

<sup>3</sup>Pierre Guyotat, "Tam-Tam," *Les Cahiers du Chemin*, No. 1 (15 Oct. 1967), pp. 7-19.

<sup>4</sup>Pierre Guyotat, *Eden, Eden, Eden* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), pp. 15-30.

<sup>5</sup>Pierre Guyotat, *Tombeau pour cinq cent mille soldats* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967). Subsequent quotations are from this edition and bear the page reference in parentheses after the abbreviated title *T*.

<sup>6</sup>Pierre Guyotat, "Bordels boucherie," *Tel Quel*, No. 36 (Winter 1969), pp. 18-32.

<sup>7</sup>Pierre Guyotat, *Eden, Eden, Eden*, pp. 30-60.

<sup>8</sup>Pierre Guyotat, *Littérature interdite* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972). Subsequent quotations are from this edition and bear the page reference in parentheses after the abbreviated title *LI*.

<sup>9</sup>Philippe Sollers, "La matière et sa phrase," *Critique*, No. 290 (July 1971), pp. 607-625.

<sup>10</sup>Joseph Venturini, "La NC en direct... à propos de Pierre Guyotat," quoted by Guyotat, *Littérature interdite*, pp. 182-183.

### Socialist Realism in a Cuban Novel: *La Situación* by Lisandro Otero

The victory of Communism in Cuba had an immediate effect upon the orientation of a good part of the Cuban narrative during the first half of the sixties. The social and political reality in existence prior to the Revolutionary triumph became a major topic of critical analysis in the novels and short stories published at that time. Socialist realism did not become the only official doctrine in Cuba, as it had during the Stalinist era in Russia, yet it did appear in novels such as Lisandro Otero's *La Situación* (1963) under a different and more complex guise. Turning away from traditional patterns, Otero allows a Marxist outlook to emerge while presenting events and characters in an objective and realistic manner. *La Situación*, probably the most ambitious attempt to unveil the very roots of power in prerevolutionary Cuba, is an indictment of the bourgeoisie, the social class in which Otero himself was raised. Yet Otero's manner of achieving his goal is unique for he departs from the narrow molds of typical socialist realistic works in order to extol the virtues of the Communist system. He avoids the highly rhetorical denunciation characteristic of those works and does not set the time of the novel in the socialist present. His main character is not the positive hero of most socialist realistic novels, but Luis Dascal, a disoriented and disgruntled lower middle-class youth who restlessly moves about within the social circles of the rich bourgeoisie of Havana. Otero's deviation from the usual standards does not weaken his intent. Through an intelligent manipulation of the narrative and his complex character portrayals, Otero emerges as faithful to the spirit of socialist realism as the most orthodox representatives of that art.

The novel begins on August 26, 1951 in a bar in Varadero where the upper class meets and mingles during the beach season. Through his friend Carlos Sarría, Luis has become acquainted with certain representatives of the economically dominant element, among them, Alejandro Sarría, Carlos' father, a bank tycoon, and Senator Cedrón, an influential politician. The time span of the narrative plot is significant. The first scene reveals that Luis and Cristina, Carlos' mother, will soon begin their affair. The novel ends shortly after their relationship is concluded sometime in May of 1952. This time period of about

nine months also marks the ascent and fall of Luis' hopes for financial success, which totally depend upon his alliance with Cristina. Through her mediation, Dascal is soon appointed administrative secretary of a newspaper that Alejandro Sarriá has decided to publish as a means of increasing his political power. Months later, Dascal's indiscreet behavior towards Cristina causes him to lose his job and together with it, the possibility of advancing his position in public life.

The structural complexity of the novel is another clue to understanding Otero's motive of political and social criticism. The narrative plot involving Luis and Cristina alternates with a second stream of narration from the past. This narration is then divided into two series of chapters which the novelist entitles "Oro blanco" (White Gold) and "Un padre de la patria" (A Founder of the Nation). The first series, whose title is a symbolical reference to sugar, describes the change of fortune in the life of Cayetano Sarriá, Alejandro's father, from his arrival in Havana harbor at the end of the last century, until his death in independent Cuba; the destitute Spanish immigrant is transformed into a wealthy land baron with huge investments in the sugar industry. The second series outlines the most important events in the life of Colonel Cedrón after his triumphant return from the Cuban War of Independence. This series continues, even more importantly, to focus on the life of his son, the future Senator Cedrón, from the time of his father's assassination by President Menocal's army until he secures his financial position as a new partner in one of the most prosperous Havana law firms. Otero's selection and interjection of these chapters from past history is an early attempt to reveal the roots of political and economical power in capitalistic Cuba. The Sarriás and the Cedróns represent two ways of attaining power: economic cunning and political influence.

Sarriá's father is a prime example of the enterprising adventurer who stops at nothing in his zeal to become rich. With objective and almost casual precision Otero outlines the ruthless and immoral maneuvers which the first Sarriá undertakes in order to increase his wealth, showing among them the destruction of the economic strength of the small farmers who end up as his hired help. In Cayetano Sarriá's manipulation Otero evidently envisions a capitalistic process, the concentration of the means of production, described more than a hundred years ago by the Manifesto of the Communist League.<sup>1</sup>

Alejandro Sarriá, heir to the vast fortune of his father, is portrayed as nothing but a decadent bourgeois who tries to maintain a facade of respectability while avenging with an occasional mistress the frequent infidelities of his wife. Otero skilfully reveals the hypocrisy and insincerity of Sarriá by presenting his contradictory political opinions in two different instances. First, in 1951, with apparent good faith and lofty intentions, Sarriá confides to a friend his plans for the formation of a new political party. But when he learns of Batista's coup on March 10, 1952 his empty rhetoric changes to a cynical support of the status quo: "Batista respetaba las tradiciones. Batista sólo tenía un defecto: su tendencia a gobernar con mano fuerte, pero dada la situación del país ese defecto se convertía en virtud."<sup>2</sup>

Otero does not present in any better light the other pillar of Cuban capitalistic society, Senator Cedrón. The younger Cedrón orients his life in a manner totally different from his father. When the elder Cedrón joins an uprising against a republican government, his action represents an extreme political commitment and the undertaking of a perilous risk. During the course of his life, the second Cedrón avoids such dangerous and decisive situations. While other peers will fall during the struggle against the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado (1925-33) Cedrón will survive, giving only nominal support to

the revolution. After Machado's overthrow he refuses to participate in any of the political movements that strive to bring significant changes to the country. His joining the law firm headed by the father of a friend is the last act of desertion of any revolutionary ideal he may have embraced and the beginning of a public career that will eventually lead him to the senatorship. As a senator, his public actions will be guided by selfish personal and political interests rather than by courage and patriotism.

Luis Dascal, the main character in *La Situación*, is closer to the antihero of existentialist novels than to the positive hero of traditional novels of socialist realism. His willingness to participate in the newspaper venture along with his indifference and skepticism are apparently devoid of any feeling of social conscience or purposefulness. But, in fact, Otero, without propagandizing and with seeming objectivity, creates the character of Dascal in order to lead the reader to a condemnation of the capitalistic system. Dascal's nihilism and his lack of ethical convictions reflect an attitude of hopelessness fostered by the immorality and injustice of the environment in which he lives. This fact becomes evident when Dascal rejects the excuses or easy explanations that the Sarrias offer in order to justify some of the country's evils. When Cristina criticizes some superstitious habits of the common people, Luis is quick to point out their real source in the frustration felt by the dispossessed who are denied the opportunity to enjoy an adequate standard of living (p. 139).

The novel appears to end without a glimmer of hope about the possibility of ridding the country of the frivolity, corruption, and injustice that Otero has described as characteristic of Cuban society before the Revolution. But the fact remains that Otero has been careful to plant the seeds of hope in the very words of Dascal himself. In a discussion he has with the Sarrias, the usually skeptical Dascal reveals his belief in the people's capability for redemption when sufficiently motivated by historical circumstances: "No olviden que ese cubano de pie pequeño y camisa de hilo se lanzó a la manigua en 1868 y en 1895 porque un poder ajeno nos encasillaba como subclase humana: el criollo era inferior al peninsular y el negro esclavo y el campesino blanco inferiores al criollo: todos se sentían mal . . . Lo interesante es que cada vez que este pueblo cree que puede alcanzar el Bien Absoluto, desencadena un vigoroso esfuerzo" (pp. 145-46).

Dascal has never been a man of action and conviction, yet he continues to reaffirm his faith in the moral reserves of the Cuban people. His words now serve the purpose of the novelist and suggest and predict the inevitability of the future revolutionary victory: "Nos comprometemos totalmente en la batalla por el Bien Absoluto. La pasión nos dispara hacia los polos, o blanco o negro, nunca gris. Esa es una virtud, porque el gris mediatiza y aplaca; los matices son conformistas, sólo la exageración es revolucionaria" (p. 146). The triumph of a new political regime looms into perspective as a plausible solution to the ills of the nation. The despairing situation created by Batista's coup will act as a catalyst of revolutionary action.

Thus, Otero, in *La Situación* creates a picture of a historically concrete reality through an analysis of past events which point out the underlying forces of discontent that lead to the Revolution. Although he does not create a positive hero who is aware of his purposefulness in a socialist present situation, his novel exemplifies the concept of socialist realism expounded by Mirta Aguirre: "Porque realismo socialista hay—obténgase por los caminos que se obtenga— allí donde se obtiene la representación verídica, históricamente concreta, de la realidad en su desarrollo revolucionario; es decir, allí donde la esencia de la

realidad es puesta a flote, donde no se alberga la abstracción idealista, donde se apresa en toda su complejidad y su rico contenido de contradicciones, la lucha de lo que va a nacer con lo que muere."<sup>3</sup>

Otero's method of analyzing the social and political state that prevailed in Cuba before 1959 leads to a moral condemnation of the world destroyed by the Revolution. The necessary point of reference for the evaluation of the past is the present and the order created after the victory of Communism in Cuba. Otero's choice of narrative material and presentation of character development results in an indictment of a past reality from a Marxist perspective. Evidently based on his faith in the new social order in which he lives, Otero builds a novelistic world in which he demonstrates the impossibility of attaining any type of justice within the political structure of the time examined. With its critical objectivity, *La Situación* becomes a model of Marxist analysis that brings forth a totally negative view of the past in order to strengthen the conviction of its readers in the historical need for the emergence of the new revolutionary order.

Jorge A. Marbán  
Emory University

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>*The New Communist Manifesto and other related documents*, ed. Dan Jacobs (Evanston, Ill. and Elmsford, N.Y., 1961), p. 56.

<sup>2</sup>Lisandro Otero, *La Situación* (La Habana, 1963), p. 269.

<sup>3</sup>Mirta Aguirre, "Apuntes sobre la literatura y el arte," in *Literatura y arte nuevo en Cuba* (Barcelona: Editorial Estela, 1971), p. 182.

## Margaret Laurence's Progress

Margaret Laurence has been publishing fiction since 1954 when her translation of Somali folktales, *Tree for Poverty*, appeared. Her own early creative work, including the novel *This Side Jordan* (1960) and a collection of short stories, *The Tomorrow-Tamer* (1963), was set in Africa and dealt with various facets of the transition from tribal cultures and colonial domination to emergent nationhood. Her subsequent novels, all set in Canada, have earned her continuing critical and popular acclaim and an international reputation which the publication of her latest work, *The Diviners* (Toronto, 1974) is certain to enhance.

*The Stone Angel* (1964), with its ninety year old renegade heroine Hagar Shipley, established Mrs. Laurence's reputation as a writer in firm control of her material and one whose attitude to her central character was not only compassionate but tough-minded at the same time. *A Jest of God* (1966), the story of a neurotic thirty-four year old spinster Rachel Cameron and her attempts to cope with the demands of a clinging mother and the smothering social code of a small prairie town, won the Governor General's award for fiction and was later