

Alejo Carpentier and the United States: Notes on the *Recurso del método*

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From Alejo Carpentier we now have three major historical narratives, chronicles at once legendary and selectively documentary, in the form of *novelas épicas*.¹ These are *El reino de este mundo* (1949), *El siglo de las luces* (1962), and most recently *El recurso del método* (1974).² While the first two—set mainly in the French Caribbean (Haiti, Guadeloupe, Cayenne) in the times of Makandal, Boukman, Henri Christophe, Victor Hugues, and Pauline Bonaparte (1780-1825)—provide us with creative readings of a somewhat distant if eminently usable past, the *Recurso*—which portrays a *tirano ilustrado* whose career is largely an assemblage of well-known events from the histories³ of many Latin-American (especially Caribbean) dictatorships—brings us much closer to home. Few dates are given, and as usual in Carpentier a great many facts are blended with a lot of fiction, but we nevertheless find our historical way without much trouble. As the story begins (pp. 11-12) we are near the end of the presidential term (1906-13) of Armand Fallières in France; the downfall of the Primer Magistrado (pp. 267-72) is presided over by United States Ambassador Enoch H. Crowder (1859-1932), who held that post in Cuba during the period 1923-27, after previous Latin-American assignments dating back to 1906; and one of the participants in the “Primera Conferencia Mundial contra la Política Colonial Imperialista” (p. 326), held in Brussels shortly before the protagonist’s death, is Julio Antonio Mella (1905-29), co-founder and first secretary-general of the Cuban Communist Party.

As suggested by the above, this is an explicitly political novel, with an important French connection (the Primer Magistrado maintains a residence in the Rue de Tilsitt, just off the Place de l’Etoile, and spends much of his time there—to say nothing of nineteen quotations from Descartes which introduce various chapters and sections of the book, serving the ironic purpose implied by the title), and an equally, if differently, important United States connection (the P.M. passes through New York on trips to and from his country, and his son is ambassador to Washington, during the latter’s interventionist heyday in the Caribbean region). So we are naturally led to the author’s own published statements on the political novel, among which are the following, all from *Tientos y diferencias*: “The Latin-American politico-military context is one of inexhaustible implications. It must be kept in mind, but prudently, to avoid slipping into a facile and declamatory literature of *denunciation*.” The ideological contexts are “powerful and ever-present, but one should never allow them to transform the novel into a platform or pulpit.” The sense of the marvelous presupposes faith, so that the marvelous invoked in disbelief was never more than a literary trick, but: “That, of course, is no reason to side with certain advocates of a return to the real—a term which takes on, in such cases, a slavishly political sense—who do nothing but replace the tricks of the prestidigitator with the platitudes of the ‘enlisted’ writer or the eschatological subterfuge of some existentialists” (*TD*, pp. 27, 35, 117).

The world of politics, where at least the language is clear—compared to that of modern technology—“is complex, full of traps and ambushes, a world in which what may be true today will cease to be so tomorrow, but a world where the novelist is sure to find, precisely because it perpetually changes

. . . a cause for reflection, a source of action, of what I would call *written action*." "This America that I belong to . . . offers the world . . . the spectacle of a universe in which commitment has always been inseparable from intellectual life." There are great dangers: a commitment can be wrong, unfounded, uncertain, excessively fervent, "forced by contingencies the truth of which is difficult to discern immediately—but the whole of things is there, in the nature of the commitment." And in any event commitment is unavoidable: "not to commit oneself is to commit oneself as well." The notion that the intellectual is one who says "no" has become a platitude; rigidly applied, "it becomes as absurd, in some cases, as a system based on 'yes'. . . . The 'no' of many German intellectuals opposing Hitler, the 'no' of the French Resistance opposing Vichy, is prolonged, made more complete, by the 'yes' in support of Viet-Nam, the Cuban Revolution, the struggle of the Third World against the power of imperialism." The answers depend on principles; what is important is to avoid going wrong on the principles. And in general the writer or novelist is rarely mistaken, because of his special role as observer of his times. He understands the language of the masses, and can interpret it, *give it form*, "practicing a kind of shamanism, that is, the rendering into audible language of a message which, in its origin, can be wavering, formless, barely enunciated, and which comes to the interpreter, the mediator, in puffs, outbursts, and aspirations." He works within history, and his function is to define, fix, criticize, and display the world in which it has fallen to him to live—a function to be carried out "in keeping with the aspirations of a whole people." The novel is in a bad way only when, and where, it fails to involve itself in the contexts⁴—and *praxis*—of its times: "It is alive, and well alive, on the contrary, where it becomes epic, where the possibility of being epic moves it away from excessively particular anecdotes, where its very flow allows it to live in tune with its age, expressing realities which are those of the time in which the novelist lives, the time it is possible for him to grasp" (*TD*, pp. 131-37).

All this, of course, has a higher purpose: "The great labor of man on this earth consists of striving to better his condition. His means are limited, but his ambition large. Yet it is in this task in the Kingdom of this World where he will be able to find his true dimension and perhaps his grandeur" (*TD*, p. 141).

As good as his word, Carpentier has never succumbed to "excessively particular anecdotes"—nor produced a novel classifiable as an exemplification of a "facile and declamatory literature of *denunciation*." The particular, for him, is his Latin-American world, and he proceeds to give us "a vision of the world, starting from my commitment to that world" (*TD*, p. 137). His approach to revolution, always complex and penetrating, is also—by turns or at once—humane, ironic, ambivalent, and sensitive to nuance and paradox. Yet he has taken a risky path. His passion for documentation—for the Adamic task of naming things⁵—often takes him to the verge of mere cataloging (note the enumeration of Virgins (pp. 111, 334) and root-sculptures (pp. 285-87) in the *Recurso del método*), and more often still begets a profusion of terms and cultural references which threaten to smother the narrative. His predilection for the big themes is no doubt related to a manner which has been called grandiose, oracular, laborious, cerebral, and "exasperatingly rhetorical"—to his mounting of heavy "stage machinery" and scant concern for "the sense of inner predetermination that subordinates action to character."⁶ As for his political militancy, it has not yet spoiled a novel—nor should it, necessarily. (And I—as one who applauded the April victories at Playa Girón in 1961 and Saigon in 1975, and for more than twenty years has considered Washington's maneuvers in Latin America more often nefarious than merely misguided, and seldom better than that—am presumably not the best disposed to prepare a detached critique of

his position.) Nevertheless, to take a single case, his ready “yes” in support of the Third World’s struggle against imperialism does not seem to allow for discriminations such as those adduced—from the left—by Juan José Sebreli, or—from farther right—by P. T. Bauer.⁷ To merely broach the matter: assuming there is a struggle, is it really between worlds, or between classes within those worlds, or both? And how about the name, Third World? May it not conceal more than it reveals?

In what follows I propose to consider, in the light of these concerns, Carpentier’s references to the United States in the *Recurso del método*. The task has two rather different aspects. In the first place, the book contains a great deal of *naming*—of persons, places, institutions, cultural products and the like; details connected with the United States run into the hundreds. Secondly, the author has produced a *portrait* of the United States, an interpretation of its role in the world—especially, of course, in Latin America—during the early 20th century (and by implication since then).

Apart from the portrait—and from the selection which contributes to the portrait—one is by no means hard put to characterize the author’s naming: it is, at best, quite slipshod. So much so, in fact, that I first set out to write a piece called “Appendix Probi anglofono del *Recurso del método*.” (As one might imagine, I can bear dropping the project, but not the title.) To the extent that this naming counts, we are faced with an improbable Yankeeland where W. C. Handy is “Christopher Andy” (p. 289), Norman Rockwell is “Norman Korwin” (p. 214), Mack Sennett is “Mac Sennet” (p. 150), and Ben is “Franklyn” (pp. 213, 291); where we eat “*Quaker-Oat*” (p. 184) and “cramberry-sauce” (p. 173), and drink “wisky” (p. 276), sometimes in the form of “Bourbon-on-the-rock” (p. 272); where we sing “*Beutiful Ohio*” (p. 173), “*Alexander Rag-Time Band*” (p. 39) and the “*Star and spangled banner*” (p. 162); where one might seek diversion at a “*Skating-Ring*” (p. 160), or go see Ruth hit a “home-rum” (p. 277); where Custer bit the dust at “Little Bay Horn” (p. 213); where the fifth letter of our alphabet is pronounced “*Ei*” (p. 213) like the first; where we hopelessly scramble *and* and *or*, *yes/no* and *so/not*, to produce the barbarous “*Maybe yes, or maybe not*” (p. 279); and where *those sons of bitches* are “*esos son of a bitch*” (p. 81). There are at least a hundred of these mistakes—grammatical, lexical, factual and orthographic—and in most (by no means all) cases the British translator of the book has mercifully betrayed the text (though at other points she has introduced errors of her own).⁹ I will belabor the point no further, except to quote Carpentier’s comment on a U.S. Consul’s skill at languages—“unusual for a North American” (p. 287).

Predictably, the French presence in this novel is primarily cultural (and exemplary, though also satiric at times), while that of the United States (usually deplored) is, in addition, diplomatic, military, and economic. Among the corporations operating—or at least selling—in the land of the Primer Magistrado are United Fruit, Armour, Swift, Libby, Campbell, Coca-Cola, Woolworth, Underwood, Browning, Colt, Winchester, Du Pont, Ford and General Motors—and we also encounter Aunt Jemima, Lydia E. Pinkham, Sloan’s Liniment, Indian motorcycles and Sloppy Joe’s Bar—which does not exhaust the list. (And this presence largely determines the diplomatic and military role of the United States, discussed below.) Cultural references having to do with the United States usually involve the more commercial varieties of culture, including comic strips—“Buster Brown y Mutt and Jeff” (p. 258)—films and film personalities, and especially popular songs, from *Over There* and *Pretty Baby* to *Yes, We Have No Bananas* (pp. 150ff., *passim*). Beyond the work of Handy, jazz is represented only by Zez Confrey’s *Kitten on the Keys* (p. 307), and

classical music only by Louis Moreau Gottschalk and sopranos Mary Garden and Geraldine Farrar. At a Metropolitan performance by Garden—a famous Mélisande—the Primer Magistrado is moved to “some amusing and biting remarks on the artificiality of the New York aristocracy,” among them the following: “No matter how well-cut a set of tails may be, on the back of a Yankee it always looks like a magician’s costume.” Dissatisfied with the opera, which features “a medieval lady with a Kansas City accent,” he repairs to a 42nd Street brothel and the company of “some blondes, painted and made up to look like movie stars” (pp. 38-40). And later, when an opera troupe visits his country, we meet an Italian “contralto with a knife in her garter, whose womanly elegance contrasted cruelly with the frailty of the pale North-American dancers” (p. 197)—this at a time when Isadora Duncan, no Italian to be sure, had been famous on both sides of the Atlantic for more than fifteen years.

The literature of the United States is represented by *Collier's* and the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Poor Richard's Almanack*, James Fenimore Cooper, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Monsieur Beaucaire*, and “the articles of the gringo adventurer John Reed” (pp. 162, 213-15, 336). (In the case of Reed—though not always, I think—we must distinguish between the position of the Primer Magistrado, an admirer of Porfirio Diaz, and that of Carpentier, who presumably admires the Oregonian buried in the Kremlin whose *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1919) was later prefaced by Lenin.) Are we to infer that Latin Americans never bothered—or had the opportunity—to sample such fare as *Moby-Dick*, *Leaves of Grass*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, *The Golden Bowl*, *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, *The Emperor Jones*, or *Skepticism and Animal Faith*? Or that it does not please Carpentier to recall that we are capable of such things? No doubt the mediocre, more saleable, products of our civilization have been the more widely distributed, but this alone, one suspects, is not adequate to explain his selection.

Of the book's seven chapters the first four deal with events prior to 1920, including World War I, into which the Primer Magistrado is delighted to follow the United States, primarily to facilitate internal repression (pp. 160-65). In these early chapters the United States plays a much smaller role than farther on, though we should not forget the offer (later a threat) to intervene militarily which is set forth in Chapter 2 (and to which we return below). Chapter 7—devoted to the years after the Primer Magistrado has been deposed, spent in exile in Paris—adds little to a portrait already fully drawn before then. Which leaves us with Chapters 5 and 6 (pages 213-93, divided into five sections, numbered 14-18). Here the United States presence in Latin America is viewed, in the first place, as economic and cultural penetration, and secondly, as imperialist intervention—regularly diplomatic and often military.

The cultural penetration results in changes in the schools, such as the displacement of Latin by English and of traditional historical figures by North-American ones; the substitution of books and periodicals from the United States for those from France, of extravaganzas by the likes of D. W. Griffith—“visions of a gringo with a hangover” (p. 216)—for European films, of Christmas for Navidades (with “Santiclo” and his toys, Ouija boards and Texan cowboy suits); and that familiar interpretation of World War I according to which the doomed Entente had been saved by the conquering Yanks, Europe was the world of the past, and America—North, that is—had become the new focal point of Western Civilization, “awaiting the time when we, from farther down, had managed to free ourselves from that accursed tradition which kept us living in the past” (p. 215). Other aspects of this situation may be noted in the following exchange between the Primer Magistrado and his sidekick Peralta:

“. . . Our people detest the gringos.” “Our people, yes; but our bourgeoisie always adapts its ways to theirs. To our moneyed class, Gringo is synonymous with Order, Progress and Technical Skill. Those sons of good family who aren’t studying under the Jesuits of Belén are at Cornell or Rensselaer, if not West Point. We’ve been invaded—and you know it—by the Methodists, Baptists, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Christian Scientists. North-American Bibles are part of the furnishings of our wealthy homes, like the pictures of Mary Pickford in silver frames, with her familiar, rubber-stamped *Sincerely yours*.” “We’re losing all our character: we’ve moved too far away from Mother Spain.” (pp. 251-52)

An especially interesting manifestation of cultural penetration from the United States is the increasing interest in—

. . . periodicals like the *New York Times*, which provided, in their Sunday magazines, news about new music, strange paintings, and extraordinary literary movements being conceived in Paris (it seems that over there, in spite of what people said, there was a small renaissance in progress), though *L’Illustration* and *Lectures pour tous* seemed to be unaware of those events, or, when they alluded to them, only did so in order to denounce them in the name of the “sense of order, proportion and moderation,” so that to find out about some surprising innovations—the poetry of a certain Apollinaire, for example, who died on the very day of the Armistice—one had to turn to the publications from New York. (p. 217)

This alone would suffice to remind us that Carpentier is not a hopelessly hidebound foe of the bourgeois press and all its works, but there is more to come. One morning the word is passed that the *Times* has printed a long editorial in which its specialist on Latin America “relentlessly analyzed our bankrupt economy, spoke of police repression and torture, cleared up the mystery of what happened to certain missing persons, and reported assassinations still unknown down here, recalling that the Primer Magistrado, placed in the category of such as Rosas, Doctor Francia . . . Porfirio Díaz, Estrada Cabrera . . . and Juan Vicente Gómez . . . had been in power for nearly twenty years . . .” (p. 217). This article is followed by three more in the same vein, and all four are widely read, despite the most assiduous efforts at suppression. The Primer Magistrado regrets his decree establishing the study of English in the schools, but whatever the effects of that decision the texts soon appear in Spanish and are further circulated in all sorts of clandestine ways, leaving the government and its own controlled press no recourse but diversionary sensationalism, occasionally relieved by trivial oddities and historical tidbits like “the story of Heloise and Abelard, treated with all necessary euphemisms insofar as it dealt with the action of Canon Fulbert, whom a few bastards hastened to identify—they never let a chance go by—with the Chief of the Judicial Police . . .” (p. 220). With due allowances for the thirty-five-year gap, we cannot help but see the connection between this and the role of the *Times*—especially Herbert Matthews—during the final years of the Batista regime—which does not, of course, imply any apology for its prior or subsequent sins of omission or commission with respect to Cuba or the rest of Latin America. Carpentier, it seems, is aware of the fact that the United States, with all its faults, remains an open society where what needs to appear in print usually does—sooner or later—though it may not receive appropriate attention. (He does not say that the *Times* exposé served Washington’s purposes, and thus was instigated or at least encouraged there, but an implication in this direction cannot be ruled out.)

There remains the question of outright intervention in Latin America, which of course was neither new in the days of the Primer Magistrado nor old yesterday. In the *Recurso del método* it first appears in references to concessions to United Fruit, arms sales, and the United States military attaché—found waiting on the railroad platform as the Primer Magistrado arrives from Europe to put down an attempted *golpe* led by one of his generals. Once this threat has been eliminated, he is confronted with an increasingly radical reformist movement headed by one Luis Leoncio Martínez, a professor of philosophy whose admiration for Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin and Francisco Ferrer is seasoned with interest in Swedenborg, the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*, and “metapsychic phenomena” (pp. 50-51, cf. p. 320). When the group advocates land reform and prosecutions for misuse of public funds, and especially when it begins military training of workers and students, the reaction from Washington is as follows: “. . . observing that the movement was gaining ground, and showing signs of a syndicalism inspired by alien, antipatriotic doctrines, inadmissible in our group of countries, the United States Ambassador held forth the offer of a quick intervention by North-American troops to safeguard our democratic institutions.” Cold War rhetoric *avant la lettre*. The Primer Magistrado invokes national sovereignty and the need to show “esos gringos de mierda” that he and his people can solve their own problems. “Because, on top of that, they are the kind who come for three weeks and stay two years, wheeling and dealing. They come ashore dressed in khaki and leave wearing suits lined with gold” (p. 72). But later the Ambassador—dressed like Stanley in search of Livingstone—appears with the news that armed bands have penetrated the Pacific banana zone, seizing \$200,000 from one of the offices of United Fruit, and that Du Pont’s mining operations stand paralyzed. So it was necessary to put an end to the “socialistic mysticism” of Dr. Martínez; the United States would not tolerate another Madero in the region. “If the country didn’t promptly return to a state of calm and respect for foreign property, North-American intervention would be inevitable” (p. 76). The Primer Magistrado capitulates, and manages to buy off the movement’s military commander, but a working class leader arises to carry on the struggle, which ultimately leads to a massacre, brought to its hideous conclusion in the Matadero Municipal. Words from our military attaché (p. 81) indicate United States involvement up to the end. After this, the Primer Magistrado comes to be known as the “Carnicero de Nueva Córdoba” (pp. 94, 282).

These events take place in about 1913. Later we learn of the “Model Prison, designed in compliance with the most modern principles of penitentiary construction, a field in which North-American architects were masters” (p. 203), of the Kentucky horses of the Guardia Rural, and “that fucking police of ours, trained in the United States and not worth a shit, except maybe to beat up on prisoners in bonds, deliver lashes, and drown people in bathtubs” (p. 233).¹⁰ In the 1920’s the situation worsens. With Dr. Martínez in exile, a new opposition leader emerges, this time an authentic Marxist known as El Estudiante. Fear of this more ominous force induces Washington to sponsor its former enemy, the professor of philosophy: “Whether it’s him or someone else hardly matters to them. But he’s come to personify a type of *Democracy* they invoke every time they want to change something in Latin America” (p. 251).

After another massacre (pp. 262-64), Ambassador Crowder appears at the Palacio de Gobierno, unannounced, in his Yale sweatshirt, racquet in hand, to inform the Primer Magistrado that the Marines have landed and the United States no longer supports him. (Here the President recalls other interventions, the actions of other U.S. troops, in Mexico, Nicaragua, Haiti, Cuba, and many

other places, under generals like Wood and Pershing, hunting down blacks or using bayonets on zambos and Latinos.) The jig is up: a strike is in progress, most of the army has revolted, the palace staff has evaporated, and Luis Leoncio has already made a triumphal return from exile. The best the dictator can get is refuge in the U.S. Consulate at Puerto Araguato—where the warship Minnesota lies at anchor—and even that is endangered by the mass uprising. With the help of Peralta, dressed as a male nurse, he manages to escape in an ambulance, disguised as a casualty. Here, as elsewhere, Carpentier makes it clear that Washington makes no bones about writing off its former clients (pp. 250, 271-72, 281-82).

In Puerto Araguato there are Marines on duty, and the Primer Magistrado learns that they already occupy “the key locations, the electric plant, and the bars and brothels of the city, after having taken a piss, in passing, on the Monument to the Heroes of the Independence” (p. 276). Here we meet the U.S. Consul, clearly the most interesting *yanqui*—and one of the most significant characters—in the entire novel. He is from New Orleans and part black, though light enough to have “passed” during his earlier career. Once found out, for appearing too frequently at a *bal martiniquais* in Paris, he began to get only the worst assignments: “And now I’m here, which is like saying, in the shithouse” (p. 290). A friend of W. C. Handy (1873-1958), he plays the *Memphis* and *St. Louis Blues* on the harmonium—having inherited the sensibilities of his great-uncle Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-69)—and keeps an elaborate collection of root-sculptures, picked up “in the course of his many adventures along the coasts of the Continent” (p. 285). Like the Primer Magistrado, he has a taste for Baudelaire, but unlike him also knows the poems of a future Nobel laureate: an unidentified text he quotes (p. 288)—in connection with Gottschalk’s return from Europe to tropical America—turns out to be from Saint-John Perse.’

In shell-rimmed glasses, wrinkled pants, and cowboy shirt, he addresses the fallen *caudillo* in the casual, direct, often irreverent manner likely to be associated with citizens of the States. His cynicism, while perhaps *sui generis* for those in positions like his, also has roots in our society’s white racism, which, as Carpentier reminds us, goes back to the Founding Fathers. High-sounding phrases like “of the people, by the people, for the people” are chanted “with a chorus of black sweepers, shoeshine boys, ashtray emptiers, and rest room custodians”—while in the White House “they plan the rotation of the whirligig of uniforms, frock coats and silk hats newly on display, which goes round and round, in this America of ours, bringing on its thieves and sons of bitches—and this I say ‘with no aspersions cast on present company,’ in the Spaniards’ phrase—with every turn of the crank” (p. 291). Utterly without illusion, the Consul is able to appreciate the intelligence and skill of El Estudiante—“a new breed of man within his breed”—while accepting the fact of inevitable conflict: “. . . there’s a hopeless incompatibility between our Bibles and their *Das Kapital*.” He knows the game (You say you did us favors? How do you think you stayed in power so long?), and its terminology: “. . . just look at Haiti where, changing from *landing* to *intervention* and from *intervention* to *occupation*—*des nuances, des nuances, des nuances, toujours*—the thing goes on, and on, and on” (pp. 282-83).¹² Much of this is expressed with a sardonic sense of humor, as in the case of the President’s dependence on drink: to put him aboard the Minnesota would not only embarrass the United States but also deprive him of his *aguardiente*; in accordance with the 18th Amendment it would be thrown over the side—even though the captain, in private, might be drunk as a lord. The Consul, on the other hand, can’t keep a sick man from his medication: “And since I’m one who’s *mistaken* in all of this, I can

also believe that stuff is cough medicine, Scott's Emulsion or Matico de Grimaud" (p. 283). And finally, as the people truck dozens of statues of the Primer Magistrado to the port, and begin to throw them into the sea, it is the Consul who remarks that when they are found, centuries hence, no one will remember who he was: "In your case they'll say: 'A bust, a statue, of A Dictator. We've had so many and will have so many more, in this hemisphere, that his name is of no importance'" (p. 293). So the definitive word on this multiple, prototypic tyrant (who remains nameless throughout the novel)¹³ is delivered, in a sense—to borrow a phrase of Che Guevara's—from the entrails of the beast.

Carpentier's picture of the United States is clearly not one likely to be familiar to most people who call the country home. And precisely *that* is perhaps the most important thing about it. We are subject to a kind of colonization of the mind which is vital to the implementation of corresponding policies abroad. Our citizens know little (though recently somewhat more than before) about the actions of our military and foreign service officers, espionage agents, police instructors, academic consultants and business executives in Latin America. Thus, for example, the misbegotten campaign against Salvador Allende was a surprise to many when it should have been to none. And of course Latin Americans can be expected to view us not as we view ourselves, but most naturally in terms of how we behave, especially in their countries. Which is how we are viewed, for the most part, in the *Recurso del método*. As we have seen, the portrait is undeniably partial, not always free from error, and occasionally misleading or tendentious. But nevertheless convincing. The lapses turn out to be minor, and the larger truth prevails. Furthermore, the book can be said to contain a kind of hidden dialectic, fully accessible only to readers reasonably familiar with the United States: the confrontation between the imperialist, neocolonialist realpolitik we too often practice abroad, and the democratic standards we honor—too often in the breach—at home.

Faithful to his own formula, avoiding, by and large, the pitfalls he foresaw in *Tientos y diferencias*, Carpentier has again produced a brilliant epic novel—which of course invites comparison with other recent contributions to the genre, such as *El otoño del patriarca*. Amply documented, but less elaborate, less ornate, than much of his earlier work, the book is also notable for revealing more than we previously knew of the author's considerable satiric gifts (though earlier displayed, on a smaller scale, in *El derecho de asilo*). We have good reason to look forward to *La consagración de la primavera*, reportedly near completion at this time.¹⁴

NOTES

¹On the epic novel see his *Tientos y diferencias* (Montevideo: Arca, 1967), pp. 131-41. This book consists of essays on literature and the arts, plus two short texts by French poet Robert Desnos (1900-1945)—who provides Carpentier with an opportunity to take a shot at the United States (see p. 91). I cite from the third edition ("ampliada"), using a copy printed in 1973. Quotations from the work will be identified in the text by the letters TD. The translations are my own.

²*El recurso del método* (México: Siglo XXI, 1974). My references are to the tenth edition ("primera argentina"), published in Buenos Aires in 1975, and from here on appear in the text. Carpentier's other narratives include the novels *Ecue-Yamba-O* (1933) and *Los pasos perdidos* (1953)—both more anthropological than historical—and a number of shorter works, most of them collected in *Guerra del tiempo* (1958). The English version of the latter—*War of Time* (New York: Knopf, 1970)—contains a translation of *El derecho de asilo* (Barcelona: Lumen, 1972; 71 pp.), which is related in theme to *El recurso del método*. For a detailed bibliography see Klaus Müller-Bergh, *Alejo Carpentier: estudio biográfico-crítico* (New York: Las Américas, 1972), pp. 185-211. Information on Carpentier's most recent work may be found in Seymour Menton, *Prose Fiction of the Cuban Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975).

³We can assume that for Carpentier some of these events are yet to occur (or recur), some of the histories still being written or to be written (or rewritten), as implied by the notion of *Los Recuerdos del Porvenir*—the name of a back-country *taguara* in *Los pasos perdidos* (III, xiii); p. 127 in the edition I have used (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1973).

⁴The contexts discussed by the author are the political, ideological, racial, economic, chthonic, bourgeois, cultural, culinary, and those of lighting, distance and proportion, and chronological displacement (*desajuste*); see *TD*, pp. 20-36.

⁵See *Los pasos perdidos* (II, vii), p. 74.

⁶Luis Harss and Barbara Dohmann, *Into the Mainstream* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 40, 51, 52, 53, 55, 64.

⁷J. J. Sebreli, *Tercer mundo, mito burgués* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veinte, 1975), especially pp. 145-96. P. T. Bauer, "Western Guilt and Third World Poverty," *Commentary*, January 1976, pp. 31-38. See also note 12 below.

⁸This error persists from *TD* (p. 51); other miscues in *TD* include v.2 of Baudelaire's "Correspondances" (p. 74).

⁹The *Recurso* appeared in English as *Reasons of State* (New York: Knopf, 1976), tr. Frances Partridge. The translations included here, however, are my own, and may be taken as a fragmentary critique of the Partridge version.

¹⁰Here we are reminded of the Uruguayan events of 1969-70, as portrayed in the film by Costa-Gavras and Franco Solinas. See their screenplay, *State of Siege* (New York: Ballantine, 1973).

¹¹Saint-John Perse, *Oeuvre poétique*, I (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), pp. 17, 24. The passage in the novel is made up of two fragments from the section "Pour fêter une enfance" in *Eloges* (1911ff.).

¹²Though the occupation of Haiti (1915-34) eventually ended, the country remains a protectorate of the United States—at least according to René Depestre, *Pour la révolution, pour la poésie* (Ottawa: Leméac, 1974), pp. 54, 83, 119, 183, 188 and *passim*. He also says that, violating the evident cultural unity of Latin America, "les Etats-Unis d'Amérique du Nord ont fait du sous-continent où vivent nos peuples, un tiers-monde compartimenté, brisé, cloisonné, balkanisé" (p. 138). This book contains several remarkable essays on the Third World, its writers and their responsibilities, including cogent discussions of Négritude, the "zombification" (p. 111) of enslaved blacks, etc.

¹³There is one case where a protester shouts "Down with Valverde!" (p. 199), but this name serves no other purpose.

¹⁴See *Chasqui*, 5.2 (1976), 43, and *Review 76* (Center for Inter-American Relations, N.Y.), Number 18, Fall 1976, p. 9. The latter contains five contributions on Carpentier occasioned by the publication of the *Recurso* in English (pp. 5-29).