

RAYMOND D. SOUZA

Major Cuban Novelists: Innovation and Tradition

Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1974. Pp. 120. \$10.00.

Raymond Souza's *Major Cuban Novelists* is one of a growing number of important studies that have recently enriched the field of Cuban literary criticism. It combines a general survey of the development of the Cuban novel from Avelaneda's *Sab* (1841) to Reynaldo Arenas's *El mundo alucinante* (1969) with a more detailed analysis of three Cuban novelists who are at the forefront of Latin-American narrative: Alejo Carpentier, José Lezama Lima, and Guillermo Cabrera Infante.

The first part of Souza's study unfolds the development of the novelistic tradition in Cuba. Souza points out a basic interest in the depiction and examination of society in the first Cuban novels (*Sab*, *Francisco*, and *Cecilia Valdés*). He calls attention to José Martí's *Amistad funesta* (1885) and Ramón Meza's *Mi tío el empleado* (1887) as deviations from the existing general trends in narrative fiction. *Amistad funesta*, with its emphasis on creative language, is the first Spanish-American *Modernista* novel. *Mi tío el empleado*, with its irony and shifting points of view, goes beyond the limitations of most realistic novels. *La conjura* (1909) by Jesús Castellanos and *Las honradas* (1918) by Miguel de Carrión show the tendency of early twentieth century novels to present the conflict between individuals and social mores. The third decade of this century is an important period in the development of Cuban narrative. Souza justly points out the significant role played by Lino Novas and his contemporary Alejo Carpentier in transcending regionalism by giving universal value to their stories and characters. On the other hand, Enrique Labrador Ruiz's experimental novels of the thirties are well ahead of those contemporary works in which the importance of plot is significantly diminished.

Some older writers (Virgilio Piñera, Carpentier, Lezama Lima) have attained relatively late recognition as novelists and therefore share the stage with the younger generation of novelists emerging during the Cuban Revolution. Among the younger writers discussed, Souza deals more extensively with Severo Sarduy and Reynaldo

Arenas. Sarduy's novels strive to create suggestive multiplicities rather than plot construction. Souza makes the interesting suggestion that Sarduy's ingenious linguistic experiments may have undermined creativity in his second novel *De donde son los cantantes* (1967). In *Celestino antes del alba* (1967) and *El mundo alucinante* (1969) Arenas uses a variety of innovative techniques to effectively represent his character's dilemmas and perspectives. Souza points out the magical realism in Arenas's second novel and brings forth, in that context, the name of Carpentier, the first of three novelists he subsequently discusses in greater detail.

Souza shows that Carpentier is at his best when portraying men somewhat removed from their passions. This fact, a liability in his first novel *Ecue Yamba O* (1933), is used to better advantage in his later novels *Los pasos perdidos* (1953) and *El siglo de las luces* (1962). Souza stresses that Carpentier's novels are thoroughly documented and well structured but are somewhat lacking in spontaneity. Although his characters share a chaotic view of existence, chaos for Carpentier is only a stage in a general progression toward meaning and order in history. The bewitching quality of Carpentier's language succeeds in creating a world in which the marvelous is fused with reality and where permanent values are discovered in the midst of disorder and chaos.

Souza's chapter on Lezama Lima's only novel *Paradiso* (1966) is possibly the most valuable section of this book. The critic chooses significant passages from this imposing and complex novel and ventures some plausible personal interpretations of their meaning and function. Episodes and events seemingly unconnected are shown to contain a unified view of reality. Characters and conflicts in *Paradiso* illustrate the struggle against the inner chaos caused by unruly passions and the "destructive diffusion produced by the flow of time." As Souza says, "creativity and its relation to time and eternity is a main theme of *Paradiso*."

Lezama Lima's free use of language undermines to a certain extent the structure of his novel. The breakdown of form in the novel, a contemporary phenomenon, is yet more clearly seen in Guillermo Cabrera Infante's *Tres tristes tigres* (1967). Souza notes the difficulty in analyzing *Tres tristes tigres* with traditional concepts

of form and structure since the novel is plotless and amounts to a collection of different stories, vignettes, and narrations. A unifying element is the usage by Cabrera's characters of language and sound in a creative manner. Beneath the apparent playfulness and mockery of certain parts of the novel (ie. "La muerte de Trotsky" segment), Souza uncovers proof of the conviction that a person's style rather than his ideology is more apt to survive the test of time. Souza does not emphasize the antiliterary character nor does he bring forth the escapist attitude hidden in Cabrera's games. He concludes his analysis by saying that Cabrera uses language as a means of fighting a world of chaos and confusion and protesting against the winds of time.

Some of the points made by Souza in this work have been analyzed in previous critical studies. There is, however, new insight in his criticism, especially in the chapter devoted to Lezama Lima. Souza strives at clarity, conciseness, and meaningful simplicity when discussing complex and difficult matters. He keeps in line with his avowal (in the Preface) to avoid "more sparkling criticism" while trying instead to clearly reveal the process and actuality of the novel in Cuba through each novelist's contribution. The main premises of his study—the general theme of order and chaos, and the relationship between innovation and tradition—are set forth lucidly and effectively. He is occasionally repetitive for the sake of emphasis. One may disagree with his highlighting of certain novels (ie. *Los niños se despiden* by Pablo A. Fernández) or his omission of newer generation writers such as David Buzzi and Miguel Collazo who have made interesting contributions to the areas of magical realism and science fiction. Souza's judgment nonetheless is consistently accurate and any study of this nature always implies a good degree of personal selection. *Major Cuban Novelists* is indeed a highly useful introduction and important contribution to the study of the Cuban novel.

Jorge A. Marbán

KINGSLEY AMIS

Rudyard Kipling and His World

London: Thames and Hudson, 1975. Pp. 128. £350.

Rudyard Kipling and His World is readable, but the text is not always likeable. It consists of a single, undivided chapter followed by a select bibliography of eleven titles, and it reproduces well over a hundred photographs, some of which have very little to do with Rudyard Kipling. Kingsley Amis's reliance upon the official biography of Charles Carrington (*Rudyard Kipling: His Life and Work*) is noted in the preface, as is the author's lack of concern "to find and reveal new facts" (p. 7). More important is Kingsley Amis's decision to omit the critical apparatus which one usually associates with studies of this nature. This omission is dismissed rather fatuously in the preface in the following terms: "To give names and other details is so often to give profitless trouble: who, for instance, would be much better off for being told, in parenthesis or footnote, that it was Kipling's eldest aunt's granddaughter Angela Mackail, later the novelist Angela Thirkell, who described as 'deep and unhesitating' his voice when telling stories to children?" (p. 7). In the above instance, a footnote may not seem necessary, but vague statements like "So runs the account, and much of it must be true" (p. 22) or "Some authors have swallowed it whole . . . Others have rightly been more cautious" (p. 22) need some substantiating. Again, the statement that Kipling's autobiography (*Something of Myself*) "is a fascinating book, but Kipling did not live to revise it, and other parts of it are provenly inaccurate" (p. 24) leads even a casual reader to wonder which are the unreliable parts and according to whose opinion.

Kingsley Amis, himself an author of no small reputation, possesses insights into the creative processes which more commonplace critics may not. He is quick to point out that fiction is not autobiography (indeed, it is one of the central themes of his study) and yet he is unable to tread the razor edge which divides them and frequently confuses the two. In this fashion, Amis labels as autobiographical the reference to a six-year old boy of whom Kipling wrote that "it never entered into his head that any living being even Papa and Mama? could disobey his orders,"