

In conclusion: it is the Arab, and not Daru, who accepts fully both the exile and the kingdom. "The exile and the kingdom are not two continents separated by an ocean: they are two aspects of the same breath and heartbeat. The kingdom is in the exile, the exile is a path toward the kingdom—in fact, exile could actually be the kingdom."<sup>3</sup> In no instance is this formula as evident as in the case of the Arab, who embraces the *exile* of prison in order to achieve the *kingdom* of fraternity.

William R. Womack  
Francis S. Heck  
*University of Wyoming*

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Germaine Brée, *Camus* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964), pp. 136-37.

<sup>2</sup>Albert Camus, *Exile and the Kingdom*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), p. 91. Other references will be found in the body of the text.

<sup>3</sup>Gaëtan Ficon, "Exile and the Kingdom," trans. Josephine Valenza, in *Camus: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Germaine Brée (Englewood Cliffs: New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 155.

## Mirror Images in *Three Trapped Tigers*

Guillermo Cabrera Infante begins his novel, *Three Trapped Tigers*, with an epigraph taken from Lewis Carroll: ". . . and she tried to fancy what the flame of a candle looks like after the candle is blown out."<sup>1</sup> He calls this epigraph one of the "happiest in English literature," a combination of man's metaphysical necessity and of that crystallized nostalgia which is one of the names of poetry."<sup>2</sup> The novel can be seen as an expansion of its epigraph in its metaphysical concerns (however cavalierly treated) that parallel its existence as art. Through art or crystallized nostalgia one is able to control philosophically such aspects of experience as death or the inevitability of the present becoming the past. The book represents the author's attempt to freeze time and space, and it is about the efforts of his counterparts in the novel to do the same. Cúe, the actor; Sesoribó, the musician; Silvestre, the writer, and Códac, the photographer, are all artists trying to capture the very transience of the flame blown out. The key to creating art in a total present is to fancy what the candle looks like rather than what it looked like. Memory becomes exaggeratedly important as the present of the novel is equal to the sum total of the past. It is, in fact, difficult to ascertain when the narrative reaches a present point of view, for the present is no more than crystallized nostalgia—the total presence of what has gone before.

The present becomes a crisis of memory upon the deaths of Bustrófedon and La Estrella, and the recollection of the extinguished flame becomes a metaphysical necessity. Bustrófedon represents art as pure process, never setting down a word as product, and La Estrella is similarly pure creation, the "plasma of her voice" inventing songs that seem to have been only incompletely created before (p. 62). After their deaths, the problem that remains for the central characters is some variation of "Who was/is/will be Bustrófedon?" (p. 213). Bustrófedon-La Estrella

become symbolically and legendarily eternal and therefore prototypes or even complete contraries of the other personages. The remaining characters are their images in a fragmented glass, and Bustrófedon-La Estrella signify a totality which must be reconstructed as a metaphysical necessity. Actual mirror images are prominent in the novel, it being, as one section is entitled, a "Mirrormaze" (p. 133). *Three Trapped Tigers* actually achieves a sort of stasis in time by handling the past and, to an extent, the future, which is gauged by the past, as mirror reflections in the present; thus, all time coexists or is crystallized at one moment. In terms of space, a sense of infinite presence is established through a mirror gallery with the book itself emerging as a final reflector and a tautology.

The most obvious sense of the operating of mirrors in *Three Trapped Tigers* comes from their function in space as actual physical reflectors. However, a spatial reproduction of reality is inadequate. Just as La Estrella's picture on the album cover does not quite capture the essence of La Estrella, and memories of Bustrófedon are only fragments of the whole, art and memory are never wholly successful, but it is only through such attempts at art that one does approach a sense of eternity. Art and memory, in their most faithful representations of reality, cannot be fixed in space but must account for change or movement in time, for, as Cúe recognizes, "a photo transforms reality at the precise moment that it freezes it" (p. 371). La Estrella and Bustrófedon represent art in its most fluid form, but, even then, it has its basic, fixed, and irreducible components. Similarly, the novel has its fundamental images which it must make as elastic in context as possible. Therefore, there is a constant sense of reflection and re-reflection in *Three Trapped Tigers*, as of images ricocheting from mirror to mirror. This gives the world of the novel the benefit of both containment and infinite movement, making it more true to the process of life than an immovable portrait would be.

Time functions much the same as the mirror world does, with the present of the narrative constantly receding to different depths of the past. To recapture the essence of Bustrófedon-La Estrella will require more than a physical likeness, for there must be a temporal dimension to an image also. Bustrófedon's revelations are blank pages because there can be no concrete, spatial, and completed representation of what Bustrófedon has been. His creation and re-creation are dynamic, as he exists mirrored in and remembered by his friends. Codac says that Bustrófedon, in dying, has gone to the other side of the mirror, so what he is becomes a reflection of what he was. The world was and is a subset of his identity, everything being an aspect of his name, "Bustrofather," "Bustrofoton," and "Bustrophoenix" (p. 213). Similarly, La Estrella was and is the great contrary of the other women, being large and black (Irenita is small and blond) and the composite of the minor females, being the original singer-artist and a black whale of which the other women as fish are only aspects. After La Estrella's death, Las Capellas take her place as a fragmented or double image of her.

There are several mentions of mirrors which are not important in their specific content but as mirror games in general. Silvestre toys with the idea of being unable to see the sea for the wall around it but decides he could "guess it was there by looking at the sky which is its mirror" (p. 335). In the absence of one thing, such as Bustrófedon, all that is needed is a single mirror to reflect a total presence by means of whatever remains. Just as the sea and the sky are mirror aspects of the same reality, 6 is an even number which "has an odd number imaging it in the mirror: a 9" (p. 352). The numbers 88 and 101 are perfect because they are mirrors of

themselves, unchanged in space and time (p. 222). This perfection is a state to which the novel itself aims. A mirror which reflects space as well as time is Livia's when Cué looks at her breasts in it. The mirror image is an aspect of their physical reality as well as an aspect of another aspect—the past, which is juxtaposed to the present in Cué's mind-mirror when he remembers having seen her breasts differently before. The "Bachata" section of the work (pp. 315-481) is especially full of mirrors: Cué looks at himself in the mirror; Silvestre looks at Cué looking at himself, then looks at himself to be sure he exists and then looks at Cué to see if Cué is his (Silvestre's) mirror. Time and space are transcended, which is the aim of this section, by the infinite possibilities of a reflection between two mirrors or two people and a mirror.

The stories within the novel, while seemingly digressions, are actually other mirror aspects. Mr. Campbell, the author of "The Story of a Stick" (pp. 177-188), is a writer, while Cabrera Infante is a writer re-creating the process of Campbell's writing. The tale itself exists in three versions as a constant reflection on, and an adjustment of, reality. The tape of the parodies on the death of Trotsky is also a reflection of several levels of reality, a mirror within a mirror. "A farce mirrors a fiasco or *fracaso*" (p. 172). Cabrera Infante created Bustrófedon who created parodies of the writing of other authors, as a distorted mirror image. The event of Trotsky's death is seen in these parodies from a variety of possible angles, all distortions, pointing up the fact that one reality can give way to an infinity of re-creations, just as Bustrófedon breaks down into at least four characters. The dreams of Cué, Laura, and the woman at the psychiatrist's are three aspects of a similar fear about reality since they are all concerned with fire. The first three chapters of the eight chapters entitled "I Heard Her Sing" provide an ever-changing image of La Estrella. In the first chapter of this series of three, she represents herself to Códac as a servant with a retarded son, but, in the third view, Alex Bayer provides the information that she is a self-invited guest at his house and has a non-retarded daughter.

The repetition of themes and the recurrence of images makes the novel self-contained. The characters are aspects and distorted reflections of other characters, and events are reenactments of similar events. The work begins with certain materials, and instead of evolving a plot and moving forward, it exploits all the possibilities of its own contents as objects of the book rather than as subjects. The work is not necessarily about its contents; it is its contents. There is a focusing on a world which is one element in various manifestations of itself. Irenita is a "shrinking version of Marilyn Monroe," and the bald Ingrid is just another Jean Harlow (p. 57). Laura and Livia merge into "Lauralivia: one and the same thing" (p. 148). Even languages are aspects of each other, as "Russian is Cuban spelled backward" (p. 390).

According to Cué, life and death are not opposites but mirror images of a single state, "& life is the continuation of death by other means (Or *vie se reversa . . .*)" (p. 361). The same mirror analogy applies to the temporal world of the novel as to the spatial world. Memory is a mirror which is capable of reversing images in time and of recalling the dead Bustrófedon. The memory mirror is then the present which crystallizes what stands before it, the past. Therefore, with an emphasis on the present, Silvestre can say, "It will be a pity Bustrófedon didn't come" and "It was a pity Bustrófedon won't come" (p. 317). The present mediates between the past and the future which become practically interchangeable.

Although Silvestre says that "time is irreversible," memory makes the time he experiences conform to the laws of space, for he finds that memory obeys a law of the gravity of the past (p. 344). The past compels the present to reflect, and art, memory, and the mirror eternalize by crystallizing what has been. In this sense time within the novel operates like a pendulum, striking the mirror of the present and receding to the past ("like a pendulum, swinging back the way we came," p. 341). In their journey through time-space in the "Bachata" section, Cué and Silvestre swing back both in actual space and in time through memory (pp. 313-481). In retrospect, the journey, which they symbolically repeat in reverse, becomes an accomplished destiny, as does life after it is completed and crystallized by death. In this sense, Silvestre observes that Bustrofedon is probably immortal, beyond change. Nothing is lost from the self-contained chaos which is the world, as well as the world of the novel, because the future is a way back to the past, the mirror's reversed image. As Cué points out, *yo soy backwards is still yo soy* (p. 388).

It is the mirror images in time and space which make the book complete in itself. A word game about people playing word games, it is a mirror of people looking in mirrors and art concerned with the nature of art. By being thus self-contained, the novel need not seek any metaphysical explanations beyond its own existence. Its world is infinite in that it is a mirror of worlds within worlds. Cabrera Infante says in an imaginary self-interview that the "book is about what the book is about and what the book *is* is what the book is about . . ." <sup>3</sup> It is a happy combination of metaphysical necessity and crystallized nostalgia in its very self-containment. The justification for death or life lies in the permanence of memory and the eternity of possible reflections and circles within circles, and the novel itself is precisely these things: memories, mirrors, and circles within circles.

Barbara L. Hussey  
*Purdue University*

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *Tres tristes tigres* (Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, S. A., 1967). English translation by Donald Gardner and Suzanne Jill Levine in collaboration with the author, *Three Trapped Tigers* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971). Subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>2</sup>Julio Ortega citing the author in "An Open Novel," *Review* 72, 4 and 5 (Winter 71/Spring 72), 18.

<sup>3</sup>Guillermo Cabrera Infante, "Epilogue for Late(nt) Readers," *Review* 72, 4 and 5 (Winter 71/Spring 72), 30.

### On Abram Tertz's *A Voice from the Choir*

Could Dostoevsky ever have written about the fantastic murderers, the nightmarish confessions, or his characters' insatiable desire for freedom, had he himself not been arrested, sentenced to death, pardoned at the last moment at the site of execution, subsequently sent to a labor camp, and at last, after ten years of suffering and despair, been allowed to return to European Russia? As a writer, he needed that journey through hell; and even though the first account of this journey, *The House of the Dead* (1861) might not have done justice to the depth of his impressions, the five big novels which followed did.