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The Discourse of Contradiction: Metaphor, Metonymy and *El reino de este mundo*

Naomi B. Sokoloff

As critics have quite rightly noted, Alejo Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo* relies more heavily on apposition than on succession as a principle of narrative organization.¹ The text recounts a series of social upheavals in Haiti from approximately 1764 to 1821, but it does not present history fundamentally in terms of sequence and consequence. Though events essentially follow a chronological trajectory, gaps in time, abrupt changes of perspective and a minimum of transitional narrative here lead to a juxtaposition of many disparate incidents, giving a first impression of chaotic disjunction.² Emerging then from this disorder comes a schema of parallel actions and motifs that imposes cohesive design on the episodic events. The Blacks who instigate revolution against tyrannical, decadent White rulers soon discover that their own leader, Henri Christophe, displays the same shortcomings as his predecessors. He, too, fails to resist the corrupting influence of power and neglects to appreciate popular beliefs and aspirations. The text implies that the Agrimensores, who later assume political control, will likewise fail in a position of leadership. A wealth of symmetries becomes apparent, indicating that comparable patterns of hope and despair accompany each shift of power. In this way the text allows the reader to understand the multiple incidents as various manifestations of a single phenomenon, and so we come to see history as a cyclical re-enactment of essentially unchanging human dilemmas.

El reino de este mundo thus takes advantage of the fragmentation endemic to so much twentieth century literature; Carpentier, however, gives it a new twist by incorporating it so thoroughly into his treatment of collective event and social milieu. Spatial form, as Joseph Frank has described this very widespread aesthetic of discontinuity, lends itself naturally to the disorientation of dream vision and the atemporality of lyrical fiction; Carpentier quite consciously developed this same approach out of his contact with surrealism and other brands of European vanguard art during the twenties, projecting it into the regional novel with his publication of *El reino de este mundo* in 1949.³ Arriving in this way at a convergence of opposing narrative trends, he helped initiate an important period of revitalization in Spanish American fiction. The result in *El reino de este mundo* is to establish a series of contradictory impulses, and so even in this narrative fundamentally concerned with history and public event we find the "transformation of the historical imagination into myth" characteristic of spatial form.⁴ The extensive parallels of composition here culminate in a denial of progress, a juxtaposition of fact and fiction on equal terms, and a stress on loss of self, that is, a presentation of characters less as individuals than as apsychological variants of one another.

The shift of emphasis proper to spatial form, from ties of causality

and temporality to ties of similarity and dissimilarity, clearly recalls Roman Jakobson's now classic distinction between metaphoric and metonymic discourse.⁵ This coincidence is not a mysterious one, since Jakobson's ideas grew in part out of his awareness of symbolist and modernist poetics, and his terms indeed provide an effective way to describe narrative fragmentation. His work suggests a particularly intriguing way to approach *El reino de este mundo*, because Carpentier's experiment with nonlinear organization (which in Jakobson's sense may be termed metaphoric) corresponds to a major, contrary shift in his prose, away from metaphor and toward metonymy. The integration of the two kinds of narrative orientation at different levels of the novel is symptomatic of the synthesis of opposing traditions that lends this text its essential tensions. Since these two modes of discourse involve two differing kinds of referentiality, Jakobson's work provides some insight into two distinctive ways of producing meaning in the novel. These, in turn, invite conflicting strategies of interpretation by the reader and alert us to contradictory features of this fictional world.

As we have already observed, metaphoric structure here creates for the reader an odd and disquieting history. We cannot dismiss well-documented events as pure products of the imagination, and yet Carpentier's account of Haitian revolutions undermines our sense of the consecutive and the consequential. Metonymic discourse, however, referring as it does to things related by contiguity, helps preserve links of cause and effect. The predominance of this kind of prose in *El reino de este mundo* therefore allows Carpentier to maintain a grip on chronology and causal logic, even as these undergo considerable disruption between the various segments of his text. Metonymic language aids the text's refusal to surrender its socio-historical dimensions, despite the integration of spatial form into the treatment of history.

The incidence of metonymy over metaphor in the prose of *El reino de este mundo* does not represent an accidental artistic felicity. On the contrary, it in fact marks a pivotal and actively sought change in Carpentier's career as a novelist, as he attempted to achieve a more authentic Americanism and to more accurately capture the improbabilities of New World realities.⁶ Distancing himself from the artifice and failures of the European *avante-garde*—shortcomings which he ascribed to an overemphasis on individual imagination and to a lack of concrete basis in the extraliterary world—Carpentier rejected the ornate metaphorical prose of his first novel, *¡Ecué-Yamba-O!* To be sure, this effort did not simplify his language nor make it more natural or colloquial. Through metonymy, though, Carpentier could restrict his field of reference to things understood by his audience to be inherently related in the social world, and in this way he could delimit ambiguity and free play of the imagination in his work.

Metonymy fulfilled this need because its referentiality depends closely on the notion of preserving context. As Michel Le Guern points out in his study, *Sémantique de la Métaphore et de la Métonymie*, metonymy has frequently been defined only through a listing of its possible kinds (e.g., substitution of cause for effect, container for content, material for

object, and so on); an analysis based on context, however, provides a more systematic formulation, one that also permits us to see qualitative differences in the process of signifying that metonymy and metaphor entail.⁷ While the former restricts itself primarily to displacement of reference within a single context, the latter calls for the confrontation of two terms from separate contexts or different linguistic levels. Certain semantic information from each level coincides with or parallels that from the other; through an amalgamation of the two realms—an amalgamation which includes both their principal common denominators and also other, more suppressed information—metaphor synthesizes new meaning.

This contrast yields several significant implications for *El reino de este mundo* that add to and modify the main opposition already noted between the overall composition of the novel and its prose. First of all, metaphor enjoys an inherent polyvalence, for the suppressed information in metaphoric union may enrich or challenge the parallels created between two terms. The resulting ambiguity may cause irony and humor, grotesque, ridiculous or incongruous effects. For these reasons Carpentier, through unlikely appositions, can effectively stress the improbable aggregate of contrasting cultural elements that constitute Caribbean society. The placing side by side of erudite French, Latin and Spanish epigraphs with the Haitian creole of indigenous songs is typical of the heterogeneity that lends the novel some of its extraordinary vitality. By the same token, metaphoric structure is a fundamental mechanism for generating the irony so central to *El reino de este mundo*. The various lives that resemble one another in this world force the reader to conclude that Blacks, Whites and other social groups, through they see themselves as very different and incompatible adversaries, are in fact subject to the same vicissitudes of human nature and the same political ambitions and mistakes. Just as metaphor on a lexical level allows for a clash between the semantic components of two terms, here, too, disparity among narrative elements may struggle against the uniformity their apposition confers on them.

Metonymy, nonetheless, reduces the possibility of such incompatibility, for it deals with relations of “convertibility,” that is, with terms that imply one another in an integral way.⁸ Its tautological nature lends it a kind of self-evidence, and, due to this irreducibility, metonymy reinforces homogeneity in Carpentier’s very heterogeneous world. Consequently, rather than struggling against the influence of the metaphoric organization, the prose in this sense works with it, amplifying the equalizing effect, through time and across social barriers, which emerges out of the extensive parallels of composition. Helping to curb the incongruities of the work, it fosters a remarkably uniform depiction of an extensive range of characters, showing them all to be products of a single environment. Metaphor and metonymy in this way complement one another at different levels of the text and highlight a central paradox of the narrative: the vision of a society united mainly in its divisions, comprised of individuals who share a mutual alienation.

A second implication of the notion of context ties in closely with the polyvalence of metaphor and the lack of polyvalence proper to

metonymy. By preserving a single context, metonymic process essentially preserves consensus, for it acknowledges only a single field of perceptions and meanings conventionally accepted and understood by a given audience. Metaphor, however, breaks down old perceptual categories, admitting a consideration of new semantic information or a reevaluation of information previously difficult to put into words. That is to say, metaphor permits us to verbally formulate what before may have been excessively private or simply beyond the scope of our shared cultural understandings. Metonymy, more concerned with denotation or that which has already been named and categorized, differs from metaphor's reliance on connotation and on that which has not yet received clear or convenient labels.

Creating as it does a constellation of meanings which the individual must weigh and integrate in defiance of already established categories, metaphor resists paraphrase and admits more freedom of interpretation than does metonymy. These principles of linguistic operation hold true at the level of overall narrative organization as well as at the lexical level, and so spatial form consistently demands a special kind of active reading. As a result, although *El reino de este mundo* maintains intact chronological eventuality and confirmed facts about Haitian history, the metaphoric structure forces the reader to think about the social world in an innovative way. Even as the individual conscience loses priority in this fictional world, the novel challenges us, through experimental narrative strategy, to exercise our own critical capacities. Weighing one event against another, we must decide how much they do or do not have in common. It should be noted that the history of Haiti lent itself especially well to Carpentier's purpose here, for this material represented relatively unfamiliar territory to most of the author's audience when *El reino de este mundo* first appeared. The topic appealed to the renewed interest that Latin Americans experienced during the '40's in their own past and identity—an interest which meant a turning away from Europe as a principal center of intellectual activity; nonetheless, the subject of Haiti was new enough to submit to manipulation in fiction without provoking immediate dismissal as an unacceptable tampering with historical fact.⁹

At the same time that metaphoric structure functions as a way of mediating between individual interpretation and collective materials, the prose of this novel shies away from metaphor proper, as a trope, in its capacity to invite subjectivity. Metaphor has potential for introducing value judgments between narrator and audience, for it draws equivalences between things that are nevertheless not identical, and so it assigns them a new kind of relative worth. As James Fernández puts the matter, it “moves them around in quality space.”¹⁰ When Carpentier for example, writes, “la partida de Paulina señaló el ocaso de toda sensatez de la colonia,” the metaphor *ocaso* draws a parallel between a sunset and the disintegration of Haitian society at a moment of duress.¹¹ Decline is common to both, but through the mention of a sunset the narrator exposes us to extra connotations and does not leave a neutral impression of the situation. Suggesting the oncoming darkness of evening, the text intimates that the sinister brutality and disorder on the island are accompanied by

an atmosphere of spectacle, of colorful, theatrical decadence. The narrator thus implies an element of fascination and also of disapproval. The fact, however, that *ocaso* is a hackneyed phrase, a highly conventionalized trope already deprived of much of its polyvalent impact, is symptomatic of Carpentier's general tendency to avoid metaphor in this novel. Restricting authorial intrusion in his prose here, much more so than he did in *¡Ecué-Yamba-O!*, the writer lends more credibility to this world as a reality unto itself. He asks the reader to accept it on its own terms, and, in addition, his use of a single frame of reference suggests a notable lack of transcendence in this fictional world.

The chapter headings do constitute one major exception to this quality of *El reino de este mundo*. The frequent reliance of these titles on allusion (e.g. "Te Deum," "La hija de Minos y de Pasifaé," "Agnus Dei") signals to us, in metaphoric fashion, another realm of existence, another order of reality. The narrator, by introducing an added context to our awareness of his fictional world, alerts us to the fact that things are not as simple as they may appear; in the final analysis there will be a larger perspective from which to view the meaning of events here. That perspective, of course, is afforded by the spatial composition of the work, and so metaphor in the prose forms a small bridge or cross-reference to the metaphoric organization of the novel as a whole. That organization in turn, however, even as it subsumes individual episodes, is itself a problematic one which redirects us back to the impression of nontranscendence created through the prose: segments of the text make sense only when considered together as a configuration of events. Spatial form doubles back on itself, calling our attention time and again to the same basic situation, and, by maintaining reference which is essentially internal to the text itself, this composition thereby alerts us to the self-sufficiency of this fictional context.

There are other ways, too, in which the opposing impulses of the prose and the composition supplement as well as contradict one another. Most importantly, the metonymic narrative frequently effects displacements or distortions within its own realm of time and causality and so facilitates the defamiliarization of the social world brought about through fragmentation. Metonymy may accomplish such derealization thanks to its elliptical qualities, which derive from the fact that this kind of discourse "decomposes things and rearranges them. . . . It invents nothing, but rather extracts and recombines."¹² In contrast to the transformations of meaning that metaphor enacts, metonymy involves primarily an omission of relatively predictable information. This concept becomes more clear if we take an example. If we say, for instance, "he drank the entire glass" to designate that "he drank the entire [contents of the] glass," we can rather simply reconstruct a connection of contiguity from data given in the first sentence to plausible other terms, and so we can find and insert the missing elements necessary to compose the more complete, second sentence. This process entails a much easier transition from figurative back to nonfigurative language than is possible with metaphor, as well as a much less appreciable loss of meaning. The metonymic configuration, which practically invites paraphrase, for the same reasons brings about changes

of signification that are chiefly ones of emphasis. It may result in intensity, precision, or laconic effects, or it may lead to a displacement of perception that fosters surprising or denaturalizing impressions.

In *El reino de este mundo* perhaps the most important examples of metonymic deletions or changes of focus serve the function of dehumanizing. When, for instance, Carpentier states, “en un callejón de gritos y risas bailaban los pañuelos de una calenda” (p. 109), the kerchiefs replace the women who wear them, and shouts and laughter replace the crowd which produces the noise. Though the text indicates to us that women are dancing, metonymy acts here as a shortcut and effaces the human agents from the dialogue between narrator and reader. Elsewhere, in similar fashion, metonymy often replaces a whole with a part and so shifts the focus from the personal to the impersonal, or from individuals to collective units. A transfer of action from people to their clothing, for example, occurs as the fortress La Ferrière falls to a rebel group:

Pronto las noticias bajaron por los respiraderos, túneles y corredores, a las cámaras y dependencias. Los soldados empezaron a aparecer, en todas partes, empujados hacia adelante por nuevos *uniformes* que salían de las escaleras . . . (p. 119).¹³

The use of the word *uniformes* instead of, say, *tropas* or *soldados* reduces the human beings to their status as members of a group, separates them as individuals from the action, and implies a divestment of moral responsibility. Indeed, no investigation into their emotional or intellectual responses to the situation ever comes into consideration.

Other cases of this same linguistic process further shift attention away from the realm of personal identity and so reinforce the tendency of the overall structure to present figures merely as apsychological variants of one another. Deemphasizing the place of personal conscience under such circumstances, metonymy underscores the potential for brutality in this world:

. . . *el machete* del anciano había liberado otras piedras desemparejadas. . . (p. 133).

Ahora, los Grandes Loas favorecían *las armas negras* (p. 79).

Centenares de hombres trabajaban en las entrañas de aquella inmensa construcción siempre espíados por *el látigo y el fusil* (p. 94).

Here the weapons, acting in place of people, seem to have a will of their own.

In comparable manner, parts of the body also often dissociate themselves metonymically from the characters in *El reino de este mundo*. This is true most notably of voices. We read, for instance,

Era fama que *su voz* grave y sorda le conseguía todo de las negras . . . (p. 14).

... *el rumor* de las conversaciones llenaba todo el bosque ... (p. 51).

... *una voz* potente se alzó en medio del congreso de sombras ... (p. 51).

In this last sentence the substance and power of the voice make themselves particularly evident through the contrast with shadowy human figures. One of the most outstanding examples of this kind of dissociation is realized in the chapter, "Lo que hallaba la mano." Mackandal, the leader of a slave uprising, loses a hand in a work accident. His remaining hand becomes invested with an autonomy similar to that of the disembodied voices, the kerchiefs of the dance, and the whip and gun at the construction site. Acquiring an almost magical capability to perceive secrets of natural life, this limb endowed with special privilege examines plants and insects that usually pass unnoticed by humans. In the process it discovers the poison that will be instrumental in the coming insurrection.

As these illustrations indicate, verbal metaphor is closely related to the metonymic displacement of reference which allows attributes to replace people and take over their actions. The same trope that dehumanizes characters may personify the inanimate. For this reason, while substantive metaphor is extremely infrequent in *El reino de este mundo*, verbal metaphor is legion and appears in a variety of grammatical forms, including present, imperfect, and preterite tenses and past and present participles:

Ríos caudalosos, *nacidos* del hielo, lamían los pies del hombre ... (p. 16).

... espadas que *mordían* ... (p. 46).

... masas reales cuyo perfume *volaba* hasta más allá de la calle ... (p. 46).

... [la actriz era] *mordida* por el paludismo ... (p. 47).

... el espejo lo *envejecía* de semana en semana ... (p. 66).

Llamándose unos a otros, *respondiéndose* de montaña a montaña, *subiendo* de las playas, *saliendo* de las cavernas, *corriendo* debajo de los árboles, *descendiendo* por las quebradas y cauces, tronaban los tambores radás ... (p. 113).

It is natural that the metaphor/metonymy distinction should be less clear cut in the case of verbal metaphor than in the case of substantive metaphor, since both syntactically and semantically the verb actively modifies the noun it governs, and vice versa. The metaphoric change of one element therefore extends its own polyvalence to the semantic components of the other. Such interaction does not so readily occur when two nouns stand in a relation of equivalence to one another. Adjectival metaphor operates in much the same way as verbal metaphor, as is indicated to us by the use of past participles that serve here as both adjectives and verbs (*nacidos*, *mordida*, etc.). The phrase *ríos nacidos del hielo*, for instance, alters the ordinary sense of both *ríos* and *nacidos*; the rivers, of course, acquire a kind of autonomy and undergo a suggested transforma-

tion into living creatures. Concomitantly, the verb *nacer* regains a more general meaning than that of being born, and so comes to connote a broader sense of emergence and generation.¹⁴

This kind of mutual modifying of verb and noun, or of noun and adjective, so prevalent in Carpentier's novel ensures the unity of the enigmatic and the evident, the supernatural and the natural in this fictional world. Acting as natural counterparts of one another, metonymy and verbal metaphor create a shift in expectations: a beating of drums gains eerie freedom from the people who beat them and so seems to be at the behest of supernatural powers; poison drags itself across the country, apparently without the aid of human agents. Thus metaphor and metonymy act as one of Carpentier's primary methods of injecting the marvelous into his Caribbean portrait. As Frances Weber has pointed out so well, the same processes operate in Carpentier's subsequent narrative, "El acoso" (1956).¹⁵ They result in a similar magical animation of setting and complementary, crippling loss of volition in the human figures. The combination, however, results there in an exaggerated artificiality due to the extreme fragmentation of the text and the extreme metonymic distortions in the prose. Depicting a series of events in the life of a student turned revolutionary and hunted by a rival terrorist block, "El acoso" retains only the most superficial political focus. It is a *tour de force*, difficult to read, to decipher and to piece together; it enacts a ritual drama and presents an interesting subversion of linearity as the standard mode of detective fiction, but it does not pose serious questions about the nature of history, social responsibility or individual conscience. *El reino de este mundo* cannot be dismissed quite so easily as a purely fictional entity, easily ascribed to designs of the imagination; it is much more readable and maintains in precarious balance a recognizable world of shared experience and a world of the imagination such that both complement one another and ensure a *real maravilloso*.

The techniques are less gratuitous in *El reino de este mundo*, furthermore, since they are consistent with the marvelous transformations seen here as an integral element of Haitian culture. The leaders of the slaves, availing themselves of the powers of Voodoo belief, know how to assume various forms of life and enter the animal kingdom. Thus, even when faced with death, Mackandal can remain in the kingdom of this world, transformed into a flying creature in the perception of his people: "Mackandal había cumplido su promesa, permaneciendo en el reino de este mundo. Una vez más eran burlados los blancos por los Altos Poderes de la Otra Orilla" (p. 41). The figure Ti Noel, too, learns this art at the end of the novel, and he becomes in rapid succession a bird, an ant, a bee, a stallion. The Voodoo beliefs indicate that there is no appreciable schism between the spiritual and material realm, and, furthermore, that there are lively and direct interactions of divine, magical or miraculous events with ordinary human affairs. Through his insistence on *lo real maravilloso*, Carpentier assumes the rightful place of such phenomena within the confines of his textual world.¹⁶

To achieve his portrait of the fabulous, Carpentier reinforces the use of metonymic shortcuts with other related narrative devices. As

Ricardo Fernández points out in “La novelística de Alejo Carpentier,” cause and effect often appear in the text via a shift in focus that makes their relationship seem disjunct. For example, an intermediary step in a process may be omitted, as it is in the sentence, “El paso de la carroza del gobernador, recargada de rocallas doradas, desprendió un amplio saludo a Monsieur Lenormand de Mezy” (p. 9).¹⁷ While a causal link exists between the carriage and the greeting, this connection depends on the actions of passengers who in fact never receive direct mention in the text. Omitting acknowledgment of these people confounds our ordinary sense of an action and its origins. A similar kind of deletion may alter the sequentiality of entire paragraphs as well. When Mackandal loses his hand, a perplexing number of actions are recounted before there is finally mention of an amputation (pp. 16-17). Like the slave himself in his shock and horror, the reader fails to grasp immediately what is happening. Splitting the events into disconnected details, the prose enhances the nightmarish quality of the scene.

Roberto González Echevarría observes in *The Pilgrim at Home* that Carpentier takes advantage of a comparable kind of ellipsis in his adaptation of historical documents to his fiction. The result, similarly, is to render strange the familiar by distancing causes from effects. González Echevarría refers to this technique as “collage, the superimposing and collation of historical text” (p. 132), and his discussion shows how Carpentier closely paraphrases earlier narrative versions of the same events, while bringing about a significant change of emphasis. In contrast, for instance, to the description of Mackandal’s execution in a treatise from 1797 by Moreau de Saint-Méry, Carpentier’s version of this scene deletes transitions and explanatory statements. The result is to give more prominence to the slaves’ perception of the incident as a fantastic one.¹⁸ Their belief that the leader has been saved hits the reader before the colonizers’ more rational perceptions of the event do, and so, due to this careful shift of focus, the marvelous gains authenticity and the implausible, by consensus, thereby acquires new legitimacy.

These points remind us that the novel as a whole exhibits a disjunction similarly ascribable to discontinuities in the narration. The episodic nature of events encourages us to make sense of the work by interpreting it according to patterns of similarity and difference. We can see now that the overall metaphoric organization of this text and the metonymic ellipsis of the prose complement one another, precisely because the former is simply an intensification of the same process that motivates the latter—a contiguity disorder that suppresses links of temporality and causality. Both derealize, through with significant differences of degree. One of the strengths of Jakobson’s metaphor-metonymy model, one which has allowed discussion of the various interrelations of opposing narrative impulses in this novel, is the fact that it enjoys a built-in flexibility. Because Jakobson’s distinction is elastic enough to acknowledge an inescapable coexistence and interdependence of these two modes of linguistic operation at every level of language, this theory need not become ensnared in reductive polarities.¹⁹

The enumeration so frequent in Carpentier’s novel further capital-

izes on the overlap and the tensions between succession and apposition that mark the work as a whole. Like the fragmentation of the general organization, enumeration fosters contradictory, simultaneous claims on the reader's attention. The many particulars it presents retain a certain individuality, yet the lack of combinatorial ties between these terms highlights the parallels between them. A constant tug-of-war ensues between the tendency to see those details in isolation and the tendency to see them as parts of a unified set of events.

Since fragmentation and totalization are two sides of the same coin, enumeration creates contradictory effects; it may tend to fracture or to stress unification. The former occurs in the description of Mackandal's accident and also in the description of Sans Souci, the fortress of the Black king, Henri Christophe (pp. 89-90). Ti Noel, happening upon the location, cannot at first assimilate the incongruous details of the scene; Blacks, dressed in lavish European fashion, carry out the functions of a luxurious European court. The phenomenon becomes explicable thanks to mention of the name, Sans Souci, but this comes about only after the presentation of a disorienting wealth of detail. The list of items that decorate the cave of Maman Loi, the sorceress, similarly builds up a sense of singularity and emphasizes Ti Noel's amazement when he first encounters the site (pp. 19-20). Although the denotative richness of lists particularizes and vivifies the fictional world, enumeration in excess derealizes, much as metonymic deletions tend to preserve context but may simultaneously distort it. Carried to an extreme, enumeration leads to a bewildering multiplicity. The converse effect of this device, to unify, makes sensible patterns of such chaos from a higher perspective. For this reason the technique is associated frequently in the novel with crowd scenes (pp. 14, 45-46, 63). A proliferation of items often serves to evoke a whole panorama and to convey a sense of large dimensions, prodigious exuberance, and massive groups of people, all of which Carpentier thought worthy of a new epic narrative in Spanish American fiction. These scenes imply that there is in fact a self-contradictory coherence in New World culture: the Caribbean is portrayed as a conglomeration of diverse traditions, undeniable in its material immediacy, but also undeniably astonishing and implausible.

These indeed are the qualities most central to Carpentier's social vision in the novel. New World identity presents itself here as an extremely vital and lively one, a highly eclectic one, and on all levels a profoundly anti-rational one. Our examination of metaphor and metonymy therefore corroborates and amplifies the author's views of society as he more discursively expressed them in essay form. In his piece, "Problema de la actual novela latinoamericana," Carpentier suggests that the New World enjoys a Baroque sensibility in which opposites converge.²⁰ *El reino de este mundo*, too, implies that a new synthesis can develop here out of the clash of various cultures, since certain essential affinities unite the different ethnic groups involved. Despite the effete refinement of European society and the earthy sensuality of the Haitian slave society, the European excesses and the spectacular aspects of Voodoo share a comparable exuberance, ostentatiousness and fantastic improbability. For this reason Pauline Bonaparte's sudden and extreme immersion in

Voodoo customs parallels the easy adaptation of Solimán, her former slave, to life in Rome. By the same token, a visit to the Borghese palace and an encounter with a statue of Pauline triggers, in Solimán's mind, a flashback to the overthrow of Christophe. Just as, for Pauline, Solimán's exotic rituals come to have compelling authenticity and cannot be disregarded as superstition, for Solimán the statue seems to be a real person, capable of springing to life at any moment. The boundary between the ordinary and the extraordinary disappears; art and life, the imaginary and the actual, all coexist in a single realm of the marvelous. By the same token Ti Noel finds "un calor de vodú" (p. 79) in the Spanish churches of Santiago de Cuba, and as the colony falls to an insurrection, he underscores the place of the marvelous in both European and African heritage, which is superior to (French) rationalism and which points to a tremendous potential for syncretism:

Ogún Badagrí guiaba las cargas al arma blanca contra las últimas trincheras de la Diosa Razón. Y, como en todos los combates que realmente merecen ser recordados porque alguien detuviera el sol o derribara murallas con una trompeta, hubo, en aquellos días, hombres que cerraron con el pecho desnudo las bocas de cañones enemigos . . . (pp. 79-80).

The social synthesis envisaged here, however, remains a fundamentally divisive unity, composed of irreconcilable disparities. It does not preclude vicious conflict between the diverse groups that comprise the society as a whole. Certainly, part of the collective identity created in this world depends precisely on the pervasive cultural emptiness, shared by all, that results from their incompatibilities. Though the work is directly concerned with redefining and reappraising a national identity, it cannot do so by reconfirming cultural origins. These people do not share a past or tradition capable of granting them a communal sense of self or of historical continuity. The text, consequently, can point out only a shared failure to achieve solidarity and to garner meaning from time. The process of national self-discovery in *El reino de este mundo* therefore becomes ironically a process of loss: there can be no progress here, only spasmodic revolution and ever-new permutations of old defeats.

The ending of the novel reinforces this sense of irony and of impasse, yet it does leave the way open for a revalorization of each present moment and of man's meaningful participation in collective experience. Carpentier's characters, seen from an overarching perspective, may seem to crystallize into immutable patterns of action that testify to the futility of their lives. From one man's perspective, though, Ti Noel tries to invest a comparable futility with significance. Articulating at the close of *El reino de este mundo* what the author already implied quite clearly through the metaphoric composition of the narrative, this figure realizes that all efforts evade fulfillment for the individual, and so he makes his peace with meaninglessness through an existentialist reassertion of struggle as a spiritual value. Comprehending that the means to an end often ironically become an end in themselves (albeit a less than entirely satisfying one) and that human aspiration to overcome limitations has

worth, ironically, only in the limited world of the here-and-now, Ti Noel sums up the human dilemma:

hermoso dentro de su miseria, capaz de amar en medio de las plagas, el hombre sólo puede hallar su grandeza, su máxima medida en el Reino de este Mundo (p. 144).

This affirmation of contradiction subsequently finds its most condensed and resonant expression through the metaphor that marks the close of the novel. As Ti Noel reviews the events of his life and comes to an understanding of their value, a cataclysmic wind suddenly arises and no one ever hears of him again,

salvo, tal vez, aquel buitres mojado, aprovechador de toda muerte, que esperó el sol con las alas abiertas: cruz de plumas que acabó por plegarse y hundir el vuelo en las espesuras de Bois Caimán (p. 145).

The metaphoric phrase, *cruz de plumas*, effectively blends the Voodoo motif of metamorphosis into animal forms together with the Christian symbolism of sacrifice, at the same time endorsing and subverting them both. The semantic information, *cross-shaped*, is common both to a crucifix and to the outstretched wings of a bird, and in this way the metaphor conjures up the freedom associated with flying and the connotations of martyrdom which the title of the chapter, "Agnus Dei," reinforces. The result is to lend the bird positive, mystical significance that contrasts ironically with the sinister attributes of vultures. The fact that a bird is animate and a cross inanimate adds to the irony; while it is incongruous on one level for a living creature to serve as an instrument of death and sacrifice, on another level this suggestion is entirely in keeping with Ti Noel's conclusions that life itself, all human enterprise, constitutes effort and suffering for the sake of unknown others. The text hints in addition that the man himself has assumed the guise of a vulture, just as he previously turned himself into various representatives of the animal kingdom. This possibility adds even more irony, for the scene implies that Ti Noel becomes part of the bird, converted in death to the carrion on which the vulture feeds. Whereas this kind of physical transformation is not entirely incompatible with the Voodoo belief in metamorphosis, an enormous discrepancy exists between the values attached to the two kinds of change. Mackandal's execution converts itself into an occasion for joy, since his supporters see his death as an escape in the form of a bird, but Ti Noel's case is tinged with suggestions of repugnant desecration of the dead. The irony of the metaphor cuts both ways, against a purely Christian interpretation and against a Voodoo interpretation, yet the *cruz de plumas* is fully integrated with the character's destiny, with the ironies of his existence and with the positive value he derives from absence of meaning.

The *cruz de plumas* metaphor is particularly striking, because it concludes a narrative that so conspicuously leans away from metaphor and toward metonymy. The metaphoric organization of the text unifies

multiple incongruities by setting up parallels, but the final image more nearly involves an identification of two separate realms of meaning and so offers us a more complete image of union. The immediacy of the concluding trope all the same depends in part on the fact that it is an example of genitive metaphor, which, like verbal metaphor, straddles the opposing ranges of metaphoric and metonymic process.²¹ The word *de* here creates a link of contiguity, connecting an object to the material of which it consists. Blurring the boundary between the figurative and the literal, this word holds the imagined construct of the cross firmly to the concrete element of feathers. The trope thus helps invest Ti Noel's physical fate with an indissociable spirituality. Both acquire disquietingly ambivalent values, though, as we have seen, and the metaphor thereby reiterates the impression that New World identity is a very rich, syncretic one, one that necessarily entails an alteration of the traditions it subsumes.

The title, *El reino de este mundo*, also achieves its greatest fulfillment at the conclusion of the novel. Superseding all preceding sense of conflict, it combines allusion to Voodoo beliefs with an existentialist perspective, and it recalls Christian belief—blasphemously—in its very rejection of faith in the Kingdom of the Next World. Furthermore, in its linguistic make-up the title recapitulates the overall structure of the novel that fosters a synthesis of all those things. This is so, first of all, since the phrase takes the form of a genitive metaphor. *Kingdom* here introduces a figurative element, since Ti Noel, in his rejection of political leadership, clearly rejects all kings. The metaphor takes not the form *A of B = C* (as was the case with *crúz de plumas = buitre*), but rather *A of B*, where *A* is basically identical with *B*. The kingdom is essentially equated with *this world*, but since its connotations of splendor are counteracted by the mention of the here-and-now, they serve to deny any kind of other-worldly glory; concomitantly, they invest the everyday with a tinge of grandeur. At the same time, the title is formally indistinguishable from a metonym *in praesentia*, a metonymic configuration in which both terms of the trope are explicitly mentioned. The phrase *of this* creates a link of contiguity between *kingdom* and *world* and so insists on a connective of cause and effect, even as the equivalence relationship, the identity of kingdom and world, struggles to deny that link. The two processes underscore that this highly polyvalent fictional reality is of a single piece; man's fulfillment remains in the realm of this world, just as reference in the phrase *el reino de este mundo* comes back around to itself.

Projecting a parallel onto a chain of syntactically linked elements, much as the narrative as a whole projects metaphoric structure onto historical sequence, the title itself dramatically presents the tautological preservation of context that is so important in the work. Availing itself in a number of ways of the overlap between metaphoric and metonymic operations, the title underscores for us again the conflicting impulses of the narrative and the precarious reconciliation they achieve in this work. *El reino de este mundo* attempts to forge a collective portrait of people who do not share a common heritage, and the pervasive contradictions that emerge here through an inversion of modernist conventions, an adaptation of spatial form to collective portrayal, stem from this basic,

paradoxical situation. Socially this circumstance calls for a highly creative response: the forging of a new identity capable of merging formidable varieties of racial, ethnic and cultural groups, extremes of wealth and poverty, the coexistence of primitive and modern societies. Artistically this circumstance led Carpentier to create a textual reality that blurs the boundaries between transcendence and immanence, the plausible and the implausible, the historical and the fictional, as it attempts to turn fragmentation and discontinuity into a cohesive depiction of communal dilemma.

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NOTES

1. For discussion on the contrapuntal schema of the novel, see Emil Volek's essay, "Análisis e interpretación de 'El reino de este mundo' de Alejo Carpentier," in *Homenaje a Alejo Carpentier: Variaciones interpretativas en torno a su obra*, ed. Helmy F. Giacoman (New York: Las Américas, 1970), pp. 147-48. In *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 137-41, Roberto González Echevarría examines some consistent patterns of opposition in the text, most notably a contrast between Sundays of ritual and Mondays of events. These he evaluates in terms of authorial presence imposed on historical material and a resulting void between writer and world. Other critics, less astutely, have noted mainly the fragmentation and not the coherence of the novel. See, e.g. Fernando Algria, "Alejo Carpentier: Realismo mágico," in Giacoman, p. 50.
2. Ricardo Fernández calculates these dates convincingly in "La novelística de Alejo Carpentier," Diss. Princeton 1970.
3. "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," in *The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1963), pp. 3-60. This essay appeared originally in *The Sewanee Review*, 53, Nos. 2-4 (1945).
For discussion of Carpentier's debt to surrealism, see Klaus Müller-Bergh's "Corrientes vanguardistas y surrealismo en la obra de Alejo Carpentier," in *Asedios a Alejo Carpentier: Once ensayos críticos sobre el novelista cubano* (Santiago de Chile: Universitaria, 1972), p. 23.
For more details on the effect of modernistic fragmentation in the collective novel, see my essay, "Spatial Form in the Social Novel: USA and *El reino de este mundo*." *Papers in Romance*, Vol. 2, Supplement 1 (July 1980), pp. 111-19.
4. Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," p. 60.
5. Frank acknowledges this connection in "Spatial Form: Some Further Reflections," *Critical Inquiry* 5, No. 2 (1978) 275-90. For Jakobson's ideas see especially "Two Aspects of Language: Metaphor and Metonymy," in *Fundamentals of Language*, ed. Jakobson and Morris Halle (The Hague: Mouton, 1956); rpt. in *European Literary Theory and Practice: From Existential Phenomenology to Structuralism*, ed. Vernon Gras (New York: Dell, 1973), pp. 119-31.
6. Carpentier himself commented on this change quite specifically; see "Confesiones de un escritor barroco," an interview by César Leante, in Giacoman, p. 21.
7. (Paris: Larousse, 1973).
8. This is Kenneth Burke's term from *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley and

- Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), p. 508. Burke uses it in connection with synecdoche, but the word applies very aptly to the understanding of metonymy which I rely on here to discuss Carpentier's work.
9. González Echevarría discusses the *mundonovismo* of the '40's in detail in the third chapter of *The Pilgrim at Home*.
 10. "The Mission of Metaphor in Expressive Culture," *Current Anthropology*,¹⁵ No. 2 (1974), 118-44.
 11. *El reino de este mundo* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1969), p. 78.
 12. This is James Irby's explanation in "The Structure of the Stories of Jorge Luis Borges," Diss. University of Michigan, 1962.
 13. Emphasis has been added here and in the subsequent quotations that present examples of metonymic discourse.
 14. In *A Grammar of Metaphor* (London: Seiker and Warburg, 1958), pp. 206-37, Christine Brooke-Rose suggests that in fact the verb of verbal metaphor dominates the noun. Thus the sentence, "the chair laughed," in her estimate enacts a change in our sense of what a chair is or may do, but does not alter our sense of what laughing is. I agree more with Le Guern's assertion that both verb and noun are modified in this kind of construction. By insisting on the pivotal nature of the verb, Brooke-Rose sometimes confuses special cases of personification or fantasy with genuine verbal metaphor.
 15. "El acoso: Alejo Carpentier's War on Time," *PMLA* 78 (1963) 440-48.
 16. Two studies, Alfred Métraux's *Voodoo in Haiti*, trans. Hugo Charteris (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), and Maya Deren's *Divine Horsemen: Voodoo Gods of Haiti* (New York: Dell, 1972), explore this kind of deliberate link of contiguity between the divine and the human in Voodoo tradition. They explain that the deities, or Loas, penetrate the human world in a very concrete way through ceremonial dance in which the participants enter trances and take on the attributes of the gods that are seen as possessing the body.
 17. "La novelística de Alejo Carpentier," Chapter II.
 18. Along with Saint-Méry's work, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'Isle de Saint-Domingue*, González Echevarría mentions in particular V. Schoelcher's *Vie de Toussaint-Louverture*, from 1889, as an important source for Carpentier's presentation of Haitian history.
 19. The overlap of the two categories is most evident in the simple fact that to form a sentence it is necessary to select lexical items from among the possible choices available and then combine those items together syntactically. Therefore, each phoneme, word and phrase in the resulting utterance by definition maintains relationships of both likeness and dependence with other elements in the language. Thanks to the inherent flexibility of Jakobson's concepts, there is considerable room to refine and elaborate on his ideas without resorting to fundamental modifications of the metaphor/metonymy opposition. Jakobson's model merits this consideration, above all, because it is based on compelling psycholinguistic evidence which justifies positing the existence of two primary verbal orientations.
 20. *Tientos y diferencias* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1964), p. 41 especially.
 21. See Le Guern, p. 34, for a thorough discussion of genitive metaphor.