woman. This and other allusions to such a well-known Cuban female literary figure allow for reflection on the position of the *mulata* in society in the past, her role in the early 1930s, and what her role might be now at the time of the novel's setting. However, any expectation that Romelia's fate will follow that of Cecilia will be refuted.

Finding the atmosphere at home too repressive, and in order to avoid her father's blatant disapproval of her interest in revolutionary activity, Romelia goes to the hill to reflect. In leaving the house for the hill, she claims this open and highly visible public space for her own private space. It is where she feels most comfortable, and as a high location occupying a dominant position, it reflects metaphorically her refusal to be subordinated to a variety of forces, be they political, racial, social or gendered.

The ambivalence of Romelia's reaction to being raped by Lucas is here continued in that she does not always see the hill in a positive light. At one point in the novel, she refers to the hill as a monster: 'veía la loma como un monstruo gigantesco calcando su lomo erizado, contra la menor oscuridad del cielo' (101). She had just seen her brother off on yet another dangerous mission, laden with a heavy load, and believes that he is not strong enough to carry the weight he has been charged with. She sees his lack of strength as her fault, in that she has failed to provide him with

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enough food: 'lo sintió como si fuera un reflejo de las preocupaciones maternales que sus dos hermanos siempre suscitaron en ella' (101). She feels responsible for, yet distant from, her siblings, despising their egotism whilst she feels compelled to struggle for more worthy causes. The hill reminds her of her position of power, and of how this is also a burden. According to Bal:

> An inner space is often also experienced as unsafe.... The inner space can, for
> instance, be experienced as confinement, while the outer space represents
> liberation and, consequently, security. (Bal 1997: 134)

This is certainly true for Romelia and her response to her home in contast to the hill. For her, the home represents confinement and insecurity, whilst the hill is where she feels liberated and therefore secure.

For the narrator, the encounter with Romelia on the hill marks a turning point in her life. Such a turning point can be considered in terms of a threshold. Bakhtin's notion of the threshold is as a site where time and place are fused (see Chapter Two). The chronotope of the threshold 'can be combined with the motif of encounter, but its most fundamental instance is as the chronotope of *crisis* and *break* in a life' (Bakhtin 2002: 248). He argued that a meeting 'may assume a multiple metaphoric or singly metaphoric meaning and may, finally, become a symbol (one that is sometimes very profound)' (Bakhtin 2002: 98). This experience applies to the white narrator who approaches Romelia at the top of the hill. She seeks access to Romelia's world and closer contact with her family, despite their lower social status. She will go on to revere and embrace Romelia's philosophy and politics, which will have life-changing consequences for the narrator. If contemporary Cuban readers of this novel, mainly white and middle class, are being asked to do the same, then the character narrator occupies the role of educator, of catalyst between Romelia and the reader.

If Romelia is projecting onto the hill the conflict she feels over her calling to the revolution on the one hand, and resentment over having to assume the role of substitute mother on the other, then the hill functions as a space of conflict and contradiction. The hill is mentioned one more time; when Hostilio dies in the sixth chapter his body is taken to the hill for burial on the summit, though we are not told why. Nevertheless, this hill can thus be linked intertextually to the hill in

Cecilia Valdés, upon which stands the Church of the Angel, with its huge cemetery[34], thus linking Romelia, through her revolutionary activity and through Hostilio, to a revered space in the Cuban psyche.

The hill thereby becomes linked to a real historical site of reverence in the former novel. If the city can offer no hope for a healthy and flourishing future, and the park brings with it plans for a different future society, the hill, then, represents Romelia's public declaration of who she is and the political standpoint she wishes to represent. Whilst the park as a space contains ambiguity, risks of barbarism and the untamed, the hill, in contrast, represents clarity of vision, and hope for disenfranchised Cubans of non-white, non-wealthy origin. It is also a mechanism through which the child narrator gains access to Romelia's world, and moreover from a physically subordinate position. As the opening scene of the novel, Romelia's dominant position is foregrounded, raising issues of race from the outset.

The house

Whilst the market, park and hill spaces have offered up interesting insights into social, racial, and political tensions present in society prior to the 1933 Revolution, it is the physical spaces within the Vargas family home which offer the most fruitful insights into the effect on individuals of life under the dictatorship, and into their engagement with revolutionary activity. The function of the spaces in this house does not remain static throughout the novel; spaces change dramatically as the narrative progresses. As a domestic space, the house stands in contrast to other spaces in the novel, which are all outdoor and public. The house first appears immediately after the opening scene in which the child narrator meets Romelia on the hill. It is through the focalisation of the child narrator that the exterior public space of the hill and the interior domestic space of the house are linked.

The child narrator is invited by Romelia to visit the Vargas home and it is the older narrator's interpretation of what she saw as a child that is narrated. She compares the experience of mounting the stairs behind Romelia as they enter the Vargas house to that of climbing the hill on top of which Romelia was sitting at the beginning of the novel: 'Se repetía en mi pequeño mundo

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[34] According to a footnote in the English translation of the novel: 'The Church of the Angel still stands in the *barrio* of the same name, on the highest point of Angels's Hill' (Villaverde 1962: 36). Angel's Hill is located by the port in Havana.

de las imágenes, la situación anterior de la loma. Y siempre hube de ascender para llegarme a la falda de Romelia Vargas' (30). This lower position occupied by the narrator as the two ascend the stairs, coupled with her shorter height, immediately puts Romelia in an elevated position within her own home, emphasising her authority and superiority.

Lax has noted that Ferrer was more intent upon describing intellectual attitudes than physical attributes or surroundings, and that with regard to the house 'a sufficient number of aspects are mentioned that serve to give a definite image of the unattractive rooms' (Lax 1961: 220). However, more so than intellectual attitudes, it is mood and emotion that is conveyed through the spaces in the house. Wellek and Warren's view that 'Setting may be the expression of a human will' (Wellek & Warren 1982: 221) appears to hold true for the spaces in the Vargas home at the start of the novel. Whilst there are few actual details about the furnishings and décor of the house, the atmosphere within is caught by using vocabulary pertaining to shape. The shape of the room reinforces the confined nature of the space occupied by the father: 'Un ángulo de la habitación, apartado de la escalera, encuadraba la sombra del padre, hundido en el sillón' (30). The visual image of the father embedded in his corner creates an air of darkness, gloom, confinement, and claustrophobia. Stanton rejects the idea that spaces can be static (Stanton 1996: 62), but this view of space is actually borne out by the way the father's corner operates as a space. The stasis and inertia which characterise this space reflect the rigid nature of the father's attitudes to his family and to the wider context of Cuba. By the end of the novel, however, spaces have become dynamic and changing, contributing even to the formation of history, as Massey argues (see Chapter Two).

The Vargas family does not correspond to the image of the close-knit Cuban family unit described in Chapter One. Its members are not the proud and loyal people portrayed in that image. Whilst the three grown-up children run the household in practical terms, their aged and paralysed father exerts a sinister and menacing form of psychological power over his family and their visitors. He charges the very air with his hostility: 'La amargura de sus frases impregnó de hostilidad el ambiente' (30). Entrenched and immobile within his chair, he represents the reluctance of the old colonial order to relinquish its grip over Cuba. The father can be compared to the landowner Valedonte in *Los Valedontes*, since he too represents the old colonial system of rule. However, that system is more forcefully exposed and open to criticism in *Romelia Vargas*. This separate corner space also reinforces the father's isolated position within the physical space of the house and within his own family.

The box-like nature of the space he occupies is in turn reinforced by the bird enclosed within its cage and suspended high up in the room. The caged bird can be linked to Romelia herself, since she yearns to escape the confines of the house and be set free to pursue her work for the revolution. It is through the descriptions of physical shape, therefore, that the atmosphere and conditions within the space of the house are projected at the beginning of the novel. Elsewhere in the house, however, the atmosphere is very different. In contrast to the gloom of the room in which the father is located, the *saleta* is large and airy: 'Era amplia; abría a un balcón; por su altura se apreciaba el contorno de las lomas y algo del campo' (31). This room, used by Romelia and her siblings, looks outwards towards the hills and the air from outside is allowed in, providing a counterbalance to the room occupied by the father, and highlighting the difference between his outlook and that of his daughter.

Paying little attention to her appearance and physical needs, Romelia's own room is full of books on philosophy and politics and her time is devoted to furthering social change. The character narrator notes that the house contains 'un tesoro oculto de propaganda filosófica materialista' (38). For Romelia the house is an oppressive space pervaded by the outlook of her father, whose views she opposes: 'Es el peor producto peninsular que pueda pensarse. Es de la generación canija, inculta, … Se obstina en los viejos moldes' (31). The character narrator detects a constant war of ideas within the Vargas household: 'una variada corriente de ideas en guerra constante' (33). The Vargas house is a site of 'opposing historical consciousness', along lines outlined by Bakhtin (see Chapter Two), because Romelia and her father's conflicting viewpoints, one colonialist, the other revolutionary, represent the head-on collision between the old and the new Cuba on the eve of the 1933 Revolution. In other words, even though Cuba had experienced thirty years of independence from Spain, the relationships in this household show that colonial attitudes take years, if not a whole generation, to adapt to a new vision. The house can also be seen as representing what Bakhtin called a 'border between two epochs' (Bakhtin 1996: 23), embodied in Romelia and her father, between the old and the new, between Spain and Cuba. This border zone status is reinforced by the house's location at the very edge of the city. Morris's argument that for Bakhtin some border zones contain the potential for creative change, has a bearing on the Vargas home, since Romelia leaves her marginalized position within the house with the purpose of creating social and political change (Morris 1994: 18).

The house, therefore, operates as a fairly obvious metaphor for Cuba and its relationship with its former colonial oppressor. However, there is more to this space than a container for a paralysed

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and dying Spain. Deeper analysis, focusing more on the actual spaces within the house, and their changing functions over time, reveals the house to be a space which is acting on several levels: as an initially male-gendered but eventually female-gendered space, as a site in which embedded spaces become a border zone between the public and the private, and as a threshold for personal, social and national change.

As economic head of the Vargas household, now that her mother is dead and her father an invalid, Romelia occupies both the traditional male role as wage earner and provider, and that of mother figure to her siblings. However, she fails to live up to the traditional maternal image of nurturing homemaker. The narrator points out that Romelia is not a particularly good housekeeper, noticing items of male and female clothing, well worn and discoloured, scattered throughout the house: 'también pendían acá y allá prendas masculinas o femeninas, vulgares, desnaturalizadas por el uso' (34). The narrator avoids going into Romelia's brother Jesús' room because: 'El retrete aparecía en total desacuerdo con la higiene' (34). Casal noted that the upper class visitors to the Vargas family constantly make reference to lack of cleanliness in their home (Casal 1975: 183). She also noted how 'Romelia's bedroom was not as smelly as Piedad's and definitely less than Jesús'', and concerning the father: 'Allá en la sala el olor del anciano paralítico, sin jabones diarios' (34).

The narrator helps Romelia and her sister with their appearance, lamenting the lack of opportunities for flirtation available to them. The absence of the expected items of personal care add to the sense of feminine neglect, and emphasise the mother's absence: 'En ningún lugar de la casa ví nunca afeites propios para el embellecimiento femenino o propios a la higiene del tocador' (34). This implies that it is the mother who 'civilises' her offspring, and that after colonialism Cuba has been left 'motherless' by Spain, and needs to 'mother' itself. Yet, paradoxically, Romelia becomes a mother figure to the narrator, with her child-like fascination for Romelia's teeth, hair and skin. They will go on to share a close relationship in the future, in spite of their age and racial differences. The implications of this are several. A mother figure does not necessarily have to operate only within a domestic context, since Romelia 'mothers' in a wider, more social context, and is therefore a model for a new kind of female, even a new kind of Cuba. Furthermore, Romelia's position could be a call for whites, via the white narrator, to rethink their position vis-à-vis the *mulato/a*, and embrace their difference.

The house is clearly a space that is subject to gender contestation, in the relationship between father and daughter. Whilst the father wishes to cling to his Spanish heritage by creating an atmosphere of hatred towards Cuba as Spain's former colony, thereby making life very unpleasant for his children, Romelia is intent on tearing down the old system and building a new socialist Cuba. The house thus becomes a battle ground in terms of several binaries: between old and new, father and daughter, male and female, and patriarchy and progress in terms of gender equality. Furthermore, the house reveals what happens when a space is expected to be gendered in a certain way, but does not function accordingly. The mother's absence, coupled with Romelia's inability or lack of will to create a clean and orderly home, means that the house at the start of the novel is portrayed as a male-gendered space. If Romelia's relationship with her father is characterised by hatred and opposition, the legacy of her mother's death has other implications. Power during the years prior to the start of the novel has rested with the father, but his claim is now increasingly challenged by Romelia. Throughout much of the novel the house remains a contested site, firstly because of the father/daughter relationship, and thereafter because of the power relationships between the revolutionaries. With the father's death, it is women who are now in charge and who are instrumental in helping to bring about and shape the revolution. Unlike the space of the restaurant in *Los Valedontes*, in which it is the landlord Valedonte who emerges as victor in the power struggle between himself and Ramona, the house in this novel changes from a male to a strongly female-gendered space.

In order to understand the true nature of the house as a space it is necessary to examine the position of Romelia's younger sister Piedad. Less of a *mulata* in appearance, being whiter and slighter in build than her sister, she is pale, thin and often ill. Like the *acosado* in the Mirador, she clings to religion in a space that has become her prison. Whereas he constantly seeks out a replacement mother figure in an effort to forge his own masculine identity, Piedad suffers from a poor sense of her own female identity, which has also partially resulted from the lack of a mother figure. Her meekness, thinness and overall demeanour are reminiscent of the nineteenth-century sickly female of Romantic literature, confined to the house and lacking in energy. Her development into an emotionally healthy young woman appears to have been arrested by a combination of her lack of mother figure and the hatred she felt directed at her by her father from childhood onwards: '¿No ves cuanto daño me hizo de niña?, y de mujer me despreciaba, me miraba como a una extraña…' (115).

Chris Barker's observation that the home is constructed through social relationships that are both internal and external, and constantly shifting in their power relationships (Barker 2000: 293), is relevant to the Vargas household. Owing to Romelia's activities in recruiting for the revolution, she has opened up an otherwise introverted, dysfunctional and sealed family unit not only to the wider influences of the city beyond, but to a world of dangerous and clandestine political activity. Romelia's siblings too have become empowered in both their personal and public lives, whilst the narrator's reverence for Romelia and the Vargas household has inverted the traditional supremacy of white over black, and working class over middle class.

In Chapter Two it was noted that Bachelard raised questions about the use of space in the setting of the domestic home, stressing the home as the original site of human warmth, its nourishing role, and the key role of the mother. Spaces in the home function as containers full of memories, delights, horrors and fears, serving as portals to metaphors of imagination. These are psychologically complex since the home contains memories of the characters who inhabited them, and how they spoke and moved (Bachelard 1994: 7). One can see his theory at work in the Vargas home, with its constant echo of the dead and absent mother, and later on after the death of the father.

Piedad's father's apparent hatred and contempt for his daughters appears to have dominated any positive influence their mother might have had, at least in Piedad's case, over the formation of a positive body image. Her whole existence is tainted by her cumulative memories of her father's disapproval. It is precisely the positive maternal influence that is absent in the Vargas home, depriving Piedad of 'original warmth'. She appears to have no recollection of her mother's warmth, only her father's coldness and hostility. Bachelard drew attention to how the memory of each individual contains voices of people from that individual's past; these voices live on, even the manner in which they spoke. Piedad lives with her father's words permanently etched on her memory. Even after his death, she in particular feels the persistence of his disapproving gaze:

> Sintió que desde aquel ángulo de la sala alguien la miraba fijamente, tan fijo
> y tan penetrante era el influjo de aquello que la miraba, que se irguió
> violenta, tensa, y se paró frente al mueble, con los puños cerrados. (138)

Embedded spaces within the house are a major contributor to the house as a site of transformation. The space formerly occupied by the father in the corner of the living room is one

of several such spaces. The weapons' store and hideout under the stairs contain ammunition intended for fighting against the existing social order. The other embedded space is the corridor near the bedrooms, which becomes converted into a sick bay for the injured revolutionary Hostilio, bringing a normally very public, yet clandestine operation from its wider social context into the very intimate and private space of the house. Whilst the atmosphere in the house has been gloomy and hostile, Hostilio, despite his illness and wounds, brings warmth, vitality and a spirit of self-sacrifice to the household.

By bringing Hostilio with his city-bred illness into corridor space, the public city is brought into the private space of the home. The embedded space of the corridor, as the location of the affair between Piedad and Hostilio, leading to Piedad's sexual awakening and ultimately Hostilio's death, is not even a recognised socially defined space within a house; it is a site of transition between rooms, a border zone, a space through which people usually only pass. Whilst the lovers' relationship must be conducted within the confines of a secret space because Hostilio is now wanted by the authorities, it then becomes available for scrutiny within the confined circle of family members, their visitors, and other revolutionaries seeking refuge.

Yet far from being a zone of death and misery the sick bay operates as a space where sexual passion is ignited and flourishes. Hostilio and Piedad become strongly sexually attracted, in spite of his illness and her former inhibitions. The atmosphere in the embedded space of the corridor has changed from a site of pain and suffering to an erotically charged location in which illness exists alongside healthy human drives. An initially domestic space characterised by the paralysis of its inhabitants thus becomes an active, thriving site, one of the dynamic cells of the revolution.

Whilst the final chapter of the novel is largely set within the house, reference is made to two other spaces: the park and the city. It is as if the external spaces within the park and city are brought inwards, represented by Romero and Tomás who arrive from the city with news of the deaths of two fellow revolutionaries. They also bring the news that Lucas is to leave Cuba by boat. For Romelia this news brings memories of her assault by Lucas in the park. This juxtaposition unites the planning of revolutionary activity in the park with the resulting events in the city, the response by the authorities within the city, and the support for the revolution within the house. This last chapter of the novel fuses the three spaces of park, city and house. The public has entered the private domain, first with the revolutionaries from the park, then with Machado's representatives

from the city. The external and the public, then, becomes an embedded space of experience within the private.

The function of the house, therefore, undergoes a transformation as the novel progresses; at the beginning it represents, metaphorically through the father, a paralysed, old, colonial, hegemonic and predominantly patriarchal order. With the exception of Romelia, the members of the Vargas household at the beginning of the novel suffer from a type of paralysis: the father is quite literally paralysed and confined to his chair, unable to walk, Piedad appears to be paralysed in a child-like physical and emotional state, Hostilio, the wounded revolutionary, is literally paralysed by injury and illness, while Jesús, Romelia's brother, is paralysed in his attempts to assert his masculinity.

Jesús is a strange young man, lacking direction in life, and flitting from one interest to another. He is described in the most unflattering terms: 'poseía tendencias animales más inexcusables que las de sus hermanas. Su presencia era completamente repelente' (35). He prefers to go about semi-nude, clad in Greek and Roman togas made from sheets, and with a facial tic. He exudes a sickly sweat which repels other people. His bedroom in the house is an interesting space: 'Cada uno de sus rincones expresaba un estadio diferente de la voluble personalidad esquizofrénica de Jesús' (36). For example, his period of interest in taxidermy resulted in a weird collection of stuffed creatures. Able to recite well in Latin from his time as a choirboy, Jesús spends hours wandering around the garden at the back of the house, reciting in his toga. The arrival of the wounded revolutionaries into the house creates a threshold into a total transformation for Jesús, marking his conversion from opponent of the revolution to its fervent supporter, and also his change from a rather effeminate youth to a confident man with a clear sexual interest in the narrator's older sister. The activities in the spaces of the house, therefore, contribute to the establishment of Jesús's political and sexual identity.

The house has become a space which represents thresholds for many of its occupants and visitors, and, like the park and the hill, a space of liberation. Thresholds can be experiential and not just physical or structural. For Hostilio, the house offers not only nurture and peace, but also, through his encounter with Piedad, a re-establishment of his libidinal drives which surface once more before his death. Piedad crosses a threshold with the arrival of Hostilio, changing for the better and experiencing a boost to her confidence. She changes her view of her body, her strong sexual response to Hostilio causing her to re-evaluate her upbringing and to deplore its lack of sexual

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freedom: 'el apego imbécil a la virginidad, esa cosa mezcla de teoría fisiológica y superstición' (174).

For Romelia, the house is a place from which she seeks escape; in a metaphorical sense she wishes to escape the house because of its links with Spain, whilst in a literal sense she actually escapes to the hill, to the park and to the city. It is a place in which to store her many books, a starting point for her revolutionary goals. It is also a burden for her; she must earn enough to feed her dependants when really she would prefer to be out recruiting for the revolution.

For the character narrator, the encounter with the house brings about a fundamental shift in her thinking and altering her whole world-view. It awakens her social conscience, as she changes her view over what constitutes an essential life as a result of her visits:

> Lo que fue un entretenimiento intelectual para mi hermana, y para mí la
> escuela admirable donde aprendí a ponderar y a distinguir las sin-números
> facetas de preconciencia y de conciencia humanas. (34)

The house, for all its gloom and restriction during the early part of the novel, is an attractive site to the character narrator. White and upper class, the lower social standing of this once more prosperous family, together with their mixed race heritage, holds considerable fascination for her. Far from experiencing paralysis, she is transformed through her experience of the Vargas home. For her it is a site of awakening, a spatial and experiential threshold for personal change.

By the end of the novel it is clear that the house has changed from a site of paralysis to one of the very nerve centres of the revolution, representing metonymically the many other private spaces in the city which have hosted the participants of the revolution, households in which other individuals do battle with their consciences and ideologies at such a time of social turmoil and transition, in which revolutionaries seek cover, and in which new personal relationships and transformations take place. Such micro sites of transformation pass unrecorded in history, in favour of the big events in the centre of the city, which affect only key public figures, rather than members of the anonymous masses. In this novel, the face of Cuba's future is a female one, and moreover, non-white. The house, then, although initially an anachronism and a remnant of old Spain in the new Cuba, becomes transformed into a female-governed space with an important social and political function.

The city market, the park, the hill and the house are spaces which elucidate Romelia's position. At the start of the novel she appears to be the only person in the family with energy and purpose. Through her use of spaces, Ferrer has provided an insight into what it was like for a *mulata* to be a committed revolutionary, and the obstacles such a person faced. The novel therefore makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of how the events leading to the fall of Machado in 1933 affected the lives of ordinary individuals and how they in turn helped to shape that revolution. Montero's claim that individual issues merge into the collective in this novel, and that this is the novel's main argument, does not hold true after an analysis of spaces (Montero 1989: 18). In fact, it is the very dilemmas surrounding the commitment of the individual to the revolution that are foregrounded throughout the body of the novel. The novel's main argument is surely encapsulated by a comment from Bakhtin on how public and private domains relate to political events:

> Characteristically it is not private life that is subjected to and interpreted in
> light of social and political events, but rather the other way around - social
> and political events gain meaning in the novel only thanks to their connection
> with private life. (Bakhtin 2002: 109)

A superficial reading of this novel would conclude that it is driven by the events of the run-up to the fall of Machado. However, deeper analysis has shown that the novel does far more than this through its exploitation of physical spaces. If the city market is representative of decay and degeneracy, the park is a space which allows a new society to be shaped but brings with it unexpected and unlicenced behaviours, and the hill is symbolic of Romelia's growing position of power, the house, like the cinema in *Los Valedontes*, also becomes a space in which transformations take place. Spaces in this novel provide the platform for identities and sexualities to be debated and shaped. The park and the house in particular awaken the protagonists' awareness of their hitherto unacknowledged identities and sexualities, leading Romelia to a conscious decision not to be sexual, Piedad to discover her sexuality and femininity, and Jesús to fulfil his political and sexual identity. The house is therefore a catalyst for political and personal transformation, but it also represents a world in which stereotypes of power are subverted: the Spanish is shown to be outmoded and degenerate, whilst power is assigned to the Cuban, to the woman, and to the non-white.

CHAPTER 6: *LA TRAMPA* (1956) BY ENRIQUE SERPA

Of the three novels analysed so far, *La trampa* by Enrique Serpa (1956) has most in common with *El acoso*, published in the same year. Set in early 1950s Havana, the action focuses on two major socially opposed groups, policemen and gangsters. In contrast to *El acoso*, none of the events in *La trampa* is based on the real events of the 1930s and 1940s. However, the older gangsters in *La trampa* look back with nostalgia to the time of the 1933 Revolution. Whereas in *Los Valedontes* spaces reveal that identities are well-established and essentially unchallenged, and in *Romelia Vargas* they indicate that female sexual identities in particular are at first undefined but subsequently established, in *La trampa* spaces will reveal unexpected and interesting insights into male identities.

Serpa (1900-1968) was a journalist, poet and novelist, who played a key role in the Grupo Minorista[35]. His 1938 novel, *Contrabando*, earned him the *Premio Nacional de la Novela*. In *Contrabando* social themes are examined through the naturalistic techniques similarly found in the work of Emile Zola, and through narrative experimentation. From 1952 until 1959 Serpa was Press Secretary for the Cuban Embassy in Paris. *La trampa* was written there between 1955 and 1956, and edited and published in Buenos Aires in 1956. (We might note that Carpentier wrote *El acoso* in Paris during the same period).

La trampa can be classified as a 'gangster' novel, containing elements of the *novela negra*. In the *Prólogo* to the 1980 edition of the novel, Dania García Ronda has usefully identified the historical context for the novel as the period of Prío's government (1948-52), and more specifically during the run-up to Batista's coup of March 1952 (see Chapter One): 'se trata de la época inmediatamente anterior al golpe de estado del 10 de marzo' (Serpa 1980: iii)[36]. The action of the novel takes place within just twenty-four hours, with the focus on the predicament of a group of gangsters sometime during the early 1950s, and that of the central character Fileno, a motorcycle policeman. He had been associated with the AIR gangster group prior to joining the

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[35] Founded in 1923, and mainly comprising journalists, the Grupo Minorista was formed to give a voice to young writers concerned with social and political problems. This loose group had no president or magazine, but counted Marinello and Serpa amongst its members. It called for renovation within the arts and increased political awareness. It disbanded in 1928, in the face of the persecution of its members by Machado's government.

[36] All subsequent references to *La trampa* are taken from the 1974 edition: Serpa, E. (1974) *La trampa*. Havana: Editorial de Arte y Literatura. 1st edition 1972, 1st published in 1956.

police force[37]. Fileno suffers acute anxiety as his wife Celia, assisted by the domineering midwife Martina, endures labour pains in the bedroom of their small apartment. (The actual birth does not take place until one third of the way through the novel). A succession of women visits to see the new baby, as do Fileno's police colleagues. Meanwhile, a group of gangsters hold discussions in a café on a variety of subjects: politics, history, the role of the intellectual, and their own motivation for leading the gangster life. Some older members, such as Marcelo and Silverio, had started their life of violence as students engaged in revolutionary activity in the struggle to bring down Machado during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Younger members, such as Bebo, are more attracted to earning the right to the macho image associated with violent action, craving approval from their peers.

Seated with the gangsters in the café is Dr. Castier, a frustrated intellectual who had wanted to write novels but is engaged in teaching and journalism. He tries, without success, to gain popularity amongst the gangsters in order to gain their votes for his bid to enter politics, but they only ridicule him. Marcelo Miró, another veteran gangster of the anti-Machado struggle, lives with his wife María Teresa, who still acts as a messenger for the gangsters. As head of the gangster group, Marcelo attends the funeral of his old friend Roberto Blanco, who has been murdered. The funeral attracts many gangsters, revolutionaries and even government officials. Roberto had helped Marcelo's brother to escape from Cuba, and Marcelo feels a moral obligation to avenge his death by claiming the life of a member of AIR, the group he believes has killed Roberto (His chosen victim will prove to be the policeman Fileno). Marcelo's group pay a visit to Dr. Dávila, an intellectual and former revolutionary, who disagrees with violence as a strategy for social change. The novel ends when Fileno leaves his flat to catch a bus to the police station. Upon seeing Fileno, the gangsters decide to avenge the death of Roberto Blanco, and Bebo, desperate to prove himself in front of his peers, shoots Fileno dead.

The narrative structure alternates between the highly domestic and private scene within Fileno's home, and the more public spaces of the world inhabited by the gangsters, such as cafés, streets and cars. This alternating structure enables the author to explore the themes of power, the motivation to revolutionary action, the role of the intellectual, attitudes to women amongst the gangsters, the futility of violence as a strategy for political change, and ultimately, as spaces will

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[37] *Acción Insurreccional Radical* is a fictitious organisation and is probably a fusion of the names of three real groups active in the late 1940s.

reveal, threatened masculinity. With the alternation between the private space of the flat and the more public spaces outside, a reading of spaces in terms of the threshold is invited.

As regards the usefulness of Stanton's application of a spatial analysis, *La trampa* does not lend itself to a study along the urban/rural axis. The notion of flight through space, however, is useful for an analysis of the gangsters' plight. Furthermore, the question of identity as revealed through space is highly relevant to several groups in this novel: gangsters, homosexuals, policemen, and women. *La trampa* has attracted the most critical attention of the three lesser-known novels in this study. Aldereguía (1957), Álvarez García (1980), Cairo (1993), Casal (1971), García Ronda (1980), Marinello (1977), Pogolotti (1958) and Portuondo (1957) have commented on the novel[38]. Whilst most critics focus on non-spatial matters, two have commented on the narrative structure of *La trampa*, particularly the alternation of chapters (Portuondo and Pogolotti)[39].

However, they did not pursue a spatial analysis by considering these locations as spatial entities in themselves. Aldereguía noted the film-like qualities of the novel:

> Todo el libro es como una película de furias; huracán tropical de pasiones
> destadas que arrastra a su vórtice, y grita el dramatismo silente de sus
> páginas arrancadas a la realidad cubana de antevíspera. (Aldereguía 1957:
> 65)

However, he did not go on to use this observation as the basis for an analysis of spatial elements.

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[38] It has not been possible to obtain an article published in *Boletín de la Comisión Nacional Cubana de la UNESCO* in 1957, entitled 'Libros y publicaciones. *La trampa* de Enrique Serpa'. Nor has an article by Manuel Millares Vásquez come to light entitled 'Enrique Serpa, *La trampa*. Novela', published in the journal *América* in 1957.

[39] Portuondo's article presents something of am enigma. According to Ana Cairo, Portuondo had an article published on both *La trampa* and Gregorio Ortega's *Una de cal y otra de arena* (1956) entitled 'Dos novelas recientes', in the journal *Nuestro Tiempo* in 1957 (Cairo 1993: 202). An article with that title does indeed appear in that journal in that year, but signed by 'C.E.', and in the issue immediately prior to that cited by Cairo. It is unlikely that an article on the same two books with the same title would appear in two consecutive issues of the journal, therefore it is possible that Cairo is referring to an article which may have been wrongly catalogued. I will assume, therefore, that this article is by Portuondo. In it he usefully traced the history of the type of novel which takes as its theme 'las luchas políticas nacionales', mentioning works by Cubans Levi Marrero, Marcelo Salinas, Teté Casuso, and Rafael Esténger, and including *La brizna de paja en el viento* (1952) by the Venezuelan Rómulo Gallegos.

The flat

The first space to be considered is the opening scene of the novel, which takes place in Fileno's flat and the embedded space of the bedroom within. For a novel in the gangster genre, it is surprising that *La trampa* does not actually begin with a focus on gangsters. It might at the start of the novel be assumed that the narrative will be about Fileno, his wife and child, an intimate portrayal of family relations. This illusion is dispelled, however, when the location changes to the space of a café containing a group of gangsters. At the beginning of the novel, police officer Fileno is waiting in a state of acute anxiety. The reason for his distress soon becomes apparent; his wife Celia is in the process of giving birth in the embedded space of the bedroom next door, and her screams disturb him greatly: 'El misterio de la maternidad lo mantenía transido de angustia' (12).

Consideration of Bakhtin's views on the relationship between characters and spaces is useful when analysing this opening scene. Referring to the moment in literary history when 'a contradiction developed between the public nature of the literary form and the private nature of its content' (Bakhtin 2002: 123), Bakhtin observed that since 'the quintessentially private life that entered the novel … was, by its very nature and as opposed to public life, closed. ... one could only spy and eavesdrop on it' (Bakhtin 2002: 123). Bakhtin's point about eavesdropping on the private space of the individual can be extended by considering the space of the flat in terms of a theatre; it is as if Fileno were alone on stage and Celia in a room just off stage, from which noises can be heard. Furthermore, the succession of female characters who visit the flat after the birth and who conform to certain stereotypes, reinforces the analogy between the flat and the theatre, as if different characters emerge onto the stage. The involvement of some 1950s writers with art theatre can be detected here[40].

Any expectation that the novel will be fast-paced, with plenty of gangster-instigated action, is immediately dispelled with the deliberately slow tempo of the narrative, highlighting the protagonist's agonised state of mind. Fileno's feelings of helplessness as his wife undergoes labour are stereotypical for a man in this position, though close analysis of the text will reveal that his wife's labour will have even deeper repercussions on him than might be expected. As early as

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[40] Serpa himself was also a dramatist, whilst Piñera is credited with reinvigorating the theatre in Cuba (Smith 1997: 240).

the second paragraph, the narrative focuses on a detailed description of the interior of the flat, lasting a whole page. The emphasis is on the tiny amount of space afforded by the flat:

> No contaba sino de dos piezas, además de la pequeña cocina, un cuarto de
> baño no mayor que el de una casa de muñeca y un patiecito que podía ser
> cubierto con un pañuelo. (10)

Time is decelerated as the narrative lingers over the various items of furniture and ornaments in the living room, detailing how and when each was acquired:

> En la vitrina-aparador descollaba una colección de copas de Bacará, regalo
> de bodas de un hermano de Celia, y la fina licorera – un hermoso frasco y
> seis copitas de cristal talado sobre una bandeja de espejo -, fruto de una
> colección realizada entre un grupo de camaradas de Fileno. (10)

The limited space of the flat enables any slight movement or noise to be foregrounded. The sound of a dog barking, or an insect buzzing, is all the more noticeable and magnified, increasing the notion of time weighing heavily on Fileno. His disquiet is mirrored by that of the dog Linda, which also seems to be in a state of anxiety. Fileno himself is likened to an animal, both in the opening scene and at various other times throughout the novel: 'Tenía … fuerte dentadura de animal carnívoro' (11). Later he is described in feline terms: 'Se acercó furtivamente a la puerta, andando de puntillas, con la flexible suavidad de un felino en el sigilo de la caza' (56). The alignment of the human with the animal is one of the legacies of naturalism. Portrayed in these terms, Fileno's power as a policeman is diminished, leaving him open to ridicule. As with the *taquillero* in his ticket booth in *El acoso*, the confined space of the flat reinforces that felt by Fileno, his irritable dog, and by Celia confined to her bed. This inability of the couple to escape the restricted space of the flat will be paralleled by the plight of the gangsters.

Bal argues that the primary aspect of space is the way characters relate to it in terms of their senses (Bal 1997: 133) (see Chapter Two). They use sight, hearing and touch in their perception of space. Bal contrasts the sound of a low buzz in close proximity to a character with that of a church clock sounding in the distance, which extends the space. This contrast is at play in Fileno's flat, where Fileno's irritation and anxiety are exacerbated by the noise of an insect, which he knows he could crush in an instant to reveal nothing more than a smear of blood. He

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then compares the insect to Celia: '¡La vida de un insecto tal vez pudiera tener ante aquel poder el mismo valor que una vida humana! ¿La vida de Celia por la vida de un mosquito?' (74). He is clearly feeling insecure about the state of his wife's health and his questioning of the validity of human life suggests an existential dilemma. Once the baby has been born, Fileno's disquiet remains unalleviated; this is conveyed by the mention of the clock showing the early hour of half past five in the morning, and the focus on the noises from outside heard by Fileno: a cock crowing, an alarm clock, birds singing, a factory siren, a car exhaust, and a parrot repeating the same words in Martina's adjacent flat. Fileno is disturbed by the motion of a cockroach, and this time he does indeed crush the creature, in an act of anger and frustration. He then promptly feels sick at the sight of the cockroach's viscera, and washes his hands twice over in the kitchen. He has clearly been profoundly affected by his wife's labour and the birth of his son, if not in fact emotionally and physically disturbed. He links the birth of his child with thoughts of death. Like the life of the insect, the life of a gangster or a policeman can be crushed in an instant, as will become evident by the end of the novel.

That Fileno should be contemplating the life/death dichotomy within the normally secure and familiar space of his own home is symptomatic of the aspect of alienation within 1950s existentialism. Whilst he is normally completely familiar with the limited space of the flat, today he feels as if he is in a strange and unknown space:

> Todo aquello le era familiar, constituía su universo cotidiano. Y, no obstante, había momentos en que Fileno sufría la sensación de hallarse inmerso en una atmósfera extranjera. (10)

Given the circumstances of prolonged social unrest experienced by the inhabitants of Havana in the 1950s, it is not surprising that a climate of hopelessness and despair prevailed (see Chapter One). Fileno is not alone in feeling alientated within his familiar environment; the following examination of the gangsters' position in society will demonstrate that his plight is symptomatic of a wider social malaise.

The alternation between the flat and the café over seven short chapters prolongs the tension over the imminent birth of Fileno's son by spreading this part of the narrative out to encompass scenes concerning the gangsters. This device enables comparisons to be made between what happens in the two spaces, and the fates of the characters within them. Furthermore, this constant

juxtaposition invites comparisons between the role of the policemen and that of the gangsters. The ten separate scenes set within the flat are linked by a common language, with certain nouns of emotion repeated: 'angustía' (9, 12, and 77) and 'tensión' (12 and 74). Sounds and animal references serve a similar function, enabling the author to quickly recreate the atmosphere each time the flat is revisited by the narrative. It also enables the flat to be contrasted with the café throughout, the flat epitomising life and the café death.

Furthermore, this technique is highly effective in that the two spaces of the flat and café become sustained simultaneously in the reader's mind. The reader is able to construct and maintain this spatial duality, demonstrating the concept of space as a mental construct as indicated by literary theorists such as Mitchell and Smitten (see Chapter Two).

For Pogolotti, this technique of alternation starts effectively, but becomes mechanical:

> Lo que al comienzo se vislumbraba como un robusto contrapunteo, se
> convierte en mecánica alternancia entre la casa del policía Fileno y la
> parturienta, y las reuniones de las pandillas de pistoleros. (Pogolotti 1958:
> 193)

Yet these alternations between locations become less obvious after the halfway point of the novel, when the narrative focuses increasingly on opposing views about how social and political change should be achieved. Furthermore, the alternating narrative structure invites the notion of thresholds, as one space is exited and another entered by the reader.

As is outlined in Chapter Two, Bakhtin acknowledged that certain spaces in literature function as thresholds, often performing a metaphoric function. For him, thresholds and encounters represent 'crisis and break in life' (Bakhtin 2002: 248). He listed a great many types of spaces in the context of the city, but he did not elaborate on how the juxtaposition of different spaces in novels can create further thresholds. Bakhtin's study of the threshold related mainly to physical spaces, yet thresholds can be experiential and not just physical or structural. For example, while on the one hand Fileno anxiously awaits his new status as father for the first time, similarly Bebo desires initiation into the gangster group by committing his first murder.

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As has been shown, the juxtaposition of the flat with other more public spaces allows for the contrast between the themes of birth and death. After the child has been born there are allusions to the boy as part of the survival of the species; the news of his birth strikes Fileno not just as something to be celebrated but as 'algo más grande, misterioso y profundo, ya que el advenimiento de toda criatura implica un triunfo, que es la supervivencia de la especie' (149). This section is all the more poignant because it follows a section devoted to gangster Marcelo's wife's nightmare about being followed as she delivers a parcel on behalf of the gangster group. In María Teresa's nightmare the boy to whom she hands over a parcel is found dead the next day. Similarly, another scene in which Celia welcomes the kindergarten teacher and other women who have come to see her new baby is preceded by a description of a gangster's funeral. The visit by the women to the flat is followed in the narrative by a return to the gangster's funeral and the description of the mortuary space, and then the visit to the flat by Fileno's police colleagues. With the focus on the new birth and the joy of the women visitors, with discussions on the nature of police, gangster power and guns, and with the recent death of a notorious gangster, the theme emerging from the flat is the well-acknowledged gender schism of women as creators of life, and men as its destroyers. Pogolotti highlighted the contrast in this novel between the creative forces of nature in the birth process with the futility of human enterprise:

> Las páginas iniciales presagian un impresionante y significativo contraste
> entre la grave e imponente pujanza de la primaria fuerza creadora de la
> naturaleza y la endeblez y pobreza de las empresas humanas. (Pogolotti
> 1958: 192)

In the tenth and final scene in the flat, the focus changes to the different motivations of the various policemen for joining the force. This scene is again preceded by a return to gangster Blanco's funeral, as if to foretell of future deaths and the lack of power amongst both the police and the gangsters to bring these reprisals to an end. Therefore, whilst the main event in the space of the flat is the birth of the baby boy, the alternating sections set at the funeral and in gangster-controlled spaces point to a more sinister outcome. It is not until the very end of the novel that we realise how prophetic these indicators have been, as the newly born boy's father is shot. The ending of the novel is all the more startling because the reader has only ever seen Fileno in a domestic light, as a rather weak and insecure individual, and not as the likely target of gangster warfare.

Although the flat is focalised through Fileno, it is an essentially female-gendered space. Fileno and the narrator are eavesdroppers on his wife's pre-birth distress. The narrator's view is thus implicitly male. The layout of the space in the flat casts Celia in an impersonal, distanced light, given that the bedroom functions as an embedded and almost concealed space within the wider space of the flat. Since her experience of childbirth is reported firstly through the mind and emotions of her husband, and secondly through her midwife Martina, Celia herself is denied any subjectivity as a character, not actually appearing as such until page 106. She also appears to comply with the position assigned her, offering little resistance to domination by both her husband and Martina.

This distanced and alienating portrayal of birth, together with the account of Celia's difficult pregnancy, render her almost as excluded and disempowered from the process as her husband. Her subjectivity as a woman is further denied because her cries of pain are couched in animal terms, reinforcing the analogy of the flat with a cage or animal trap, and casting her in a similar vein to the portrayal of Fileno: 'Y oyó que Celia exhalaba un desolado quejido de animal moribundo' (76). In spite of her frequent protests to Martina, once the child has been born Celia appears to quickly assimilate the negative view of motherhood presented by Martina from the outset: 'Era lo que tenía que pagar por mi felicidad de ahora' (107). This rapid change of attitude contains an admission of sin, as if the reward of a child must be paid for with suffering. The notion of atonement will be further explored in the character of Lina who visits Celia later on.

The arrival of the new baby acts as a magnet for other women in the neighbourhood, who wish to congratulate the mother and bring presents. The exclusively female-gendered bedroom space thus provides opportunities for the further exploration of women's position in society and attitudes towards childbirth, through the characters of Martina's daughter Carmela, Nazaria, and Lina. These three women have something in common; they are all presented in terms of their bodies, a technique which further highlights their lack of subjectivity. Each woman's body is foregrounded at the expense of her character qualities. The succession of characters who all arrive at the bedroom space may appear contrived, and in dramatic terms these women appear to be stock characters - Celia the obedient and compliant, Martina the matriarch, Carmela the loose woman, Nazaria the old witch, and Lina the pure. However, the bedroom space reveals that these characters can also be read as representations of female marginalisation: the conformist and the reactionary (Martina and her daughter Carmela), the racially and religiously different (Nazaria), and the childless and repressed (Lina).

Carmela is the first visitor. Whilst no beauty, she exudes an open sexuality which Fileno and other men do not fail to notice. According to her mother, Carmela changes her husband every six months; attracting men seems to be her sole aim in life. The impression given is that she is little more than the sum total of her sexual organs and erotic zones:

> Daba de golpe, en cambio, la impresión de estar sobrecargada de erotismo,
> como si toda ella no fuese sino libido, con cada órgano, cada nervio, cada
> mucosa convertido en sensible instrumento erógeno. (150)

Far from being resigned to her role, however, she actively and intelligently uses her sexuality to make material changes to her life, and cannot therefore be viewed as subordinate.

The next visitor is Nazaria, a black practitioner of the *santería* cult of *Ochún* (see Chapter One). Before her religious practices are mentioned, it is her body that is first described. Compared to a large old boat, she is portrayed comically in terms of her girth and shape:

> La amplitud de las caderas y el tamaño del trasero, ancho y levantado como
> la popa de una barcaza, le daban el cómico aspecto de un globo que el
> empezar a desinflarse se hubiese invertido. (152)

She is also compared to an old goat, and attention is drawn to a wart on her nose, which she persists in scratching. Her strong body odour makes Celia reluctant for Nazaria to kiss her baby, lest she impart some disease.

The flat invites theorisation about what happens when any space is entirely single-gendered. In Chapter Two, Massey's view of the gendered nature of space was outlined. Here it is women, and not men, who oppress other women. They have a negative effect on each other, and through each generation, create a circularity of oppression. In her efforts to enable a healthy baby to be born, the midwife Martina exerts an ironically unhealthy influence over Celia, and the female visitors are all equally oppressed and trapped in their roles in life, with the exception of perhaps Nazaria, who is able to exert some control as a religious practitioner.

The placing of Fileno within the confines of the strongly female-gendered space of the flat for most of the novel raises questions about his own identity. Access to his state of mind as he waits for signs of the birth provides an indication that he is suffering not just anxiety over his wife, but his own crisis of masculinity. The experience of his prolonged wait has led Fileno to consider whether he might be a coward, his mind wandering back to an experience he had as a seventeen year-old living in the country. During a fiesta he was accused of being less than a man by a drunkard who had misread Fileno's unusual way of dressing: 'Dice que lo tiene todo, pero a lo mejor le falta lo único que se necesita' (28). Unperturbed by the insult, Fileno defended his virility with conviction: '-No, compay; también me sobra eso en que está pensando. Y si quiere verlo…' (28). As Domínguez has argued: 'To call a man a queer was a way of calling him a woman, a direct attack on his masculinity, on his value as a macho. It was a way of calling him weak and unworthy of holding power' (Domínguez 1987: 42).

Those who have theorised masculinity in the last fifteen years (Buchbinder [1994], Berger *et al* [1995], and Beynon [2002]) view it as culturally constructed and subject to the political, social and historical determinants of the time, rather than unchanging and transhistorical. Both masculine and feminine behaviour are learned, they claim, yet the two terms are often used as if immutable and permanent, and used to codify, contain and render fixed a wide spectrum of the continually changing attitudes and practices of real men and women (Buchbinder 1994: 4). Men are reluctant, Buchbinder argues, to renounce the power and status they automatically enjoy from the acceptance of a dominant model of masculinity (Buchbinder 1994: 18).

Furthermore, the nature of masculinities varies within specific cultures and even within specific sites such as schools, prisons and hospitals (Buchbinder 1994: 18). Versions of masculinity also vary over time, and therefore over the course of each man's life. John Beynon highlights the notion of 'hegemonic masculinity', whereby a model of successful masculine behaviour is defined in particular places at a specific time, thereby rendering other masculine styles inadequate and inferior (Beynon 2002: 16). He draws on other critics who have argued for masculinity as text, or as enactment, and even for the 'end of masculinity' (Beynon 2002: 9-11).

Ben Knights argues that our inner life is never completely our own, and that it is characterised by 'a boundary phenomenon' (Knights 1999: 18-19). He locates our very identity as occupying a marginal position, subject to contradiction and inconsistency. This is manifest in slips of the tongue or of the pen, and in puns, an indication that 'the smooth surface of the discourse becomes

fractured or rough' (Knights 1999: 19). Consequently, in literature we must pay attention to the suppressed, embedded or low status voices of texts, to fault lines in the narrative. For Knights this raises doubts as to the existence of any fixed, bounded, firmly defined concept of the masculine self, leading him to conclude that masculinity is in fact 'an unstable sign'. We should therefore reflect on the significance of any comment from a character which appears to be out of context, or of a distant memory which suddenly intrudes upon a character's thoughts, which is the case with Fileno.

It is ironic that Fileno should feel excluded and powerless at the very moment when his virility is being proved. His ability to respond with pride to the occasion of the imminent arrival of his child is arrested by the sheer fear and powerlessness he feels. His behaviour demonstrates how fathers were alienated from the birth process; while Celia is denied power by the midwife, Fileno for his part is denied any access to the birth by the dictates of convention. Once the child has been born, Fileno sweats profusely and collapses into an armchair. When he is finally admitted into the birth room he is astounded to find his wife looking healthy and happy, rather than a physical wreck. He does not respond positively at first, feeling mainly pity for his son: 'Fileno permaneció frío y distante ... No existía en él amor, sino lástima por un pequeño ser insignificante' (110). However, once reassured that his wife and son are well, his emotions turn to warmth and love for both his wife and his new son.

When the narrative is next set in the flat it is Fileno's police colleagues who visit. This follows immediately after gangster Marcelo's visit to the morgue. The focus on the dead body of the gangster Blanco in the space of the morgue now switches to the living body of police sergeant Aguilar, as he stands in the doorway of the entrance to Fileno's flat. His body hardly fits the space, creating a comic and disrespectful image:

> El corpachón de Segundo Aguilar, que amenazaba hacer estallar el uniforme
> policíaco, pareció demasiado voluminoso para insertarse en el hueco de la
> puerta. (212)

The presence of several policemen in the small flat is both unusual and humorous. They are motorcycle police and supposedly highly mobile, yet here they are unexpectedly confined in a private space at a time when that space is distinctly female-gendered. This portrayal is reinforced when the sergeant comments that the police force is a laughing stock as far as the public is

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concerned: 'La gente se ríe de nosotros y cree que tenemos miedo' (248). It is widely known, he points out, that the country's President had met with gangster groups and drawn up pacts with them, making any efforts on the part of the police futile (see Chapter One). Whilst the visiting women are clearly not out of place, the power and authority of the police is subverted and their masculinity challenged by their presence in the flat. Police power is further diminished and threatened since it is the gangsters who control the very public spaces which Fileno and his colleagues are supposed to patrol and protect. The theme of threatened masculinity recurs throughout the novel, as men on both sides of the law appear to have problems with their sexual identies.

The space of the flat also functions as a container for the several types of policemen and their differing motivations. Carreras, and others of his kind, obsessed with the idea of hunting down the criminal, and preferring to use a pistol or machine-gun in order to inflict the nastiest of injuries, have earned the motorcycle police a bad reputation. Carreras complains that Fileno does not possess the necessary drive for police work. Fileno, with his more tolerant approach, and Carreras, more prone to violence, exemplify two very different types of policemen with motives as different as those to be found amongst the gangsters. Pogolotti found it ironic that the victim of the novel, Fileno, is himself an instrument of repression, given that so many have lost their lives over the years in the struggle for justice for the Republic:

> Tras la interminable lucha agónica de sus hijos por alcanzar una forma
> superior de convivencia … que la víctima sea un agente del servicio de
> represión, resulta un sarcasmo sangriento. (Pogolotti 1958: 193)

Furthermore, the brutality of Carreras and his thirst for death are accentuated all the more within the female-gendered space of the flat and the start of a new life.

The flat also provides an opportunity for an insight into housing conditions in the city. While awaiting the birth, Fileno's thoughts turn to the building in which his flat is located. The small flats remind him of the prison cells he saw on the Isla de Pinos: '¿Y qué otra cosa sino celdas de presidio eran aquellas piezas de puntal muy bajo, calurosas, donde había que moverse con mucho cuidado para no tropezar con los muebles?' (54). He blames the erection of such a building on the housing shortage and the sudden rise in sugar prices (see Chapter One). Fileno's view is poignant, given that the raison d'être of his job is to put criminals behind bars. With the gathering of his

police colleagues at the flat to congratulate the couple, the image of the prison assumes a more collective significance. Whilst the forces of law and order are in effect imprisoned in this very private domain, public spaces outside such as the café and the park are not policed. This focus on the isolation of the individual is another aspect of the concept of alienation prevalent in existentialism.

The layout of the various flats is a reflection of the different social levels of their tenants:

> El pasaje se extendía entre dos hileras de apartamentos: siete a cada lado, sin
>
> contar los dos del frente, que otorgaban a sus ocupantes una aparencia de
>
> más prestigio social y de más próspera economía. (54)

Poor maintenance has created a hygiene hazard in the block, with human and animal excrement left unattended: 'los inquilinos tenían que someterse a las exigencias y abusos del propietario, que ni siquiera se había ocupado de mantener un conserje o encargado' (55).
Marinello and García Ronda commended the writer's depiction of this typical *casa de vecindad* of the time. For Marinello, this is a successfully realistic depiction of the building: 'El tono de la vida en la casa de vecindad –desocupación, chisme, bondad, sexo, desdicha, azar…-, está bien traducido' (Marinello 1977: 299). Dania García Ronda found the description of Fileno's flat accurate for the times, and explained how the novel demonstrates the tendency for what was once a large house to be sub-divided into smaller rooms, in order to enable greater profits to be made for the owner (Serpa 1980: xvii). It is in such depictions that García Ronda has located Serpa's strength. However, Serpa does not get to the root of the social problems of the day, García Ronda argued, whilst conceding that the novel provokes reflection on a crucial period in Cuba's history (Serpa 1980: xviii). Nevertheless, these critics did not examine the atmosphere within the flat, or what function the flat might serve. The spatial reading in this thesis shows that an analysis of social problems was not the author's intention; rather, it is the gender and sexual identities of particular social groups that are important, as they are exposed in this novel.

Although the flat is a distinctly urban space, it is also interestingly used to explore the plight of country-dwellers, through the conversation of the policemen in Fileno's flat. Some very disadvantaged social groups live in the same block as Fileno. Many are families recently arrived from the country with few possessions. One such family is so poor as to have no furniture whatsoever in their living quarters. It is interesting that the policemen recognise the

disadvantaged position of the displaced country-dweller, yet do not seem to acknowledge their own lack of power. They view people in the country with disdain, referring to their starving bodies:

> Y había que ver la estampa de aquellos guajiritos: flacos como cujes, sin
> zapatos ni ropas, con un color de tierra seca que daba grima. … Todos andan
> comidos de lombrices, hechos unos esqueletos y con la barriga hinchada
> como un globo. Dicen que los parásitos. Todos tienen parásitos. (219)

However, most of the characters involved in this discussion concede that it is not the country-dwellers' fault that they are in this displaced position, because the rural economy has long been neglected by successive governments. Some, however, remain cynical: 'El guajiro le echaba la culpa al gobierno de que no lloviera. Es lo mismo en todo' (220). Most ultimately agree that the plantation owners are guilty of exploitation and of underpaying the workers, with the collusion of the government: '¿Tú sabes que en muchos lugares los compradores de tabaco son al mismo tiempo gente de la política?' (220). Rural workers are located miles away in distance from the space of the flat, but are nonetheless accorded some sympathy from those here in the city. As we have seen, the countryside was generally perceived to be a place of death and starvation, as is represented in *Los Valedontes*, set only a few years earlier.

The flat, therefore, is an interesting use of space in that both genders are shown to lack power, and, further, male sexual identity is questioned and threatened. Alternation of the flat with the public spaces of the café and morgue adds extra depth to the presentation of issues of life, death and identity, as does the extradiegetic space of the convent, which is the next space under consideration.

The convent

Access to the convent is gained through Lina, the third female character to appear at the flat to see the new baby. Her position as a woman deeply affected by her upbringing in a convent is placed within the context of the previous discussion between Nazaria and Carmela on *santería* and Catholicism. Domínguez has cited Lina as an example of:

> The ideal female (who) was supposed to be unconcerned with sex. Fear of
> sex was fostered in upper- and middle-class females by all socialising agents
> from overprotective parents to the religious school. (Domínguez 1987: 38)

The convent deserves consideration as a spatial entity in itself, since although it does not explicitly feature in the novel as a space in which current events takes place, it nonetheless forms part of the spatial backcloth to this novelistic world, and affects the reading of the actual spaces. Lina started her education in a convent, which, far from offering a protective and nurturing space, functioned as a repressive environment. As Foucault argued, convents are a type of prison (see Chapter Two). They are particularly conducive spaces for the manipulation of young minds and bodies; girls in convents are deliberately kept apart from the rest of society, and are rarely affected by any influences which may run counter to the indoctrinating world view held by the nuns. The whole ethos of the convent is that the girls should not be contaminated by anything held to be impure, be it in mind or body. Yet the isolated space of the convent has allowed the Catholic religion, articulated by the nuns, to teach women to be fearful of their own bodies and their intimate, personal spaces. In Catholic dogma, the sole purpose of sex is procreation. The convent is thus an enclosing, limiting, and exclusively female-gendered space. It can be compared to the flat from this perspective, and more specifically to the birth room, in which procedures remain entrenched and unquestioned. Both the midwife Martina and the convent sisters represent a repressive matriarchal system, which Lina has internalised.

Lina has carried this formative early experience into her later life outside the convent, allowing her relationship with her own body to remain tarnished by her memory of a space she no longer occupies. As Bachelard contended, people carry the memory of past spaces within them long after leaving that space (see Chapter Two). Lina's previous confinement within the cloistered physical space of the convent echoes Celia's confinement within one room of the small flat. The process of childbirth limits Celia, whilst the dictates of religion limit Lina's horizons. As long as Lina has no conscious insight into the factors which have shaped her existence, she has little chance of resisting the position of debasement in which she is so firmly entrenched.

Lina is described as 'de una pueril dulzura de merengue' (158). Like the character Piedad in *Romelia Vargas*, she is presented as childlike and passive, totally entrenched within the belief system in which she was raised. The hegemony exerted by the Hermanas de la Caridad meant that Lina was conditioned to believe that women's bodies contain 'funciones sucias, repulsivas, pero

inevitables' (159). The world-view imparted by the nuns was to mark Lina deeply for the rest of her life, in terms of her attitude to sexuality. The nuns had even draped sheets over the various female statues around the convent, with the result that: 'las niñas imaginaban bajo aquellas telas, no la casta desnudez del mármol, sino algo horrible, comprometedor y espantable' (159). Powerless to resist the domination of the nuns, Lina was set up for life to believe that 'no tenía derecho a nada' (158). The nuns even arranged her marriage, but failed to prepare her adequately for it.

Lina's convent childhood and subsequent marriage have shaped her current persona; during her twenty-five years of marriage, Lina has kept hidden her secret desire to have a child, as if this perfectly acceptable wish were something of which to be ashamed. However, this was not out of genuine maternal yearning, but out of her wish to atone for the 'sin' of 'committing' the sexual act with her husband. Furthermore, her husband is prone to violence, causing Lina to have frequent nightmares. Like the Vargas children in the house in *Romelia Vargas*, Lina's upbringing in the convent has affected her whole personal and social development.

Whilst Lina's developing sexual identity was repressed during her upbringing in the convent, Celia is cast in terms of passive child-bearer with no identity outside maternity. There are wider textual implications for the shame felt by Lina, because the extradiegetic embedded convent space colours the reading of the host or 'mother' space of the flat, reinforcing the negative view of women perpetrated by the nuns, and linking this to Celia and Martina. These two spaces tell us is that it is women themselves who perpetrate this negative view of female sexuality.

The café

Unlike the *acosado*, who must seek refuge only in interior spaces, the gangsters prefer to inhabit more anonymous public spaces, whilst the flat and the convent are essentially female-gendered spaces, the more public spaces in the novel are not surprisingly male-gendered. If the domestic space of the flat undermines the power of the motorcycle police force and questions their masculinity, then the public space of the café performs the same function as regards the gangsters, in that it too undermines their masculinity. There are certain textual strategies which link the two spaces; one of these is the use of sound. The second section of the novel is situated in the café, with the focus, as in the flat, on sounds created by onomatopoeic use of language: 'Claro tintineo de vasos de cristal golpeados por cucharillas. ... Retintín metálico de las bandejas al caer

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sobre el vitrolite de las mesas' (19). Dominating these sounds is the Mexican *bolero* music from the jukebox:

> Y por encima de todos los ruidos, dominando todos los ruidos, el escándalo
>
> de la ortofónica eléctrica, que derramaba como un jarabe espeso y
>
> empalagoso la sensiblera melodia de un bolero, entonado por un trío con
>
> acento mexicano. (19)

The portrayal of the black woman who dances in the first café scene anticipates the arrival of the black *orisha* Nazaría in the flat. The woman in the café becomes the focus of attention for gangsters Marcelo and Silverio, the emphasis being, as with the women in the flat, on her physical features.

The café preserves the gangsters' marginal position with the result that they are neither full-blown convicted criminals nor decent, law-abiding citizens. They feel comfortable neither in the domestic nor in the public domain, and the café functions as their home. Whilst the flat is Fileno's home and conforms to a socially expected model, the café for the gangsters is not simply a place to meet friends over a drink; it has become one of the few refuges open to them, in effect a substitute home. The technique of juxtaposing chapters in alternation between the domesticity of Fileno's home, and the uncertainty of daily life for the gangsters who spend most of their time in public places, highlights their alienation from the conventional model of the family unit. The gangsters can only relate to each other, forming father-son relationships between the older and younger gangsters.

Silverio spends a lot of time in the café because his position as a well-known and respected gangster means that he cannot even visit his own family in safety. When he visits his sister he is putting her life in danger. Moreover, he does not believe that he can ever marry and have a family, since he knows that one day he will be the target of another gangster's bullet. Instead, he must remain on the fringes of society, never knowing the security and contentment of a life to which the majority of society aspires:

> Pero no me atrevo a casarme. … Ni siquiera me echaré una mujer fija, que es
>
> lo mismo que casarse. Me acuesto con las que puedo, pero no pongo cariño

en ninguna y hago lo posible para que ellas no lo pongan en mí. Pero a veces

me siento solo. Y no hay cosa más terrible que la soledad. (131)

Silverio alludes to a state of existential *angst,* a feeling of total powerlessness to change his position, for this is his destiny: 'Yo sé que no puedo cambiar mi destino, pero tengo que enfrentarme con él' (131). Like others, he dare not look inwards out of fear: 'Tenemos miedo de mirar hacia nuestro propio interior, donde no encontraríamos más que el vacío' (133). He, more than all the other characters, epitomises the widespread existential despair of the 1940s and 1950s.

The gangsters' presence in the café would not have been questioned, since most public places were male-dominated. The café environment thus allows the author to convey their opinions on a variety of topics, from politics and history, to women, marriage and the role of destiny. It also allows the gangsters to reveal their different motivations for being in the group, much as the policemen in the flat discuss their different motives. Similar discussions about the different rationales amongst revolutionaries are also to be found in *Romelia Vargas*. The male-gendered nature of the café space is reinforced by their discussions about their attitudes towards women, whom they see as playing no part in politics or revolutionary struggle.

The café is also used to provide a platform for discussions on the role of the intellectual and his position in society. Dr Castier, as a frustrated novelist, journalist and teacher, clearly stands out as different from the gangsters. Whilst he does not share their belief in violence as a means of social protest, he would like their votes in his bid to enter politics. When Castier leaves the café the gangsters ridicule his bid for power and recognition in politics. The café is a space traditionally associated with the *tertulias*, a place where intellectuals would discuss weighty issues. Now it is the intellectual Castier who feels ostracised. Yet it is his presence in the café which stimulates a discussion on the role of intellectuals on the part of the gangsters. The fact that it is a group of gangsters here who are discussing politics and the role of the intellectual, rather than the intellectuals themselves, is subversive, implying that gangsters played a role in the shaping of ideas in society at this time.

Most of the gangsters ultimately concede that there are some intellectuals who have contributed to the revolutionary struggle. The discussion highlights the position of most intellectuals as very much part of the political and social scene, often wielding considerable power, and not on the

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fringes like the politically aspiring Dr. Castier. It appears that the intellectual lacks power only as an individual case in this novel, and not as a collective. However, the mere fact that gangsters are discussing the role of intellectuals in society is an indication of some degree of collusion between theses two groups.

In the café, therefore, the excluded and alienated position of the gangsters can be compared to the position of Fileno in the flat. Whereas the flat serves to contest the masculinity of the police, the scenes in the café highlight the inability of gangsters to express their masculinity in non-violent ways. Their isolated position and lack of power leads them to question their masculine identity, because they are unable to fulfil their role as procreators. The café as a male-gendered space reveals the position of the gangsters to be as polarised as the female characters in the flat and the convent. The message here is that single-gendered spaces, be they male or female, are unhealthy both for the individuals who inhabit them and for the future of society, adding a further nuance to Massey's theory of gendered space. By implication, the whole of society is alienated and robbed of coherence. The café is therefore a site in which a crisis in male identity and in the broader shaping of society is exposed. This space is all the more effective, however, when considered alongside the car, as we shall now see.

The car

The café is not the only space in which the gangsters are obliged to make their home; they may also use the car. A standard feature of the gangster novel, the car is a space that is neither completely public nor totally private. The gangsters appear to have the freedom to patrol the city's streets by car, without police intervention, and they are often transported in chauffeur-driven cars. Such a mode of travel gives them anonymity and protection, enabling clandestine activities to take place. The car enables them to function in a virtual vacuum, providing a crucial tool in the exercise of their power, since the gangsters can act swiftly and incognito. They are thus both in control and also removed from the seat of responsibility. If the driver, however, feels that he lacks power in the public domain, he can compensate by exerting control and power over the car, which is potentially as lethal a weapon as his gun. An example of this is when Tiro de Gracia vies with another motorist for possession of the road. His masculinity is at stake and the loser's is threatened. The chauffeur's name is interesting because it implies that death is a better alternative than life for the victim and that the act of shooting is a favour.

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The car may give the illusion of power and control, but it also confines the driver and his passengers. The use of the chauffeur-driven car, therefore, both protects and isolates those in power from the public at large, as well as from their enemies. Gangsters are thus displaced people, who need to move around through space like tramps within indefinite, obscure places. As a type of space the car is unique; private, enclosed, and perceived as masculine, its driver can move between different public spaces, yet remain within his own private space.

Like the train in *Los Valedontes*, the car moves through space and time. But unlike the teacher's train journey the gangsters' car rides generally lack purpose, and they are often circular. Whereas the train does not afford much privacy, the car is a private space offering a degree of anonymity. Moreover, unlike the train, the car does not necessarily have a destination; trains always travel from one specific place to another, whilst it is possible for the car to follow an indefinite path, through labyrinthine streets. Although the car and the café both provide the gangsters with substitute homes, these spaces in fact restrict the gangsters and entrench their field of existence, in much the same way as Celia and Lina are restricted by the spaces of the bedroom and the convent.

Compared to Bakhtin's chronotope of the road and the train, which always supposes a linear shape between two points, and usually with a specific purpose, the gangsters' car journeys are far from linear and purposeful. Pogolotti, referring to *el gatillo alegre*[41], to denote the groups of trigger-happy young thugs or gangsters of the late 1940s and early 1950s, viewed this aimlessness as symbolic of the wider vicious circle in which the whole country was caught at the time: 'un reducido círculo del infierno consciente y perenne que vive el país' (Pogolotti 1958: 191). Indicating an animal trap, the title *La trampa* is reflected in the frequent descriptions in the novel of people in terms of animal imagery, trapped within their various spaces, and symptomatic of the naturalist strand in literature.

When veteran gangster Silverio takes the novice Bebo for a ride in his car the conversation begun in the café about different types of gangster and their motivations is continued. The space of the car allows for a comparison between the older gangster, who took part in the 1933 Revolution, and who still retains his revolutionary ideals, and the new younger gangster who is motivated

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[41] The members of the *gatillo alegre* groups consisted of those who were too young to fight against Machado, engaging in violence without the revolutionary goals of their older counterparts. Consisting mainly of students, these action groups disintegrated into gratuitous violence.

only by the desire for violence and kudos. They represent two different types: some are seasoned anti-Machado revolutionaries, such as Marcelo and Silverio, while younger, newer members, represented by Bebo, represent *el gatillo alegre*. As García Ronda has indicated, it is Silverio who seems to have the clearest vision about why he originally became a gangster:

> No tiene ideales y lo sabe. … sabe que la lucha de grupos no conduce a nada, que es sólo un medio de "vivir a costa de la muerte de otros"; sabe que sus acciones no intentan acabar con la injusticia social y sabe que está en un callejón sin salida. (Serpa 1980: xii)

Silverio explains to Bebo that he has no choice but to remain a gangster; his university education was curtailed in the fight against Machado, meaning that after 1933 he had no skills to offer, other than an ability to use a gun. His explanation highlights the process by which he and others like him have become alienated from their own ideals, and were forced to embark on another tack - that of inescapable gangsterism. Powerless to stop this process, Silverio is cast as a helpless pawn.

The title *La trampa* invites speculation about the nature of the trick or trap to which the novel alludes, whilst the epigraph 'cada cual está en su destino como en una trampa' (7) reinforces the concept of trickery or entrapment and links it to general human destiny. The flat, café and car are portrayed as cages and traps, establishing a link between the title and the epigraph. Gangster Silverio believes that dicing with death is the gangster's destiny, and like the *acosado*, who feels a certain pre-destiny about his fate: 'Repartidos están los papeles en este Teatro' (Carpentier 1956: 15), Silverio believes that it was a deceptive and controlling God who assigned him his role. Similarly, the various characters who appear in the flat are manipulated as if on a stage by a controlling director.

Bebo's reasons for joining the gangsters are misplaced; more interested in achieving kudos from his peers, and in the outward show of *machismo*. Bebo is not far removed from policeman Carreras in his motivation and penchant for killing, yet they are supposed to operate on opposite sides of the law. In spite of Silverio's warnings about the dangers of the gangster life as they and Bebo drive around in the car, Bebo remains excited about committing his first murder, an act he feels he must perform in order to attain power as a gangster. Bebo constitutes a rogue element even within the gangster group. It is significant that it is his bullet which kills Fileno, since as a

representative of the new generation of gangster, Bebo is not even aware that all he is doing is perpetrating the violence which was started in order to bring down the former dictator and create a new and successful social order, one which has not come to fruition.

The car, therefore, coupled with the café, functions as a substitute for the gangsters' lost domestic spaces. It is a special type of space that subverts previously held conceptions about the car as a modern symbol of freedom and escape, and of male sexual prowess. Here the car functions as a restricting, enclosing and alienating space, one which prevents the gangsters from encountering the non-criminal public and from forming conventional relationships. If during the 1950s the car was generally perceived as representing modernity, power, wealth and freedom, then for these gangsters it characterises their very lack of freedom. It has become a space of entrapment, a sealed unit that limits their lives and challenges their masculinity. In this novel the car epitomises the absurdity and futility of the gangsters' existence, and highlights their powerlessness to assert their masculinity.

The park

Given that the flat is a space in which the masculinity of policemen is questioned and where women's sexuality is suppressed by other women, and that the café and the car limit the masculine identity of gangsters, the park can be read as a space in which gender and sexual identity are destabilised and obscured. In this novel the space of the park is used to explore the plight of the homosexual in Cuba in the early 1950s, mainly through the character of journalist and would-be politician Dr. Castier. He is reluctant to walk through the park on his way home from work, fearing both the people he is likely to encounter, and also the latent desires and urges they might unleash in him. He is not even able to acknowledge to himself that his fears centre around the homosexual activities practised in the park:

> Nunca le había gustado transitar por la oscuridad de los parques, adonde
> concurrían parejas de novios a besarse y manosearse y ciertas clases de tipos
> a buscar a otros como ellos o peores aún, con quienes satisfacían apetitios
> inconfesables. (98)

Like the park in *Romelia Vargas*, it is probable that this park is larger than the small, glorified squares which were typical of Cuban cities (see Chapter One), given that Castier could have

saved considerable time if he had the courage to traverse it. It is on his way home from meeting the gangsters in the café that Castier has the option of crossing the park. This space, in which clandestine activities take place that operate outside of conventional concepts of gendered behaviour, is consequently read in the light of the male-gendered space of the café. If the park in *Romelia Vargas* is a space in which unexpected and untamed sexual urges are unleashed, and in *El acoso* the park provides a sensual foretaste of sexual pleasure, then here in *La trampa* the park represents a more general threat in the form of uncharted gender and sexual territory.

However, unlike the park in *Romelia Vargas*, and like the convent in this novel, the park does not actually feature as a space in which narrative action takes place, since Castier does not physically enter the park. It exists in the narrative as an extradiegetic, reported space, much of the information about its users coming from a journalist. We gain access to what may be going on in the park through Castier's thoughts. Like Fileno, Castier recounts a story from his own history, as he dithers at the edge of the park. The fact that Castier has these thoughts by the park is significant because his next train of thought is about his relationship with the gangsters, and how different he feels in comparison to them. His work and marriage already mark him out as different from them, but despite the trappings of conventionality he feels debased and powerless as a mere journalist, believing that he is more than capable of writing great literature, and carving out a career in politics. Castier's wife has complete power over him, leaving him afraid of arriving home late, lest he incur her wrath. Described as 'una gobernadora' (94), she is portrayed in terms of a dictator, and Castier's fear of questioning his wife's authority emphasises his doubts over his masculinity.

Avoidance of the park adds considerable time to his journey home, and he hesitates for quite a while as he wonders whether to take the more expensive option of a taxi. Whilst the car journeys made by the gangsters are circular and undefined, the park as a space is usually crossed by people with a specific direction and destination, as van Baak has indicated: 'while in the city centre or market-place the trajectories are linked with purposes …, a park consists entirely (or almost entirely) of trajectories' (van Baak 1983: 43). Castier had recently received anonymous correspondence urging him, in his capacity as a journalist, to launch a campaign against 'indecentes afeminados' (98) in the Prado y Virtudes park, an ironic name, given the nature of the activities within. Castier reflects on the recent comments of his journalistic colleagues; a police reporter has told the incredulous Castier that people like those in the park are also to be found 'en bares y cabarets (donde) *las locas* - … - se exhiben completamente *partidas*, no ya resignadas,

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sino orgullosas de ser y parecer lo que son' (98). The individuals to whom the reporter refers are feminised, showing how homosexuals were viewed alongside women, and deprived of any possibility of virility (see Chapter One). The technique of using the voice of the reporter to articulate this information means that the narrator and also Dr. Castier are distanced from the subject matter. The reporter goes on to offer further insights into the plight of homosexuals and how they were perceived:

> Hace veinte años la condición de invertido era la más degradante que podía
> sufrir un individuo. Nadie entraba en consideraciones de orden médico o
> social. No había comprensión, ni siquiera lástima para el homosexual, que
> sólo encontraba desprecio y burlas. Por eso, el que lo era lo ocultaba. (98)

The reporter comments, however, that things have changed in more recent times. Homosexuals are now viewed as 'interesantes y simpáticos', and even envied and copied. He repeats a well-used phrase: 'son cosas que ocurren hasta en las mejores familias' (98).

It is significant that Castier's thoughts on his relationship with the gangsters should be so closely linked to his thoughts and fears over homosexuality as he wonders whether to step into the park. His thoughts go back to the conversations with the gangsters in the café, and he is outraged at some of the comments directed towards him: 'sintió que de nuevo lo invadía un sentimiento de furia por haber soportado mansamente las torpes alusiones del "Ramirito ese"'(99). He feels intimidated by the gangsters, yet part of him wishes to be like them, going as far as to say 'Yo soy uno de ustedes' (100), but he immediately regrets it, knowing that it stemmed from a position of subordination: 'había inspirado en un propósito de adulación, una especie de soborno, que en éste instante lo avergonzaba' (100). On the one hand he wants their votes in his bid to enter local politics, whilst on the other his intellectual aspirations and journalistic career set him against violence as a strategy of protest. The implication is that he is a closet homosexual - he was set apart from other children as a boy and told he was different, he is dominated by his wife, and suffers from stomach ulcers, a possible symptom of inner conflict and stress. The gangsters may indeed epitomise virility for him and this may be the reason for his attraction to them, but he also resists this tendency, ending up in neither faction and suffering for his indecision. Buchbinder argues that homosexuals are sometimes regarded as failures in terms of the prevailing view of masculinity, and are consequently subject to censure:

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> For a man publicly and unmistakably to give up his claim to masculine
>
> power and privilege may be to invite not only the disapproval of other men
>
> but also their violence. (Buchbinder 1994: 18)

Castier may be also fearful of public reaction to any doubts over his masculinity. His plight can be compared to that of Lina, if one considers Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's argument that homophobia is inherent in any patriarchal society, and that the oppression of the homosexual is 'a product of the same system whose rules and relations oppress women' (Sedgwick 1985: 3).

Marinello is the only critic to have mentioned the sexual elements in the novel, maintaining that sexual preoccupations pervade the narrative: 'La preocupación sensual –sexual, mejor- , discurre subterránea, y a veces a flor de la letra, por todo el libro' (Marinello 1977: 299). Furthermore, he views this as a weakness:

> Cuando nos preguntamos cómo en medio de tan evidentes logros y de tan
>
> buena gracia narrativa se filtran tales debilitamientos, se descubre que el
>
> entendimento del asunto, el radio y naturaleza de los problemas y conflictos
>
> que el relato cubre, han dado ocasión a tales manquedades. (Marinello 1977:
>
> 299)

A spatial analysis, however, leads to the conclusion that far from constituting a weakness, the portrayal of sexual identity is one of the novel's important themes.

For Castier, the park is a threshold over which he dare not tread, resulting in his decision to avoid it altogether. It is clear that he is indeed on the threshold of great personal change, and that he would have to enter into a more public domain to achieve this. His dilemma encapsulates an important current running throughout the novel – that of contested masculinity. The space of the park, therefore, as a zone of experimentation for gender and sexuality, contrasts with both the essentially female-gendered flat and also the male-gendered café and car. Those who thought their gender and sexual identity stable and fixed are led to question their positions. Furthermore, the park is a space that is ill defined and nebulous in character, adding weight to Massey's view of space as shifting and difficult to qualify. The park adds a further nuance to her argument, since it cannot be defined as either male or female-gendered. It shows us that when spaces are

indefinable in gender terms, they become suspect, marginalised sites, regarded with hostility by both the authorities and the public, and subject to manipulation by the press.

In conclusion, it is clear that *La trampa* is not just a simple gangster novel. The analysis of physical spaces highlights how three often oppositional groups - policemen, gangsters and homosexuals - share similar experiences of powerlessness and exclusion, linking them to widespread notions of existentialism prevalent at this time. Marcelo Pogolotti stated that the novel 'no presenta más que un sector limitado' (Pogolotti 1958: 193), yet he did concede that the groups portrayed provide a sample of the wider social context. The most important aspect revealed by my analysis is the degree to which traditionally masculine identities are questioned. In the flat it is policemen whose masculine identity is ridiculed and contested. In the café and car the gangsters are also shown to be in a threatened position in terms of their masculinity, whilst through the device of the park the unstable position of homosexuals in society is expounded. The only identities on stable ground in this novel are those of women, but this well-established female identity is a constructed and negative one that deprives women of any authority over their own identity.

Sexual identity is therefore a central theme of the novel, with many of the male characters preoccupied with insecurities despite their very different roles. Indications of threatened gender identity permeate the novel: car drivers compete over the physical space of the city, their masculinity at stake; Bebo, the young gangster, reacts with horror at having his masculinity questioned, seeking to prove it by committing a murder, whilst a politician is called a homosexual by way of insult.

The examination of spaces in *La trampa* has revealed that if the gangsters consider that it is they who have total charge of public spaces, then this is an illusion. Their ability to dominate physical space is shown to be contested by unseen forces which are too strong and impersonal with which to engage. Juan Marinello has suggested that American imperialism distorted Cuban life, and that young people did not recognise the cause of their dissatisfaction and limitations (Marinello 1977: 235), whilst in the introduction to *La trampa*, García Ronda accused Serpa of failing to attack the hegemony of the United States (Serpa 1980: xiv). García Ronda's suggestion that the trigger-happy novice gangster Bebo is: 'también un producto de la malformación republicana' (Serpa 1980: xiii), did not take account of the effect of social dislocation on his sexual identity, nor on that of the other groups in the novel. A homophobic view of the novel might find this lack of

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virility amongst prevalent social groups to be the very cause of social malaise. However, the juxtaposition of the gangster, the homosexual and the police in this novel suggests that the contested state of male virility and identity is an inevitable and disturbing side effect of a dislocated and dysfunctional society.

This analysis of the alternation of spaces has exposed several binaries in the novel: life/death, male/female, purity/immorality, violence/pacificism. The final scene of the novel, with the new family man Fileno as protagonist alone in the street, is as public and film-like as the opening scene is private and theatrical. The large and impersonal public space of the street contrasts with the small and solitary figure of Fileno, who has entered gangster-controlled territory. A new father, he is thinking his private thoughts about the future of his son. The gangster Bebo shoots Fileno from the vantage point of the car, destroying one family's life, symbolic of many. The gangsters destroy what is held to be the conventional model of the family unit, and in so doing wreck their own chances of forming relationships, creating families and perpetuating the species. The choice of violent action brings about the gangster's self-emasculation.

Unable to form relationships of their own because of fear of retribution, the gangsters continue their path of destruction, thus raising questions about the future of this generation and the future of Cuban society. The novel leads the reader to consider what might be the next phase of Cuba's history, and whether the country itself is poised on the edge of a threshold of social change. Furthermore, the references to animals, to blood, and to the human species within the flat, set against the plight of the gangster as being no longer able to maintain traditional relationships and procreate, raises questions about the survival of future Cuban generations. Towards the end of the novel the intellectual Dr. Dávila does indeed pose the question: '¿Dónde está lo que nosotros imaginábamos que iba a ser Cuba?' (301), indicating his awareness that Cuba's very future was uncertain.

CONCLUSION

In the Introduction it was proposed that when a spatial analysis is applied to Cuban novels of the 1950s, as opposed to a conventional analysis of realist novels as representations of society, these novels are shown to be more worthy of critical attention than has hitherto been maintained. The strategy of drawing on Stanton's study of one 1950s novel, *El acoso*, to provide the methodology for the analysis of the other three novels, has unearthed several important issues. Her spatial approach to this novel resulted in a reading along identity lines, and when applied to three other novels of the period, this spatial approach allows for yet more findings concerning issues of identity. These novels do not merely contain simple and predictable descriptions of daily life in 1950s Cuba. Rather, they address questions of cultural, racial, gender and sexual identity of a sometimes surprising and controversial nature. The study of the novels in this thesis helps to demonstrate that the swing away from the novel that has occurred in Hispanic scholarship since the 1970s, in favour of other forms of cultural output such as film and visual studies, could profitably be reconsidered.

In Chapter One, it was explained that, beneath a superficial appearance of prosperity in relation to the rest of Latin America, Cuba was struggling to balance its uneven distribution of resources, concealing a whole range of social and economic problems. Cuba's economy continued to be strongly linked to that of North America, with the result that the business sector of the middle class could not exert the power it might have otherwise enjoyed. In terms of cultural identity, the middle class in particular attempted to emulate a North American lifestyle, with music, food, cars, fashion, business and education following American trends. Some of its educated sectors suffered from unemployment, although not as much as the working class, which also experienced cycles of seasonal unemployment as well as general underemployment. Access to education was uneven, with the rural poor faring worst. The established racial hierarchy dictated that whites were superior to blacks and that the social ranking of *mulatos* lay between the two, although boundaries were not rigid and were open to self-definition. The power of Catholicism had waned, with *santería* the popular form of religion. Cuba was characterised by economic distortion, with much of its wealth in the capital and rural areas starved of resources. Space was at a premium in the city, and underexploited in the country.

Politically, by the mid 1950s Cuba had experienced over twenty years of relative stability, following the Revolution of 1933 which brought down the dictator Machado, followed in turn by

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Batista's emerging corporatist coalition with himself as elected President between 1940 and 1944, and the elected civilian Presidents Grau and Prío. Socially, however, Cuba during this period was subject to waves of violent action. From 1933 onwards groups of thugs known as *bonches* operated from the university campus, often incorporating people with official civic and political roles. By the late 1940s this *bonchismo*, although still a feature of campus life, had further developed into three main *grupos de acción*, with whom Prío colluded, corruption was rife at all levels, and violence and terror a daily occurrence. The United States chose to recognise each successive government during these years, turning a blind eye to corruption and the gambling which was often American backed. The excessive lifestyles of the corrupt few were conducted at the expense of the powerless poor, with superficial prosperity masking the cracks beneath the surface of society.

In Chapter One it was also explained that Cuba's cultural output suffered both from external and internal factors. Writers suffered on several counts. Legally bound to work for radio soap production companies, leaving little time for other writing, they were up against a lack of publishers and also an indifferent readership that either had access to and a preference for imported material, or were not sufficiently literate. Furthermore, the cultural elite was marginalized and fragmented, some favouring a political approach and others a more evasive, aesthetic stance, whilst other forms of literature such as poetry and the short story enjoyed more success than fiction. Furthermore, writers of literature were widely and disfavourably associated with being homosexual. Literature in all its forms was also losing ground to other forms of entertainment. Music, theatre and cinema flourished, albeit often imported, and the newer media of radio and television were more attractive to a population that favoured communal entertainment. However, the *tertulia* continued its popularity, as did the literary movement and associated journal, *Orígenes*. The most widely known Cuban fiction writer of the period was Carpentier, and notable genres included the detective and gangster novels, the rural-based novel, often presenting a romanticised view, with novels and other forms often displaying strong elements of the absurd or the existential. Despite this variety, critics have tended to classify novels of the period as social realist.

After the analysis of all four novels, however, it is pertinent to refer back to that part of Chapter One concerned with gender relations in Cuba in the 1950s. Men and women operated according to fixed, well-established codes of behaviour, with men exerting hegemonic power and women as their subordinates, expected to behave in a submissive manner in accordance with patriarchy.

Family honour and reputation was sacrosanct, and its reputation constantly guarded. Sexuality was not a topic for debate in the public arena, and homosexuals were marginalised. Their behaviour was rationalised as a necessary by-product of an historical shortage of women, and of the perceived strength of the sexual appetite of the Cuban male. Gender and sexual identity, therefore, were apparently fixed and unchallenged.

The fresh approach offered by this thesis to physical spaces as represented in these novels has suggested, however, that several kinds of identities, including cultural, racial, gender and sexual, were not as stable as might have been concluded from the conditions outlined in Chapter One. In Chapter Two it was argued that considerations of the spatial had historically been the realm of the scientist and philosopher, whose spatial vision was static and fixed. Since the mid-twentieth century, however, scholars have pressed for a view of space as dynamic and open, and for a spatial approach to the arts, as opposed to the previous emphasis on the temporal. Both Foucault and Lefèbvre held that certain spaces in the real world, termed heterotopias, are subject to special treatment, being removed from public scrutiny, and often working in opposition to other spaces. Their work has provided a useful framework for the study of these novels. Whilst García Canclini's focus on hybrid spaces, or spaces that operate at a cultural crossroads, might at first seem to be useful for a consideration of Cuba with its Spanish colonial past and strong links with North America in the twentieth century, this way of examining space has not proved to be useful here.

Literary theorists of space have considered spaces represented in literature in terms of their relationship to place (Relph, Tuan, Bal), the domestic home as a site of memory and in terms of the shapes within (Bachelard), and liminal or threshold spaces (Bakhtin). Some spaces have even been theorised in their own right, such as parks (Lutwack), and a typology of spaces in literature has been instigated, as yet incomplete. Literary spaces have been broadly classified in terms of binaries, such as public/private, exterior/interior, and ancient/modern. The greatest amount of scholarship has been devoted, however, to the concept of spatial form. Critics have focussed on levels (Frye), patterns, shapes and metaphors (Mitchell), space as ideology (Mitchell), and space as a mental construct (Smitten). Spatial form has now replaced setting as an important focus used by critics. It is non-literary geographer Doreen Massey, however, who has made the most significant contribution to the study of space as gendered and contested, and who has shown that spaces are shifting and fluid.

Conclusions can now be drawn about the function of physical space in the four novels as a group, comparing and contrasting the seventeen spaces selected within them across a variety of themed axes, and thereby demonstrating the full breadth of the value of this re-evaluation through spatial analysis.

The train in *Los Valedontes* and the car in *El acoso* can be compared under the obvious commonality of transport, but more significantly from a theoretical perspective. Whilst the train is a classic realist device used by writers to introduce their readers to a new place, and to focalise reactions to that new place through the eyes of a newcomer, the car is a relatively newer literary device. Given that the train has to move between two fixed points, and stop for periods at points in between, it can be used as a conduit type of space since passengers enter and depart the carriages, looking outwards from within, whilst those outside look inwards at them. Foucault's analysis of the train in relation to space has been useful, yet it can be argued that, as a space, the train is underexploited in this novel.

The car in *La trampa*, on the other hand, is a space that reveals much about the identities of its passengers. Passengers clearly occupy a more fixed position within the car, but like those in the train they can see outwards and also be viewed. However, the car in *La trampa* does not follow a purposeful route. Silverio simply drives around in circles. Whilst the train in *Los Valedontes* functions as a vehicle to demonstrate the neglected state of rural Cuba, the car in *La trampa* allows for an appreciation of the homeless and deracinated nature of the gangsters' existence, and emphasises their marginality. Rather than the traditional symbol of power, it here represents their very powerlessness. The car in *La trampa*, therefore, operates as an effective space because of the light it sheds on the identity of the gangsters.

The restaurant in *Los Valedontes* and the café in *La trampa* can be considered together as public, social spaces for the consumption of refreshment, and as spaces which operate as private or substitute homes. However, it is here that their commonality ceases. The restaurant may indeed be used by local *batey* workers for sustenance, but it also has the more sinister function of a private brothel. Not only do Ramona and her family pay rent to Valedonte as landlord, they are also obliged to let him use their house as a second home, and to give him continued access to their sexual favours, first on the part of Ramona and subsequently via her daughter. Furthermore, when Ramona presents a challenge to Valedonte's authority, the restaurant becomes a space of contestation, as the two vie for power. It is at this point that Massey's gendered view of space is

relevant, as the two protagonists are locked in a battle of wills over possession of the space, with sex as the prize for the victor. Unlike the restaurant, the café is under no threat to its livelihood, given that the gangsters use it as a second home, and that it also functions as a space for the *tertulia*. However, the café does not function as a space in isolation. The alternation of the café with the policeman's flat provides a greater insight into the plight of the gangsters, by showing the potential family life from which the gangsters are excluded. Furthermore, the extradiegetic space of the park in *La trampa* forms a threefold spatial entity which allows for an appreciation of the plight of the homosexual, in the persona of Dr. Castier.

Other important public spaces in these novels include the concert hall, the church, the cinema and the market. The markets as depicted in *El acoso* and *Romelia Vargas*, with the ample description of sights, sounds and smells, are perhaps the most 'realistic' space in these novels, but the function of the market differs in each case. In *Romelia Vargas* the market presents a picture of rotting abundance which is not accessible by all in the city, whilst in *El acoso*, through the descriptions of the caged birds, the market provides an echo of the confined spaces of the concert hall and Mirador. The concert hall offers a reading along the lines of confinement, restriction, voyeurism and expulsion, with the *taquillero* quite literally barred from attending the concert, and the *acosado* increasingly ensnared and ultimately entombed. The imagery and colours of both the Mirador and the church, provide a threefold link connecting the *acosado*'s birth, life, and death. The church for the *acosado* represents a space which offers the potential for a solution to his dilemma. His hopes for salvation, however, cast in Freudian terms by the spatial elements of the church, are then negated by the priest declining to grant him confession, leading to another expulsion.

The cinema is the most modern space in the four novels, yet paradoxically it is located in the rurally based *Los Valedontes*. The manipulation of this space is highly successful, allowing for contrast between the urban and the rural lifestyles, and functioning as a self-reflective space which enables Rojas to be exposed as harbouring a fantasy of a North American version of the cowboy's life. There is also an element of another spatial concept, *mise-en-abyme*, at play here, since inasmuch as the cinema screen holds up a false image of the rural cowboy, so the novel itself exposes the falsity of the traditional view of the countryside as a romantic, idealised place. Bakhtin's theorising of threshold spaces permits a fuller appreciation of this space, because the screen can be read as a threshold space onto which other worlds are projected, enabling viewers access into otherwise remote and inaccessible places, and also because potentially it allows the

culture of these viewers to be contaminated by foreign influences, especially if these viewers are willing recipients. In this case, that foreign culture is North American.

Despite being two very different spaces the convent and the *batey* are considered in tandem here because they share certain similarities when theorised. The convent in *La trampa* is a contained space in which a particular dogma, in this case Catholicism, has become the dominant discourse. For Foucault, the convent is a type of prison, a heterotopia, meaning a special space set aside from society, and performing in opposition to other spaces, such as the brothel. The *batey* in *Los Valedontes* is a similarly confined, enclosed space. It can be argued that its inhabitants are freer to leave than those in the convent, but with no alternative form of employment in the area, they are in effect bound into service to the landowner. Like the convent, a particular discourse dominates the *batey*, in which subordination to an antiquated colonial power structure is demanded, based on the military and landowning oligarchy. Unlike the girls in the convent, however, who have no access to an alternative world-view, the *batey* workers are aware of alternative models for agricultural concerns in North America, and more importantly, of better standards for their workers. Consequently, the workers use their own alternative discourse when able to congregate outside of work hours.

The three spaces that function as parks lead to an appreciation of their treatment by different authors, especially when observations by theorists of the park are taken into account. An analysis of the representation of the park in female terms in two of the novels was made in Chapter Six, using Lutwack's view of the park as a reclining woman. In both *El acoso* and *Romelia Vargas* the park is cast in female gendered terms, as a site of temptation in *El acoso* and of sensuality in *Romelia Vargas*. The park in *La trampa*, however, is related more to hetero- and homosexual male behaviour, whereas in *Romelia Vargas* it has a different function as a site for the planning of political change. Yet it is this park that is most effectively portrayed in sensual terms, with descriptions of the lush vegetation and its effect on the protagonist. However, whilst the park in *La trampa* is a place that is feared because of what might happen, owing to the alleged homosexual encounters within, it is in the park in *Romelia Vargas* that an act of sexual violence actually does occur.

The park in *Romelia Vargas* functions as a dynamic space in terms of its role in bringing about political change, whilst the park in *La trampa* is seen in negative terms by the wider community. The parks in *El acoso* and *La trampa* are bridging spaces, not only linking two different locations,

but also in a more experiential sense involving a change in behaviour. The *taquillero* cannot resist the temptation of the park as a trigger to visit Estrella, whilst Castier contemplates passing through the park yet is fearful of his reactions to any chance encounters he might make. Whilst the parks in these two novels are sites of sensuality and potential personal change, the park in *Romelia Vargas* does far more than this. It operates not only on a sensual level, but also politically, racially and in terms of gender contestation. This space acts as a confluence for the consideration of several controversial and hitherto taboo issues: racial hierarchy, gender power and the place of sex within the wider context of political activity. The disruption to conventional gender relations provoked by Romelia in her role as head of the all male revolutionary cell is more clearly understood with relation to Massey and her view of space as always gendered and contested. Lucas clearly feels that Romelia has invaded the male-dominated territory of the revolutionaries' meeting, despite it being held in the distinctly feminine space of the *quiosco*. His only response is to try to reclaim his territory from what in his view is a challenge presented by a female, by asserting his domination over her.

The four spaces that function as the home - the Mirador and Estrella's apartment in *El acoso*, the house in *Romelia Vargas*, and Fileno's flat in *La trampa* - are essentially female-gendered. The Mirador is a domestic space that provides an insight into the psychology of the *acosado*. Originally a space for a mariner's widow, it now symbolises the *acosado*'s desire to return to his origins via his old nanny, a substitute for the space of the mother herself. With the aid of theories by Lutwack and Bachelard, it can be read as a space for potential transcendence, although this does not transpire. It is also quite literally a mirror space for the *acosado*'s self-reflection and contemplation, yet he cannot see beyond his own degenerate body. Bachelard helps us to view both the Mirador and Estrella's apartment as sites for the evocation of past memories and the sphere of the maternal. Estrella's apartment is an echo of the Mirador space, in that the *acosado* uses the prostitute as another substitute mother. Gender roles are reversed, with Estrella very much in control, and the *acosado*, here referred to simply as 'el hombre', cast in the passive role.

Whilst the two spaces in *El acoso* are substitute spaces for the maternal home, one would expect Fileno's flat in *La trampa* to be a place where the policeman could assert his authority, but this is not the case. He is debased and powerless as the spotlight falls on his wife and the birth of their child, although Celia is equally denegrated by other women. Furthermore, the wider police community is also deprived of power, firstly by their portrayal in the flat but also by alternation with spaces occupied by the gangsters. It is Massey's theory of spaces as gendered that has

helped to elucidate this space. The flat also provides an insight into urban living conditions and the plight of the rural poor upon arrival in the city.

It is the house in *Romelia Vargas*, however, that provides the richest material as a domestic space. The theories of Bachelard in terms of the home as a site of maternal origin and memory, of Bakhtin in terms of threshold spaces, and of Massey in terms of spaces as gendered, have all been useful for the analysis of the house. Of these four domestic spaces, it is the Vargas home that is the more dynamic space, since it is here that the occupants overcome both psychological and physical abuse to take on roles that are socially and politically important, as well as experiencing personal transformations. The domestic spaces in the other novels function in a negative way, contributing to the powerlessness experienced by the *acosado*, the *taquillero*, Fileno and Celia, whereas those in *Romelia Vargas* perform the opposite function, leading each individual to find or re-establish his or her sense of purpose and inner happiness. However, the protagonists in this house are not simply preoccupied with their own personal issues. This house is a site in which a new model for society is proposed, and in which the protagonists make a major contribution to that end.

The domestic spaces in *Romelia Vargas* (the house) and *El acoso* (the Mirador and Estrella's apartment) have shed fresh light on Bachelard's view of the house as a nurturing and reassuring space. Whilst Bachelard's contention that the home contains the echo of past voices holds true as regards the influence of the father figure, in that he continues to exert a damaging effect on his daughter Piedad even after his death, the memory of the childrens' mother does not appear to exert much power. In general, the house in *Romelia Vargas* functions in a manner that is not consistent with the model set out by Bachelard. In fact, the Vargas house exerts a hostile, harmful, if not psychologically damaging effect on its inhabitants, affecting their personalities and sexualities. Yet whilst Piedad and her brother clearly suffer as a result, Romelia is all the more determined to rebel against the forces that shaped her, and turns the negativity exerted by the space of her home into a positive force for action.

In *El acoso*, the original home of the *acosado* does not feature in the novel as a space. However, the novel shows that another space in another place and at another time may act as substitute for the original space of the home. The space occupied by the *acosado*'s old nurse in the Mirador fulfils the role of the original space. Furthermore, whilst Bachelard stressed the importance of the mother figure and familiar objects, in the Mirador it is clear that a substitute person can replace

the mother figure. The small familiar objects listed by Bachelard, in this case the items in the trunk from home and his student days, can be displaced elsewhere but still retain their significance. More disturbingly, the comfort afforded by a substitute maternal space may also be sexual in nature. Whilst the *acosado* clearly does not see his old nurse in terms of a sexual partner, his childhood attachment to her as recipient of her milk is symbolised in this space when he steals her food.

Estrella's apartment functions along similar lines, demonstrating that such substitute spaces may be subject to duplication, or parallelism. The apartment is linked to the Mirador in that both spaces are inhabited by a woman who represents the original mother figure. Estrella, however, also fulfils the role of sexual partner. The substitute space for the maternal home may not necessarily remain a comforting, secure space. The focus on the objects in Estrella's apartment changes from everyday items that are familiar and comforting to her visitors, to other, more sinister items, turning the apartment into another space of confinement and unease.

Whilst the park in *Romelia Vargas* is consistent with Massey's view of space as integral to the production of history, and thus to the possibility of politics (Massey 1994: 269), as a gendered space the park adds to our knowledge of the link between sexuality and space. Although the actions of Lucas would at first imply that this space is strongly male-gendered, Romelia's reaction demonstrates that a space can be contested but not necessarily overthrown in gendered terms, in that her resistance to the role of victim restores the balance of power, leaving the park in this novel, as with the park in *La trampa*, an ultimately *genderless* space, open to all genders and sexualities. In contrast, the restaurant in *Los Valedontes* is a highly contested space in gender terms, as Valedonte and Ramona vie for power and the fulfilment of their aims, with Valedonte ultimately gaining the upper hand. Sexual desire dominates for a while, as if sex itself were an actant, playing a pivotal role in the gender power contest.

The café, the flat and the park in *La trampa* all add further nuances to the concept of space as gendered. The café is clearly a male-gendered space, in which the gangsters and other men claim ownership, but there is no evidence of any contest to this state of affairs. Parks in *La trampa* and *Romelia Vargas* show that when spaces are indefinable, they offer people the opportunity to experiment with their sexuality. However, they may also arouse the suspicion of the press and the authorities, and for some, like Castier, they may become a threat.

Having now drawn together the seventeen spaces in these novels and identified their commonalities and differences, it should be apparent that they cannot be read as straight-forward correlations between the representation of reality in fiction and real life. This analysis of space has exposed some unexpected findings concerning Cuban identities in the 1950s, meaning that this thesis therefore adds to our understanding of, and often contradicts, expected and established notions of identity for this period. Furthermore, these identities can be divided into the urban versus the rural, cultural, racial, gender and sexual identities.

A spatial analysis of even the novel closest to conventional realism, *Los Valedontes*, raises issues about cultural identity on two levels: firstly, the perception of the rural identity by people in the city and in general cultural terms, and secondly, the nature of identity as held by the inhabitants of the rural community. In *Los Valedontes* the countryside is not portrayed in the romantic, idealised light in which it has sometimes been cast by writers and poets. The novel shatters this idyllic vision, and exposes the huge problems faced by its inhabitants. Even the policemen in *La trampa* express concern over the sorry plight of rural-dwellers, showing that people in the towns are not unaware of the situation in the countryside. Any romanticised view of the country is soon dispelled by the abject poverty of the people in the *batey*, the condition of the school and the mechanism of sex as a means of economic survival. When Rojas visits the cinema, he fully assimilates a romanticised, mythical version of his own life in the country, identifying with the cowboys on the screen. The treatment of his behaviour in a satirical light in the novel raises the whole issue not only of what constitutes the true rural identity, but of the willingness of some Cubans to embrace a North American identity, and an underlying call to them to maintain and foster their own intrinsic Cuban identity.

The theme of cultural identity emerges in varying degrees through the spatial analysis of these novels. Given the extent of the influence of North American culture in some sectors of society, as expounded in Chapter One, one might have expected to find more frequent references to a North American lifestyle in these novels, but this is not the case. The clash of cultural identities in the encounter between father and daughter in *Romelia Vargas* is directly related to the legacy of the relationship between Spain and Cuba, and not to any issues over North America. There is one reference to imported music on a jukebox, but it is Mexican. There is an expensive yacht in the harbour and Corn Flakes on one of the gangsters' breakfast table, but little other evidence of American influence. The examination of spaces in *La trampa* has revealed that if the gangsters consider that it is they who have total charge of public spaces, then this is an illusion. García

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Ronda commented on Serpa's failure to attack the hegemony of the United States, whilst Juan Marinello suggested that American imperialism distorted Cuban life, and that young people did not recognise the cause of their dissatisfaction and limitations (see Chapter Six). In these novels there is little evidence that people were unable to establish their own identities without reference to North American culture. Rather, the characters who were agonising over their gender identities were doing so within the context of daily life with a distinctly Cuban flavour.

One of the novels, *Romelia Vargas*, tackles the difficult issue of racial identity. Despite the references to women's revolutionary activities in Cuban history in Chapter One, it still comes as a surprise to find a non-white, working class female occupying a key role in convincing others of the importance of racial, national and gender harmony in the early 1930s. The racial hierarchy is disrupted and inverted in the rape scene in this novel. This shocking fictional event is used as a catalyst by the protagonist to compare racial issues in the United States with those of Cuba, demonstrating her determination to work towards smashing down racial barriers.

It is over gender and sexual identities that the most startling findings in these novels emerge. Identities are shown to be contested and unstable in all but *Los Valedontes.* Whilst in the country gender and identity are not subject to instability, in the city gender identity is shown to be in a state of crisis. That all three urban-based novels demonstrate unstable gender identities leads to the possibility that this instability was a significant feature of the period. Whereas in *El acoso* the conflicts in the *acosado*'s sense of personal identity cannot be resolved by the assertion of his masculinity, ultimately resulting in his death, in *Romelia Vargas* it is mainly female identity that is questioned and either re-established or established for the first time. In *La trampa* the crisis in masculinity reaches an extreme form with groups on opposing sides of the law suffering from lack of power, and with their masculinity open to question.

Set against the macho bravura of the two terrorists hiding in the house, the strange and effeminate behaviour of Jesús in *Romelia Vargas* is but a foretaste of the array of unstable masculinities demonstrated by the gangsters, policemen and the closet homosexual in *La trampa*. The very ability of Cuban men in the 1950s, at least in the city, to fulfil their role as procreators of the next generation, is consistently undermined. Most readings of 1950s novels are in general subsumed in existentialism, which entails a fixed, patriarchal state of affairs, when actually it is masculinity in these novels that is consistently highlighted and challenged.

Whilst *La trampa* emerges as an important novel for its theme of unstable masculinity, it is the novel *Romelia Vargas* that has been exposed by this thesis as a hitherto unrecognised and unexplored work of Cuban literary output. It is also a key text which should be included in the history of Cuban women writers. It has possibly been overlooked due to the sensitive nature of its content. *Romelia Vargas* suggests that there are underlying tensions within the social relations of the period that are problematic and in need of explanation. An evaluation can be made of the use of space made by this female author compared to the three male authors. The spaces created by Ferrer in *Romelia Vargas* are atmospheric and convincing, helping to reinforce the strong, opposing emotions experienced by her characters. With her highly motivated female protagonist who is able to resist the oppression of her father, converting her anger into political action, the narrator, and by implication Ferrer, takes a feminist stance. Whilst *La trampa* and *El acoso* might be faster-paced and more exciting as works of fiction, the endings of these novels are nihilistic and inconclusive. If *Los Valedontes* attempts to expose and decry the neglected state of the Cuban countryside, *Romelia Vargas* offers a means of bringing about social change. Therefore, the thesis has shown that the two lesser-known novels can be read as more incisive than the more widely criticised ones. In ignoring these neglected novels, and their potential for a spatial analysis, critics have missed a chance to expose a better understanding of Cuban identities in the 1950s.

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**From Site of Paralysis to Site of Transformation:
the Vargas House as Threshold for Personal, Social and National Change
in the Cuban Novel *Romelia Vargas* (1952).**

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The scarcely known Cuban novel *Romelia Vargas* (1952), by Surama Ferrer, was published during the same year as the military coup by Fulgencio Batista.[1] The coup was met with widespread relief after years of institutionalised political corruption during the 1940s. In the 1950s Cuba was still dependent on the USA as the main export market for sugar, and its wealthy middle class was mimicking and aspiring to a North American lifestyle, whilst vast swathes of the population lived in poverty. Gangsterism, or *bonchismo*, had been part of the fabric of society for some twenty years. By the 1950s most Cubans were worse off than they had been in the 1920s. The novel is set in the early 1930s, a period which saw growing resistance to the then dictator Machado, in office from 1925-1933. Led for the most part by students, and a revolutionary group known as ABC, this violent opposition to the regime had culminated in the Revolution of 1933, and the downfall of Machado.[2]

Against this turbulent political backcloth, twentieth century Cuban literature up to the 1950s was characterised by several generic currents: social realism, *costumbrismo*, *criollismo*, literature of 'evasion' and the *novela negra*.[3] One female writer of this period was Surama Ferrer, who was born in 1923 and who worked for the Cuban Ministry of Culture, collaborating on various literary journals. She published two collections of short stories after the novel *Romelia Vargas* was published in 1952, and left Cuba for Puerto Rico after the Revolution in 1961. Her subsequent activities in Puerto Rico remain a mystery.

Although the novel won three national prizes in manuscript form in 1950, including the *Premio Nacional de la Novela del Ministerio de Educación*, it has not been fully explored by critics. Lourdes Casal included *Romelia Vargas* in her study on *Images of Cuban Society Amongst Pre- and Post-revolutionary Cuban Novelists* (1975), but only referred to it in terms of class attitudes to cleanliness. Virginia Domínguez's !987 essay excerpted sections on images of women in pre- and post-revolutionary Cuban novels from Casal's 1975 thesis. Domínguez only mentions the novel as part of her discussion on power and gender:

> Lucas, one of the black newspaper sellers whom Romelia indoctrinates as a
> Communist party activist, refuses to accept Romelia's role as a leader and
> challenges her in a most direct and *machista* way, by raping her, subjecting
> her by force to his will (Domínguez 1987: 42).

Cuban literary critic Ana Cairo is right to identify Romelia and her fellow revolutionary activists as belonging to the ABC cellular revolutionary group, founded in 1928: 'Romelia, la protagonista, que es la 'heroína' abecedaria A-27' (Cairo 1993: 188). She draws attention to the dual planes of time in the novel: a present time in or beyond 1940 from which past events are

narrated, and a past time between 1925 and 1933 (188). Her only other comment on the novel is that the author fails to represent dialogue authentically, leading to an essayistic style.

Susana Montero included the novel in her analysis of Cuban women's writing in the thirty-year period before the Revolution, published in 1989. In her reading of the novel, she claims that individual issues become overshadowed by the collective conflict, and that this is the novel's main argument (Montero 1989: 18). This article argues that close analysis of spatial elements show that the reverse is true; it is individual issues which are foregrounded, by the writer's creative use of physical space. Collective conflict can therefore not be the novel's main argument; this novel actually makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of how the events leading to the fall of Machado in 1933 affected the lives of ordinary individuals, and how they themselves helped to shape that revolution. Or rather, how the growing climate of resistance at local level encouraged individuals to step out of their class, race and gender boundaries to embrace new and more fulfilling roles of a more public, social, and committed nature.

The protagonist, Romelia, daughter of a Spanish father and a Cuban mother, is a young, *mulata,* office worker who recruits for the revolutionary cause by night in a city park. She is the sole breadwinner for her invalid Spanish father, her pious sister Piedad, and her brother Jesús. Both of Romelia's siblings and her father deplore her involvement with the revolutionary cause, fearing for their own safety. Romelia and her family appear to have been part of the once affluent bourgeoisie, though even in the past they struggled financially and went hungry beneath a veneer of respectability: 'ellos no tuvieron más que orfandad y hambre mal encubierta por el decoro burgués' (39). With the death of Romelia's father, the Vargas household becomes a weapons store, and a hideout for meetings and the recovery of wounded revolutionaries. It eventually comes under suspicion by the authorities, who kill Romelia's brother. Events develop into the general strike of 1933 and the overthrow of Machado. The narrative is given an added dimension by the fact that it is told by a young white female narrator, who, writing retrospectively, is only six years old at the start of the novel, and remains nameless throughout.

Whilst the novel is essentially urban in nature, it cannot be classed alongside other urban-based novels of the 1950s that display elements of the *novela negra*; *Romelia Vargas* actually defies generic categorisation. Physical space in the novel is split between the Vargas household, with its internal ideological differences and arguments, and the external background of the park with the real historical events beyond in the city. As a domestic space, the house stands in contrast to the other spaces in the novel, which are all outdoor and public: the city, the park and the hill. Situated on the very outskirts of the city, in a semi-rural location, the house is located in what was once a prestigious residential district, with hills and country views from its windows. However, the function of the house does not remain static; as the novel progresses it will change dramatically.

The house operates as a fairly obvious metaphor for Cuba and its relationship with its former colonial oppressor, Spain. A parallel can be drawn between the Vargas family and the Cuban people who, like the Vargas children, lack a caring, guiding leader. Representing Spain, the father is cast in the light of an oppressive, outdated, and anachronistic tyrant, greedily devouring the wealth of his country, with Cuba and its bright new future, encapsulated by Romelia, as the more vital power. The novel, however, reveals meanings of a more personal and social, rather than national nature. Deeper analysis shows the house to be a space which functions as a threshold for personal and social, as well as and national change. Whilst members of the Vargas household at first appear to be paralysed physically, emotionally and sexually, they undergo personal transformations into active, committed, engaged individuals with a collective goal, and stand metaphorically for a whole society and nation transformed.

The house first appears in Chapter One immediately after the opening scene in which the child character narrator meets Romelia on the hill. Invited by Romelia to visit her at the house, the character narrator provides the first insight into the atmosphere and relationships within. Whilst the narrator was clearly a child when she first met the family, it is the older narrator's interpretation of what she saw as a child that is conveyed. The Vargas family home is a space that is redolent with mood and emotion. Whilst there are few actual details about the furnishings and décor of the house, the atmosphere within it is caught by using vocabulary pertaining to shape. The shape of the room reinforces the confined nature of the space occupied by the father: 'Un ángulo de la habitación, apartado de la escalera, encuadraba la sombra del padre, hundido en el sillón' (30). The visual image of the father embedded in his corner creates an air of darkness, gloom, confinement, and claustrophobia. Entrenched and immobile within his chair he represents Spain's persistent reluctance to relinquish its colonial grip over Cuba. This separate corner space also reinforces the father's isolated position within the physical space of the house and within his own family, highlighting the increasingly anachronistic position of Spain within its former colony.

The box-like nature of the space he occupies is in turn reinforced by the bird enclosed within its cage and suspended high up in the room:

> Algún cuadro de tonos oscuros asustando cruelmente al sinsonte. Su jaula
> pendía alta. Permanecí debajo esperando la clarinada patriótica del himno.
> Pero en vano (30).

The inclusion of the caged bird can be linked to the character of Romelia, who yearns to escape the confines of the house and pursue her work for the revolution. It is through physical shape, therefore, at the start of the novel, that the atmosphere and conditions within the space of the house are projected.

Elsewhere in the house, however, the atmosphere is very different; in contrast to the gloom of the room in which the father is located, the *saleta* is large and airy: 'Era amplia; abría a un balcón; por su altura se apreciaba el contorno de las lomas y algo del campo. Entraba un viento fuerte por las ventanas' (31). The *saleta* provides a counterbalance to the dark and claustrophobic room occupied by the father, highlighting the difference between the father's outlook and that of his daughter. Whilst the three grown up children run the household in practical terms, their aged and paralysed father exerts a sinister and menacing form of psychological power over his family and their visitors: 'la amargura de sus frases impregnó de hostilidad el ambiente' (30).

Missing Spain, he takes solace in consuming a larger amount of food than necessary; Romelia tells the child narrator that 'Come mucho. Siempre quiere más. Tengo que disminuir mi ración para satisfacer su hambre inextinguible' (ibid). She further points out that he frequently launches into a tirade against them and has never loved them: 'Cuando está lúcido se convierte automáticamente en un rimero de denuestos. Ya no nos ama. Nunca nos amó quizás. Ni a su mujer' (ibid). Romelia has only contempt for her father whom she views as a remnant of a weak and uncivilised generation:

Es el peor producto peninsular que pueda pensarse. Es de la generación canija, inculta, puramente animal a que pertenecen todos los padres hoy ya viejos. Se obstina en los viejos moldes. [...] Debe morir ya. Debe morir de una vez, por completo. Morir él y sus viejos moldes erróneos (31).

She claims that he has always mocked Cuba's desire for independence and is jealous of the younger generation. After his death Romelia feels some remorse, even when her sister points out that their father used to hit them, and seemed to hate them after his wife died.

For Romelia, then, the house is a place from which she seeks escape; in a metaphorical sense she wishes to escape the house because of its links with Spain, whilst in a literal sense she actually escapes to the hill, to the park and to the city. Her home and family are a burden for her; she must earn enough to feed her dependents when really she would prefer to be out recruiting for the revolution. Taking the house as metaphor a step further, Romelia herself can be read as a metaphor for the island of Cuba; the critic González Abellas has noted how in numerous literary studies the figure of the *mulata* has been as a sign of Cuban identity: 'la *mulata* cubana sigue asociada con el sexo y la cuestión racial en la identidad cubana' (González Abellas 2001: 251). Like Cuba, Romelia wishes to break away from Spain, (her father) to forge a new, unique (Cuban) identity of her own.

'Una variada corriente de ideas en guerra constante' (33)

It is useful at this point to draw on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the threshold, firstly because in this novel the threshold of the house represents the boundary between the private and the public space, and secondly because characters in the novel will be shown to undergo major changes in their lives. In his analysis of the 'adventure novel of everyday life', Bakhtin identifies the notion of the turning point or moment of crisis in a character's life. He finds the concept of the threshold interesting because it represents the boundary between private and public, as a site where time and space are fused, and because of its link with the notion of meetings:

> the chronotope of *threshold* […] can be combined with the motif of
> encounter, but its most fundamental instance is as the chronotope of *crisis*
> and *break* in a life (Bakhtin 2002: 248).

Furthermore, the threshold can be both metaphoric and literal; it can refer to a decision that can change a life, 'or the indecisiveness that fails to change a life, the fear to step over the threshold' (Bakhtin 2002: 248).

Bakhtin also noted that at certain times and in certain locations there exist competing strands of ideological discourse. As Pam Morris has indicated, although in this case with reference to the impact of capitalism on Russian ways of life,

> the epoch itself became a creative border zone between opposing historical
> consciousnesses. For Bakhtin such dialogic moments are always charged with
> the potential of creative change (Morris 1994: 18).

The concept of 'opposing historical consciousness' will be of relevance to the father-daughter relationship in the novel.

The house represents the ideology of Romelia's father, an ideology she opposes. Indeed, the narrator detects that within the Vargas household there is 'una variada corriente de ideas en guerra constante' (33). The two radically different ideological positions of the father and daughter, one colonialist, the other revolutionary, can be read in the light of Bakhtin's 'opposing

historical consciousnesses'. Romelia is highly assertive, active, and committed, interested only in the future of her country. Paying little attention to her appearance and physical needs, the narrator notes that Romelia's room is 'un tesoro oculto de propaganda filosófica materialista' (38).

Self-identification with the motherland

If Romelia's relationship with her father is characterised by hatred and ideological opposition, the legacy of her mother's death has other implications. The gendered nature of the house as a space should not be understated; power during the years prior to the start of the novel has rested with the father, but his claim is now increasingly challenged by Romelia. Nonetheless, throughout most of the novel the house remains a border zone for gender power, a site in which power can be contested. Romelia's Cuban mother had died some time prior to the start of the narrative and her mother's relatives subsequently disowned her penniless Spanish husband and children. Now motherless, and with a father who seems to despise them, the Vargas children feel orphaned.

As economic head of the Vargas household, now that her mother is dead and her father an invalid, Romelia is cast as the mother figure but fails to live up to its traditional image of nurturing homemaker. Rather, as a *mulata* by race, and with her fervour for the revolution, she evokes the historical warrior-mother of Cuban iconography; Mariana Grajales, the mother of *mulato* independence fighter Antonio Maceo. Another reference evoked by Romelia's situation is what critic Catherine Davies describes as 'the (self)-identification of the mother with the motherland' (Davies 1997: 48). Representing Cuba as the mythologised Great Mother and eulogised as nurturing leader on the one hand, Romelia nonetheless remains marginalised because of her Spanish heritage, and the lack of a living Cuban mother. The mother's absence, coupled with Romelia's inability or lack of desire to create a clean and orderly home, mean that the house at the start of the novel is a failed female gendered space.

The narrator points out that Romelia is not a particularly good housekeeper, noticing items of clothing, scattered throughout the house: 'también pendían acá y allá prendas masculinas o femeninas, vulgares, desnaturalizadas por el uso' (34). The narrator avoids going into Jesús's room (Romelia's brother), and notes that 'el retrete aparecía en total desacuerdo con la higiene' (ibid). The narrator helps Romelia and her sister with their appearance, lamenting the lack of a feminine influence on them. The absence of items for personal grooming add to the sense of feminine neglect, and emphasise the mother's absence: 'En ningún lugar de la casa ví nunca afeites propios para el embellecimiento femenino o propios a la higiene del tocador' (ibid).

This implies that it is the mother who 'civilises' her offspring, but it could also be a reference to a lack of parental guidance from the 'mother' country, Spain. Yet, paradoxically, Romelia becomes a mother figure to the narrator, who has a child-like fascination for Romelia's teeth, hair and skin. They will go on to share a close relationship in the future, in spite of their age and racial differences. The implications of this are several: does a mother figure necessarily have to operate as such only within a domestic context? Romelia 'mothers' in a wider, more social context, and could therefore be a model for a new kind of female, perhaps even a new kind of Cuba. Furthermore, this could be a call for whites, via the white narrator, to rethink their position vis-à-vis the *mulata*, and embrace her different racial identity.

The narrator's relationship to Romelia is problematic, since she both eulogises her for her revolutionary commitment and yet draws attention to her poor housekeeping skills and lack of physical beauty. Housekeeper and mother are not roles which Romelia herself has chosen. Furthermore, before the start of the narrative there is an introduction in which Romelia is described as 'una mujer carente de atractivos externos', noted for 'su aire agresivo' when walking down the street (19). Yet she is also lauded as 'la mujer de una Cuba futura' (21). In the same introduction the textual narrator despairs of the typical Cuban woman, whom she compares to 'un manojo de margaritas'. Ferrer thus undermines her own character, by firstly praising her total commitment to the revolution, but by drawing attention to her inability to fulfil the role of successful homemaker, and by lamenting her lack of beauty.

Romelia's sister Piedad underlines more than any other character the importance of the house as an initially oppressed female space. She is everything her older sister Romelia is not; she is less *mulata* in appearance, being whiter and slighter in build than her sister Romelia, she is tied to the home, and clings to what Romelia calls 'formas poéticas y a erotismo poético también, algo infantiles' (40). Characterised by her child-like physical and emotional state, Piedad's meekness, thinness and overall demeanour are reminiscent of the nineteenth century sickly female of Romantic literature, confined to the house and lacking in energy. Passionate about the poetry of Tagore, she seems to be retreating from life in the manner of an anorexic.[4] She has no interest in politics, enjoying Tagore's work purely for its aesthetic qualities. Piedad lives with her father's hostile and damaging words permanently etched on her memory. Even after his death she feels the persistence of his disapproving gaze:

> Sintió que desde aquel ángulo de la sala alguien la miraba fijamente, tan fijo
> y tan penetrante era el influjo de aquello que la miraba, que se irguió
> violenta, tensa, y se paró frente al mueble, con los puños cerrados (138).

The evidence leans towards a feminist reading of Piedad; she is predisposed to debasement and sexual dysfunction as a result of her father's disapproving gaze. Given the overpoweringly negative influence of her father, and the lack of a mother figure, Piedad's view of her body is abjected.[5] Therefore, if the father is read metaphorically as representing an embittered and anachronistic Spain, then his disapproving gaze towards his daughter Piedad is symptomatic of Spain's disapproving view of its former colony.

Furthermore, the intertextual use of Tagore's exquisite poetry is a successful device since it contrasts with, and therefore highlights, the squalor of the house. Tagore was also renowned for his roles as a reformer and critic of colonialism; Piedad's failure to engage with the anti-colonial aspects of Tagore's work is therefore ironic, given the context of the house as a space in which Cuba still falls under the gaze of a disapproving Spain. The fusion of the elements which characterise Tagore's work, aesthetic beauty and anticolonialism, together with Piedad's negative self-image, lead to an abjected reading of the spaces in the house.

Piedad is not the only character who appears to be paralysed in some way; her father is quite literally paralysed and confined to his chair, unable to walk, and it could be said that his ideology too is paralysed and anachronistic. Hostilio, the wounded revolutionary, is paralysed by injury and illness, while Jesús, brother of Piedad and Romelia, appears to be paralysed in terms of his sexuality. The house, therefore, functions as a metaphor for a paralysed and dying Spain, with the character of Romelia as the force working against this paralysis. However, as the narrative

progresses the house becomes a site of major transformation, and by the end of the novel it has become a catalyst for personal change and sexual awakening.

This change of function for the house is achieved by an implicit comparison with the city of Havana itself, as the narrator and her sister Manojo arrive at Havana station after a stay in the country. Manojo has the impression that Havana has undergone a major change: 'Encontró La Habana diferente' (145). In fact it is she who has changed, or rather, matured. The theme of change is continued when the two sisters subsequently visit the Vargas household. They find that the house has also changed, or rather it is its atmosphere which is different. Now that the father has died, the Vargas children are no longer held back by his restricting hold. The most noticeable change appears to be their increased sexual awareness. Piedad's original appreciation of Manojo's beauty has now become sexual attraction, whilst Jesús is now also attracted to Manojo, who in turn prefers Romero, the revolutionary. Romelia, however, whilst led to question her attitudes towards sexuality, wants none of this, believing that total commitment to the revolution requires abstinence from sexual activity.

From site of paralysis to site of transformation

Embedded spaces within the house are a major contributor to the house as a threshold for transformation. One such embedded space is the corridor, which is converted into a sick bay for the injured revolutionary Hostilio, bringing a normally very public, yet clandestine operation from its wider social context into the very intimate and private space of the house. Whilst the atmosphere in the house has hitherto been gloomy and hostile, Hostilio, in spite of his illness and wounds, is far from hostile in character. Quite the opposite; he brings warmth, vitality and a spirit of self-sacrifice to the household.

The corridor merits further analysis as a space; it was originally a site of transition between rooms, a space through which people usually only passed. Firstly transformed into the sick bay, it then subsequently became the location of the affair between Piedad and Hostilio, then of Piedad's sexual awakening, and ultimately the place of Hostilio's death. Yet the corridor is not even a recognised socially defined space within the house. Whilst the lovers' relationship must be conducted within the confines of a secret space because Hostilio is now wanted by the authorities, it then becomes available for more public scrutiny within the confined circle of family members, their visitors, and revolutionaries seeking refuge.

This location, therefore, far from being a zone of death and misery, operates as a space where sexual passion is ignited and flourishes. Hostilio and Piedad become strongly sexually attracted, in spite of his illness and her former inhibitions. The atmosphere in the embedded space of the corridor has changed from a site of pain and suffering to an erotically charged location in which illness exists alongside healthy human drives. Illness thus brings about healthy sexuality, with marginalised agents as bearers; Hostilio is marginalised as a middle class revolutionary. Therefore, if the marginalised represents health, the hegemonic is shown to be the opposite, unhealthy and dysfunctional. This being the case, the implication is that the marginalised should take control. What was an initially domestic space characterised by the paralysis of its inhabitants, becomes an active, thriving site, one of the dynamic cells of the revolution.

Thresholds can, of course, be experiential and not just physical or structural. For Hostilio, the house offers not only nurture and peace, but also, through his encounter with Piedad, a re-establishment of his libidinal drives which surface once more before his death. Piedad crosses a sexual threshold with the arrival of Hostilio; her initiation into sexuality is a positive and

enriching one, changing her for the better and boosting her confidence. Paradoxically, whilst Piedad is the most transformed character through her involvement with the revolution, she does not actually participate in it outside the house. The arrival of the wounded revolutionaries into the house also creates a threshold for Jesús, marking his conversion from opponent of the revolution to its fervent supporter. Prior to this he had lacked direction in life, flitting from one interest to another, and focusing only on himself.

Furthermore the house, for all its gloom and restriction during the early part of the novel, is now an attractive site to the character narrator, for whom her visits to the house bring about a fundamental shift in her thinking and ideology. White and middle-class, the lower social standing of this once more prosperous family, together with their mixed race heritage, holds considerable fascination for her. For her the house is a site of ideological awakening, a spatial and experiential threshold for personal change:

> lo que fue [...] para mí la escuela admirable donde aprendí a ponderar y a
> distinguir las sin-números facetas de preconciencia y de conciencia humanas
> (34).

She changes her view over what constitutes the essential life: 'En aquella ocasión inicial de mi trato con Romelia y su familia tuve una visión contraria a lo que antes consideraba como la vida esencial' (33).

On one level, then, the house can be read as an obvious metaphor for 1930's Cuba: former Spanish domination, (in the metaphoric figure of the father), is paralysed, greedy and moribund, whereas the new Cuban identity, (Romelia), is intelligent, vibrant, and alive. However, deeper analysis has revealed the further implications of this rather transparent metaphor. Like the Vargas children, Cuba itself has been left orphaned by its former parent, Spain. With the death of the father the house becomes a portent of the future, anticipating the Revolution of 1933. Interpersonal relationships within the house replicate the way people are reduced to living under the tyranny of dictatorship; they feel orphaned, (for lack of a caring parent), stunted, (for lack of opportunities to develop themselves), and repressed, (through the negative self-image accorded them by their father, the tyrant).

The house at the start of the novel symbolises Cuban degeneracy following Spanish rule; by the end the house has become a dynamic threshold in which huge transformations have taken place on a personal level: Piedad has lost her former inhibitions and allowed herself to enjoy her physical and emotional relationship with Hostilio, whilst at the same time becoming committed to playing her part as a nurse in the revolutionary cause, Jesús has ceased to wallow in introversion and has engaged with the part he can play in the revolution, and the narrator has experienced a major ideological transformation. As representatives of Cuba's children, these characters have shaken off the confining and repressive shackles of Spain as parent. They, like Cuba, can now move forwards as independent, fully developed individuals united in a common mission of turning their vision for a new future for their country into reality.

The wider implication of this is that if the house represents Cuba itself, then Cuba too is now undergoing a major transformation socially and politically. The house has become a microcosm of the old yielding to the new, of Spanish colonial rule yielding to Cuban independence, of the hegemony of white power yielding to black, or at least to *mulato* power, and of male power being challenged by female power. The novel's main argument can be encapsulated by relating the house to Bakhtin's view of how threshold spaces, such as the house in this novel, shed light on the big events of history:

> Characteristically it is not private life that is subjected to and interpreted in light of social and political events, but rather the other way around - social and political events gain meaning in the novel only thanks to their connection with private life (Bakhtin 2002: 109).

It is in his analysis of the 'adventure novel of everyday life' that Bakhtin identifies the notion of the turning point or moment of crisis in a character's life. He formulated this into the notion of the threshold as a site where time and place are fused; the chronotope of the threshold 'can be combined with the motif of encounter, but its most fundamental instance is as the chronotope of *crisis* and *break* in a life' (Bakhtin 2002: 248). The threshold can be both metaphoric and literal; it can be used metaphorically in language, such as 'the path of life'. It can refer to a decision that can change a life, 'or the indecisiveness that fails to change a life, the fear to step over the threshold' (Bakhtin 2002: 248). He points out that 'in literature, the chronotope of the threshold is always metaphorical and symbolic' (Bakhtin 2002: 248).

The house, therefore, changes from a highly restrictive to a highly enabling space, from a repressive, backward looking, and constraining space to a site in which rebellion breeds and political, intellectual and sexual freedoms flourish. By the end of the novel it has become one of the very nerve centres of the revolution, representing metonymically the many other private spaces in the city that have harboured participants of the revolution. Such micro sites of transformation pass unrecorded in history, in favour of the big events in the centre of the city, which affect only key public figures, rather than members of the unknown masses. Furthermore, in this novel, the face of Cuba's future is female, and, moreover, *mulata*.

NOTES

1 All references to *Romelia Vargas* will be taken from the only edition, published in 1952.

2 ABC was a secret underground terrorist organization with a cellular structure. Its members consisted of young, middle class intellectuals, students, and army sergeants.

3 For a detailed explanation of these genres and the development of Cuban literature during the period see Cairo (1993), Smith (1997), Kapcia (1980), Lazo (1974), Pogolotti (1958), Portuondo (1962), Bueno (1963), and Davies (1997).

4 Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was a Bengali poet, dramatist and artist who was who was made Nobel Laureate in 1913.

5 For an explanation of the notion of abjection, see Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection* (1982).

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Appendix B

Gangsters, Gays and Policemen: Arrested Masculinity
in the Cuban Novel Fifty Years Ago.

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Many of the relatively unknown Cuban novels of the 1950s show how a large proportion of society was fragmented and oppositional, with different sectors vying for power. One such novel is *La trampa* by Enrique Serpa, published in Buenos Aires in 1956.[1] This novel is classified as a 'gangster' novel, in other words one in which the so-called *grupos de acción* are prevalent, and in which elements of the *novela negra* are discernable. The events of the novel are set between 1950 and 1951, during the run-up to the coup d'état of 10th March 1952, in which the former populist dictator Batista regained power. In a previous 'gangster' novel, Gregorio Ortega's *Una de cal y otra de arena*, published in the same year but set in the late 1940s, gangsters, or *bonches* as they were known, are actually incorporated into the police force and able to reap material and financial gain from illegal activities, contraband, drugs and prostitution. Gangsters in *La trampa*, however, are seen less than five years later to have lost much of this power and to be fighting against the police. Furthermore, they are now homeless and disorientated, with their very masculinity under threat.

Critics of this novel have focused on the gangster figure which accords the novel its generic pedigree, yet they have not drawn attention to issues of homelessness and threatened masculinity within the gangster community. Nor have they discussed the two other male groups represented in the novel: homosexuals and policemen. Whilst one might expect homosexuals to be marginalised in Cuba in the 1950s, what the novel actually shows is that constructions of mainstream masculinity, gangsters and policemen, are also marginalised, with their identity in question. Furthermore, these three traditionally oppositional groups actually share similar experiences of powerlessness and exclusion, linking them to widespread notions of existentialism prevalent at this time. It is through the analysis of spatial elements that these common experiences are exposed in the novel; the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin on the threshold and Michel Foucault on the heterotopia have been used to elucidate the relationship between spaces and threatened masculinity. The three key groups will now be considered in more detail, starting with the policemen, or rather, motorcycle police.

Policemen – 'La gente se ríe de nosotros y cree que tenemos miedo' (248).

The novel does not actually begin with the focus on gangsters; the opening scene is set in policeman Fileno's flat. Fileno is impatiently awaiting the birth of his first child; his wife is in labour in the adjacent bedroom. In Chapter Two the location changes to the café containing a group of gangsters. In Chapters Three, Five, and Seven the spatial location reverts to Fileno's flat, prolonging the tension over the imminent birth by spreading this part of the narrative out over several chapters. Although his son is born in Chapter Seven, Fileno does not gain access to the bedroom until Chapter Ten. The ten chapters set in the flat are interspersed with scenes concerning the gangsters, in the café, in cars, in a morgue and at a gangster's funeral. This

constant juxtaposition invites comparisons between the position of the policemen and the dilemma of the gangsters in society at large, and between the birth of the new baby and the funeral of the gangster. It also invites the notion of thresholds, as one space is exited and another entered. Thresholds can, however, be experiential and not just physical or structural; Fileno anxiously waits to cross the threshold into fatherhood for the first time.

He is in a state of acute anxiety, unnerved through listening to his wife's screams during the birth process. The flat functions like a theatre; it is as if Fileno were alone on stage and his wife Celia in a room just off stage, from which noises can be heard. The pace is deliberately slow as if to highlight the protagonist's tormented state of mind. Close analysis reveals that the experience of his wife's labour has deeper repercussions on Fileno than what we might expect from a stereotypical excluded father-to-be in the 1950s. Whilst he is completely familiar with the interior of the flat, today he feels as if he is in a strange and unknown place. The focus on the tiny amount of space afforded by the flat, on the various noises made by insects and the pet dog, and on the comparison between Fileno himself and the animal kingdom, coupled with the deceleration of time, all serve to convey an impression of the flat as a cage, a confining, limiting space from which there is no escape. This notion of confinement and lack of escape will be paralleled with the position of the gangsters.

Fileno's thoughts turn to the building where he lives; that he views it as 'una especie de penal' (54) is ironic, given that the raison d'être of his job is to put criminals behind bars. Later, when Fileno's police colleagues gather at the flat to congratulate the couple on the birth of their new son, the image of the prison assumes a more collective significance; whilst the forces of law and order are imprisoned in this very private domain, public spaces outside such as the café and the park are not policed, allowing the gangsters freedom to control the public domain.

The birth of Fileno's son attracts a succession of female visitors; the flat is an essentially female gendered space with the midwife Martina in total control of the birth proceedings. The placing of Fileno within this spatial context casts a certain shadow over his masculinity. Access to his state of mind as he waits anxiously for signs of the birth provides an indication that he is undergoing not just acute feelings of anxiety over his wife, but his own crisis of masculinity. The experience of his prolonged wait leads Fileno to consider whether he might be a coward, his mind wandering back to an experience he had as a seventeen-year-old living in the country. During a fiesta there he was accused of being less than a man by a drunkard who had reacted to Fileno's unusual attire. Unperturbed by the insult, Fileno defended his virility with conviction. As the critic Lourdes Casal points out, to question a man's virility was the ultimate insult in 1950s Cuba: 'To call a man a queer was a way of calling him a woman, a direct attack on his masculinity, on his value as a macho (Casal 1987: 42). Yet it is ironic that Fileno should feel excluded and powerless at a moment when his very virility is being proved.

Several of Fileno's male police colleagues arrive at the flat when some of the women visitors are still present; the chapter prior to this is set at the morgue where a gangster lies dead. The focus on the dead body of the gangster in the morgue now switches to the body of police sergeant Aguilar, as he stands in the door-hole of the entrance to Fileno's flat. His body hardly fits the space, creating a comic and disrespectful image. The fact that several members of the police force come to see the new baby seems unusual; the visiting women are not out of place, yet the presence of the police colleagues hints at satire, if not questioned masculinity, of these authority figures, undermining their power. They are motorcycle police and supposedly highly mobile, yet here they are unexpectedly confined in a private space at a time when that space is distinctly female-gendered. The sergeant comments that the police force is a laughing stock as far as the public is concerned. He points out that it is widely known that the country's President had met with

gangster groups and drawn up pacts with them, making any efforts on the part of the police futile. Police power is diminished and threatened since it is the gangsters who control the very public spaces which Fileno and his colleagues are supposed to protect. The theme of threatened masculinity recurs throughout the novel, as men on both sides of the law appear to have problems with their identity.

Gangsters - 'Pero ne me atrevo a casarme. […] Pero a veces me siento solo. Y no hay cosa más terrible que la soledad' (131).

If the domestic and female gendered space of the flat undermines the power of the   motorcycle police force and questions their masculinity, then the public space of the café performs a similar function for the gangster. The café preserves the gangsters' unique position and marginality as neither full-blown convicted criminals nor decent, law-abiding citizens. The technique of juxtaposing chapters in alternation between the domesticity of Fileno's home, and the uncertainty of daily life for the gangsters, shows them to be outside the conventional model of the family unit. They feel comfortable neither in the domestic nor in the public domain. Whilst the flat is Fileno's home and conforms to a socially expected model, the café for the gangsters is not simply a place to meet friends over a drink, it has become one of the few refuges open to them, a substitute home.

Silverio articulates very clearly how his position as a well-known and respected gangster means that he cannot even visit his own family in safety. When he visits his sister he is putting her life in danger. Furthermore, he does not believe that he can ever marry and have a family, since he never knows when it will be his turn to be the next victim. Instead, he must remain on the fringes of society, never to know the security and contentment of a life to which the majority of society aspires. Silverio even alludes to a state of existential angst.[2] He feels totally powerless to change his position, for this is his destiny. He points out that the gangster is on a treadmill, and knowing that one day he will be the target of another gangster's bullet, he, like others, dare not look inwards out of fear.

Amongst the gangsters is a character who stands out as different; Dr Castier is a frustrated novelist, journalist and teacher. Whilst he does not share their belief in violence as a means of social protest, he would like their votes in his bid to enter politics. When Castier leaves the café the gangsters ridicule his bid for power and recognition. In an inversion of the café as a site traditionally occupied by male intellectuals, the *tertulia*, now it is the would-be writer, Castier, who feels ostracized, leaving the gangsters to discuss the role of the intellectual in politics and society.

Besides the café, the car is the other substitute home for the gangsters. During the 1950s the car was a symbol of modernity, wealth and freedom. Here, however, the car functions as the opposite; a restricting, enclosing and alienating space, which prevents the gangsters from encountering the non-criminal public and forming conventional relationships. Both the car and the café restrict them and entrench their field of existence, in much the same way as Celia is restricted by the space of the bedroom. The gangsters appear to have the freedom to patrol the city's streets by car, but in truth the car is a symbol of homelessness and disempowerment.

Furthermore, the gangsters are slightly removed from the control of their power, for it is often not actually they who are driving, but their chauffeur. They are thus at once in control and removed from the seat of responsibility. Marcelo and Bebo are passengers as the chauffeur, Tiro de Gracia, vies with another motorist for the physical space of the road. The car may give the illusion of power and control, but it actually confines the driver and his passengers into a space from which

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it is not easy to escape. Furthermore, the car does not necessarily have a destination; it can follow an indefinite path. The long car ride taken by Silverio and Bebo demonstrates that the gangsters have neither a base nor a destination. These car rides are often aimless and circular, reinforcing the vicious circle of entrapment in which the gangsters are caught. Marcelo Pogolotti views this as symbolic of the wider vicious circle in which the whole country is caught: 'un reducido círculo del infierno consciente y perenne que vive el país' (Pogolotti 1958: 191).

When gangster Silverio takes the novice Bebo for a ride in his car, the conversation begun in the café about different types of gangster is continued. Some are seasoned anti-Machado revolutionaries, such as Marcelo and Silverio, while younger, newer members, represented by Bebo, are known as *el gatillo alegre*.[3] It is significant that it is the young Bebo whose bullet kills Fileno; representative of the new generation of gangster, Bebo is not even aware that all he is doing is perpetrating the violence which was started in order to bring down the former dictator and create a new and successful social order, one which has not come to fruition.

Whilst in the previous gangster novel mentioned, *Una de cal y otra de arena*, which is set in the late 1940s, the city and its streets are very much controlled by the gangsters and their power is not questioned, by 1951, however, it is clear that the gangsters have maintained this power at the expense of the police force, but that they have also lost control of the domestic spaces they once had. The car, then, can be read metaphorically as a refuge, a substitute domestic space offering protection, familiarity and anonymity. As a conventional symbol of masculinity, the car is usually perceived as a powerful adjunct to male sexuality. Here it has become a symbol of entrapment, a sealed unit which limits the gangsters' lives and questions their masculinity.

The final scene of the novel, with the new family man Fileno as protagonist alone in the street, is as public and film-like as the opening scene is private and theatrical. The large and impersonal public space of the street contrasts with the small and solitary figure of Fileno, who has entered gangster-controlled territory. A new father, he is thinking his private, personal thoughts about the future of his son. The gangster Bebo, as if pre-programmed like a character in a Greek tragedy, shoots Fileno from the vantage point of the car, destroying one family's life, but symbolic of many.[4] The gangsters destroy what is held to be the conventional model of the family unit, and in so doing wreck their own chances of forming relationships, creating families and perpetuating the species. One could even say that the choice of violent action brings about the gangster's self-emasculation.

Homosexuals – 'indecentes afeminados, […] son cosas que ocurren hasta en las mejores familias' (98).

If the flat is a space in which policemen are shown to lack the power they would traditionally wield, and if the café and the car are spaces which question the masculinity of the gangsters, then the park is a space in which gender and sexual identity remain unstable. Parks are, of course, spaces of a particular nature; outside of the law, they permit behaviour which might not normally be socially acceptable elsewhere. They are zones of transition between more socially defined spaces. In this novel the park is used to explore the plight of the homosexual in Cuba in the early 1950s, mainly through the character of the journalist and would-be writer and intellectual Dr. Castier, a man who believes that his talents are wasted as a journalist. He is reluctant to walk through the park on his way home from work, fearing the people he is likely to encounter, and the potential responses they might unleash in him. Avoiding the park adds considerable time to his journey home, where he is likely to incur the wrath of his domineering wife. He hesitates for

quite a while as he wonders whether to take the more expensive option of a taxi. He cannot even define the individuals in the park as homosexuals; for him even the word itself is taboo.

It is on his way home from meeting the gangsters in the café that Castier has the option of crossing the park. The park is consequently read in the light of the male gendered space of the café. Castier's thoughts go back to the conversations with the gangsters in the café; he is outraged at some of the comments directed towards him by the gangsters. He feels intimidated by them, whilst part of him wishes to be like them. He does in fact say 'Yo soy uno de ustedes' (100), but immediately regrets it, knowing that it stemmed from a position of subordination. He clearly feels that he is different to the gangsters; on the one hand he wants their votes in his bid to enter local politics, while on the other his intellectual aspirations and journalistic career set him against violence as a strategy of protest. He already feels debased and powerless as a mere journalist, believing that he is more than capable of writing great literature. The implication is that he is a closet homosexual - he was set apart from other children as a boy and told he was different, he is dominated by his wife, and suffers from stomach ulcers. The gangsters may epitomise virility for him and this may be the reason for his attraction to them, but he also resists this tendency, ending up in neither faction and suffering for it.

Furthermore, it is significant that Castier's thoughts on his relationship with the gangsters should be so closely linked to his thoughts and fears over the reporting of homosexuality, as he wonders whether to step into the park. Castier had recently received some anonymous correspondence urging him, in his capacity as a journalist, to launch a campaign against such 'indecentes afeminados' (98) in the Prado y Virtudes park, (an ironic name, given the nature of the activities within). A police reporter had told the incredulous Castier that such people are also to be found: 'en bares y cabarets (donde) *las locas* - […] - se exhiben completamente *partidas*, no ya resignadas, sino orgullosas de ser y parecer lo que son' (ibid.). The individuals to whom the reporter refers are feminised, showing how homosexuals were viewed alongside women. The reporter comments that things have changed in more recent times; homosexuals are viewed as 'interesantes y simpáticos' (ibid.), and even envied and copied. He repeats a well-used phrase: '[…] son cosas que ocurren hasta en las mejores familias' (ibid.). Homosexuality, whilst no longer an isolated practice, is clearly still viewed with some suspicion, an attitude reinforced by the press.

For Castier the park is a threshold over which he dare not tread; he finally opts to avoid it. He is indeed on the threshold of great personal change, but he would have to enter into a more public domain to achieve it. As a zone of experimentation for gender and sexuality, the park contrasts with the essentially female gendered flat and the male gendered café and car. It raises questions about the gender and sexual identity of those who thought their positions were well established and unchallenged. Further hints at threatened male identity pepper the novel: car drivers attempt to dominate the physical space of the city, with their masculinity at stake, Bebo, the young novice gangster, reacts with horror at having his masculinity questioned, whilst a politician is called a homosexual by way of insult. Marcelo dislikes any public discussion on the topic of sexuality, whilst Martina sees her son Silvino's latent homosexuality in terms of an illness.

Conclusion - '¿Dónde está lo que nosotros imaginábamos que iba a ser Cuba?' (301).

Whilst the novel confirms our expectations that homosexuals would occupy a marginalised position in Cuba at this time, it comes as some surprise to find that not long after the height of *bonchismo* (gangsterism) in the late 1940s, the position of more mainstream constructions of masculinity is contested. The disequilibrium of power in this society is exposed, a society in

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which even those groups expected to wield power, policemen and gangsters, do not. The novel exposes the destabilising effect on the individuals caught up in the tensions of the time, leaving them ostracised and powerless.

The critic Juan Marinello sees issues of gender identity as a fundamental flaw in the narrative, even a weakness:

> La preocupación sensual – sexual, mejor-, discurre subterránea, y a veces a flor de letra, por todo el libro. Cuando nos preguntamos cómo en medio de tan evidentes logros y de tan buena gracia narrativa se filtran tales debilitamientos, […]. (Marinello 1977: 229)

Yet contested masculinity is surely the novel's major theme; gender identity is questioned by many of the male characters even though they are in very different and opposing roles. They share common experiences of exclusion, powerlessness, and fears over their role in the survival of humanity in pre-revolutionary Cuba.

The critic Dania García Ronda has suggested that the trigger-happy novice gangster Bebo is: '[…] también un producto de la malformación republicana' (García Ronda 1980: xiii). However, he fails to comment on the effect of this social dislocation on his and the other gangsters' masculinity. The juxtaposition of the gangster, the homosexual and the police in this novel suggests that the contested state of male virility and identity is a disturbing side effect of a dislocated and disfunctional society.

Furthermore, the references to animals, to blood, and to the human species within the flat, set against the plight of the gangster as no longer able to maintain traditional relationships and procreate, raises questions about the survival of future Cuban generations. The personal pain of Celia's childbirth can be compared with the more public and widespread pain of the violence and disorder prevalent in society; the private and personal is linked to the public and political. The thresholds of birth and death are interwoven: Fileno's child is born, Martina's sick husband knows that death is imminent, and Fileno dies without even being conscious of the bullet which hit him. All of this leads one to consider what might be the next phase of Cuba's history, and whether the country itself is poised on the edge of a threshold.

Notes

1   All quotations from *La trampa* are from the 1974 edition.

2   A state of existential *angst* is a condition found in the protagonists of other novels of the 1950s, such as the *acosado* in *El acoso* by Alejo Carpentier (1956).

3   The members of the *gatillo alegre* groups consisted of those who were too young to fight against Machado, engaging in violence without the revolutionary goals of their older counterparts; consisting mainly of students, these action groups disintegrated into gratuitous violence.

4   The novel *El acoso*, (1956), by Carpentier, foregrounds the intertextuality of the Greek tragedy form to indicate how the hunted man's fate was sealed at an early stage.

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