the earthy solidity of the everyday and the phantomatic and disquieting; between the sober focus of an attentive mind and all the unfounded speculations which threaten to run away with reasonableness; between words which refer to nothing but themselves and words which open up a rich vein of symbolic suggestion. But numerous warning notices within the novel itself serve to keep one's more fanciful constructions in check: ". . . tout est trucage et exploitation de la crédulité . . . tant d'intérêt porté à nos supçons c'était vouloir leur donner corps . . ." (pp. 68-69), "Ou que rien n'avait à voir avec rien, on se faisait des idées . . ." (p. 56). And one wonders if the mysteries one detects, the multiple angles one sees, and the discoveries one makes are not "fantasme," "fausses perspectives" and if one has not been drugged by "le plaisir des fausses découvertes."

All the things which make a novel—a story, a character, a time sequence, and a control over words and their progression—are missing from *Passacaille.* But perhaps, in damning itself as a novel, it resurrects itself as a form of poetry: ". . . grande liberté, n'était-ce pas là le domaine de la poésie?" (p. 90). Certainly, the great themes of poetry (time and memory, nature and the seasons, solitude and death) seep through the verbal fissures. Little touches of human emotion, all the more poignant because of their spasmodic appearance in a framework of absence and erosion, remind one of Reverdy's world. Pinget's technique, which juxtaposes images but states nothing, creates a play of suggestion. Above all, the work has the densely patterned structure of a poem, within which repetitions act as refrains, changes of tempo set up waves of rhythm, and words, no longer subservient to plot or ideas, enjoy the greatest creative autonomy. The prose poem has gained respectability as a "genre." *Passacaille* could well be a major development in a poem-novel.

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Juan José Hernández and his City of Dreams

Juan José Hernández, a young Argentinian author, is not unknown to the English speaking reader. A good number of his short-stories have been published in various American and Canadian magazines. He started as a poet (*Negada permanencia,* 1952 and *Claridad vencida,* 1957) but soon after he was writing short stories, a genre in which he was to develop remarkable skill. He is a regular contributor to *La Prensa* of Buenos Aires and other periodicals. In 1969 he received a Guggenheim fellowship in the field of creative writing, and during that year he wrote his first novel *La ciudad de los sueños* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1971). In this book the author does not stress the ideological side of his story although he is not indifferent to it. He has other means of expressing such a theme. He seems to be more interested in what the social and political turmoil (unleashed by Juan Peron) did to people, than in the description of that turmoil. The history of those days when Peron rose to power is the background against which Hernández draws his characters. They all belong to the middle and upper classes of Argentina, specifically of Tucumán, his own native province.

In Tucumán, as in the rest of the country, dramatic social changes took place at that time. One of the changes occurred in women's position in society. For the first time they were permitted to vote; they were emancipated from the old family structures and went out to compete with men in all fields of work. Many of them went to the big city, "the city of dreams," to build their own future. The elderly women remained at home dreaming of the past—the golden days when they were young, protected by a genteel breed of men, ignoring the existence of that avid, resentful lot that emerged from nowhere and invaded the sanctity of their Paradise, the "shirtless" proletariat shouting "Long live Peron" and "Down with the oligarchs."

This process offers a very powerful subject matter that could be dealt with through passionate novels in the manner of Dos Passos or in the detached vein of Jorge Luis Borges' short stories. Juan José Hernández chose the allusive, concise style of the latter. He does not emphasize; he avoids heavy traits; he prefers to suggest. This is perhaps why the critics were not too enthusiastic about Hernández' novel, but when we read: "How graceful Magdalena Iturbide looked in her costume of Titania, the Queen of fairies! I was also elated by other young ladies dressed as Marie Antoinette, Joan of Arc and *Petite Duchese*," (p. 31) we can see that the costume party belongs to that vanishing era and that the nostalgia is ironic, not real. It is for the reader to reflect upon the alienated cultural world in which Argentina lived for so long. The message seems to be that we have been dreaming of a past which was never our own: palaces, princes, enchanting masquerades, the romantic atmosphere that made us regret the fact that we were born in this remote corner of the planet, far from the Europe of our ancestors. All this dream world disappeared suddenly when the masses, i.e. the *real* Argentina, came to the surface and we were faced with the fact that this was not a transplanted Europe, nor the richest country in the world as the school textbooks said. Argentina was Latin America all of a sudden; it was only beginning to develop; in short, it was a part of the *third world.*

Juan José Hernández only records facts—whether they be physical facts, or just thoughts of the characters in the story. He does not comment; there lies the value of his narrative. One reads this novel with ease but its innocence is deceptive; there is a complex structure beneath it. It starts as a "diary," in October of 1944. Soon we discover that this form is just a convention among many others. It is only one way of presenting a perspective. Without transition we read an interior monologue that comes from someone else's mind. Further on, we find a third "narrator," this time an omniscient narrator who uses the third person in the past tense, as in the traditional novel. Still another device is a conversation over the telephone between two high school students, and then a new interior monologue: this time, it is the old servant Aniceta. There are letters, fragments of the social column of *Élite* (the fashion magazine for which Matilde, the protagonist, works), Eva Peron's speeches, newspaper headlines, etc. In other words, a whole array of literary devices assembled in a very effective way. This multiple point of view reminds us of Faulkner's methods. The story progresses, chronologically, in a linear way, except for some flashbacks, or the slight overlapping in the "monologues" of the different characters. A peculiar trait is a series of photographic descriptions of Matilde's childhood (four of them: pages 11, 36, 127, and 142), which unite the scattered fragments of her life story, anchoring the narrative to a firm base. They show us that Matilde's dreams had an early start. The discovery of sex, her rebellion against the iron discipline at home and at school, her suspicion of being an illegitimate child, the emancipa-

tion (via marriage to an older man) of her friend Lila Cisneros, etc., prepared Matilde's mind for her most important undertaking, her journey to Buenos Aires, and her final disillusion.

This is, indeed, an intriguing short novel where the anxieties of an entire class are summarized in the dreams and failures of a young lady from a provincial town. She is caught between the promises of a new social order and her out-dated education. Her liberation comes late (she is 26 before leaving home) and the social order she finds in Buenos Aires, far from bringing her happiness is just as it was in Tucumán, only a little more hypocritical and with stronger prejudices.

The story only covers four years (1944-1948); the burgeoisie and the middle class do not change much. *Élite,* devoted before to the fashion and gossip from Paris, begins to give space in its columns to "folk music" and parties where Indian art or apparel are displayed, but with the same snobbishness as before. In one of those parties, Matilde's *exotic* (i. e. provincial) beauty attracts the attention of the privileged set. Ironically she yields to Jorge Páez, a retired playboy to whom she loses her virginity and her last dream.

The final message of *La ciudad de los sueños* is not one of condemnation of the Peron regime, but one of disillusion for everybody. The masses do not gain an inch in their status; the old provincial burgeoisie remains untouched (but with its pride increased); the rich continue to be rich. All of their social habits are kept intact and aloof from the so called "social revolution." Girls like Matilde were just as unhappy as before and nurtured ambitions that one would think belonged only to the outcasts. In the last chapter of her "confessions" Matilde states: "I want love and abundance here and now, and I shall fight in order to get them with all the hatred that my heart is capable of harboring."

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The Novels of Roger Mais

L. E. Braithwaite once wrote that Mais' novels "were built mainly for protest and his protest had become rather old fashioned by the time they came to be read."[1] The note of protest is not central to Mais' books. Instead the tone is neutral, but in a way which does not discount a warm informing interest. It is true to say that there is poverty and degradation in Mais' books, but a visit to West Kingston would dispel any notion that this has become old fashioned. In *The Commonwealth Pen* G. R. Coulthard refers again to the "dominant note of protest," seeing the books as "crudely realistic."[2] These attitudes arise partly out of memories of the man himself,[3] and partly out of the temptation to categorize the subject matter of his three novels,[4] though on this point, nothing is said about the last one, *Black Lightning,* which by implication is not "typical" Mais.