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Naturalism, Murder, and Identity in Three Short Stories of Ramon Ferreira

Haley Lee Osborn

Loyola University Chicago, hosborn@luc.edu

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

NATURALISM, MURDER, AND IDENTITY

IN THREE SHORT STORIES OF

RAMÓN FERREIRA

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM IN SPANISH

BY

HALEY L. OSBORN

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ABSTRACT

En sus varios cuentos premiados el autor cubano Ramón Ferreira le enseña a su lector el lado más oscuro y violento de la sociedad cubana de manera crudamente verosímil. Durante la época en que escribió, entre 1950 y 1960, mientras que el país sufría turbulencia política y social, Ferreira creaba historias sensacionalistas que mostraban escenas de asesinatos, ladrones, prejuicios, obsesiones, vicios, y cuestiones relacionadas con la falta de justicia en Cuba. Desde Cuba, Ferreira se inspiró en la evolución y el gran viaje del naturalismo que comenzó en Francia con Zola, pasando por España con Pardo Bazán, Sudamérica con varios como el chileno Augusto d'Halmar y la peruana Clorinda Matto de Turner, el Caribe con el puertorriqueño Matías González García y cubano Carlos Loveira, y transformándose en los Estados Unidos con autores como Frank Norris y Theodore Dreiser, para nombrar algunos.

El naturalismo ha hecho un viaje extenso y cambiante desde su nacimiento, mostrando pequeñas modificaciones en el género con cada autor naturalista. Ramón Ferreira, [1921/2007] también se inclinaba hacia esta tendencia. Nació en la misma tierra que Emilia Pardo Bazán y vivió allí antes de mudarse a Cuba a los ocho años de edad, y estudió fotografía en los Estados Unidos cuando era joven, por lo que disfrutó de amplias oportunidades para informarse de las tendencias naturalistas internacionales, especialmente las de la primera parte del siglo XX.

Muchas formas del naturalismo se inspiraron en la expansión y la industrialización de las ciudades. De manera semejante, en sus cuentos Ferreira nos lleva a la ciudad vibrante y cambiante de la Habana en que varios tipos de gente y sus distintas peculiaridades chocan. Para él, la Habana se convirtió en el ambiente perfecto para demostrar las debilidades de la sociedad de la época debido a la mezcla de gente tan variada. Así, el crimen, la violencia, el racismo, los prejuicios, el machismo, el choque entre las clases sociales y los estereotipos de la sociedad se transformaron en sus temas prominentes. En sus cuentos vemos cómo estas tensiones alienaban a los grupos ‘marginalizados’ de Cuba, impidiéndoles participar en la sociedad modernizada, por lo que se creaba una gran desventaja para esa gente “diferente” por sus ideales, su sexo, o su raza. Estas diferencias eran a menudo saldadas con la violencia.

Aunque Ferreira se enfocaba en el ángulo grotesco de los abandonados de la época, en vez de enfocarse en el horror del acto criminal, subraya el ambiente social y la situación desventajosa de los protagonistas. Con esta técnica, Ferreira logró mostrar en la ciudad, en sus palabras, “la penuria del lugar,” “el aspecto miserable de la gente,” “el estado ruinoso” de sus casas, “su ingenuidad al hablar,” “la zonas más oscuras del prejuicio,” “las leyes tiránicas impuestas por una sociedad machista,” y la desesperación de los menos favorecidos forzados a luchar para sobrevivir (*Papá, cuéntame*, vii). En mi análisis de tres cuentos – “Lazo de oro,” “Cita a las nueve,” y “Sueño sin nombre”— investigaré la manera en que el autor representa la violencia inspirada por la búsqueda de identidad, o más específicamente, por el asesino, durante estos tiempos de

cambio social. Muestro cómo Ferreira aprovecha del naturalismo para explorar las capas menos favorecidas de la sociedad cubana.

INTRODUCTION: THE LIFE AND WORKS OF RAMÓN FERREIRA

Ramón Ferreira (1921-2007) has earned considerable recognition for having been an accomplished author, playwright, journalist, and photographer of the Hispanic world. He was born in Galicia, Spain and moved to Cuba at eight years of age with his mother, where he experienced the peak of his adolescence. He was already beginning to observe and compare the cultural differences of his surroundings, when he was called to the study of photography. Desiring to capture the cultural nuances of the Cuban people with the lens of his camera, Ferreira realized that his attempts at photographing reality were futile, as the photographs, in his words, “no expresaban lo que yo había sentido al tomarlas” (*Papá, cuéntame* vii). Ferreira took his studies overseas to the US, expanding his experiences in culturally diverse worlds, and upon his return to Cuba, he realized that the people, “blancas, negras, y mulatas-- tenían algo en común: se mezclaba entre sí, agresivas, escandalosas, irreverentes, pero siempre con una sonrisa ” (*Papá, cuéntame* vi). The Cuban photographer accommodated his decidedly inadequate form of reproducing this reality photographically by beginning to dabble in written observation, and finally, produced three prize-winning stories.

These stories reflected his observations of the weaknesses of Cuban society during the 50s while the country was undergoing acute socio-political change. His recurring themes echoed his concerns with social class divisions, prejudices, machismo, and crime within the boundaries of Cuban society. Ferreira focused on the seldom-

mentioned, forbidden dark side of Cuba, underscoring the psychology of the Habana ‘lowlife’ of the times and emphasizing the marginalized member’s tendency towards self-destruction. Ferreira’s documentary-like, detailed writing style places the reader within close proximity of these scandalous societal ‘types’¹ often avoided by the middle and upper classes, which earned the attention of other authors and critics. In a blurb on the back cover of *Papá, cuéntame un cuento*, a book of Ferreira’s short stories, John Dos Passos dedicates his own commentary to these dark themes: “Estos cuentos poseen la cualidad de las pesadillas. Están relatados áspera, acusadoramente y, sin embargo, su joven brutalidad es a veces moderada por una ironía rayana en la ternura. Tal vez usted trate de librarse de la obsesión de estas historias ajenas. Por más que trate, no podrá olvidarla.” According to a citation given by journalist Armando Alvarez Bravo, Dos Passos also compares the writing style of Ferreira to many American authors, “combinan la torturante tenuidad de Kafka con el terso diálogo de Hemingway ... y sí contienen algo del espíritu de Poe”. In another blurb found on the same book cover, Alejo Carpentier comments on the psychological and violent aspects of his writing: “Ramón Ferreira nos ofrece un ejemplo admirable de cómo el drama cubano puede alcanzar la tensión psicológica y la dimensión universal de la tragedia clásica.”

By the time the political unrest of the late 50s had begun to shake Cuba, creating social instability throughout the island and forcing many, including Ferreira, to flee in

¹ Phillip J. Barrish (4-5) explains the common interests of the literary realist, explaining their interests in the psychological, sociological, and scientific, and their attempts at demonstrating expertise on their subjects of concentration. Part of this expertise, according to Barrish, was the common tendency of “categorizing individuals into social ‘types’ (the ruthless businessman, the ‘street tough,’ the newly self-confident ‘American girl’)”. Ferreira’s works also delineate societal ‘types’ that were common in La Habana, despite whether he was conscious of this or not. In the three stories I will analyze, we will see his interest in ‘the naive vagabond’, the ‘street tough’ and his identity crisis, and the ‘useless woman’.

search of suitable living conditions, Ferreira's short stories had gained accreditation in many regions of the Caribbean. He was frequently the subject of interest in *El Nuevo Herald* (Miami), where he spent the rest of his life in exile as a political journalist. Although Ferreira produced his last short story, "Papá, cuéntame un cuento," in 1960, which demonstrated his disheartened state of mind while forced to live away from his beloved home in Cuba, his ten years of short stories continued fascinating those that encountered them. In 1989, literary critic Alvarez Bravo dedicated an article in *El Nuevo Herald* (Miami) to his works called: "Los Fundamentales cuentos de Ferreira." Alvarez Bravo provides a short bibliography of the author's life and affirms that Ferreira's technique is a suitable amalgamation of reality and creativity: "es literatura que con tanta imaginación como el realismo, desde una poderosa sensibilidad y capacidad de recreación, presenta distintos aspectos de una gran e intrincada realidad". He also asserts that this realistic writing style is comparable to the works of literary naturalist James Joyce, William Faulkner, and Ernest Hemingway, who, he claims was a close friend of Ferreira.

Jill Ingham, on the other hand, compares Ferreira's stories to those of Cuban author Surama Ferrer, who published during the same decade. In her article, "Sick Sunflowers, Santeria, and Suffering: The Short Stories of Surama Ferrer", she comments that "Ramón Ferreira, creates a world of tension and conflict in *Tiburón y otros cuentos* (1952): 'in a careful and transparent style, Ferreira depicts the misfortunes of his characters who often solve their psychological conflicts through the use of violence'" (Martínez 1990: 440; Ingham 202). As Ingham mentions, this depiction of society's

violent response to psychological conflicts was often depicted by Ferreira as a result of social injustice.²

Alvarez Bravo calls Ferreira's affinity for recreating the Cuban character's confrontation with his or her personal demons "comedia humana", in which he expresses these underlying psychological problems that the majority of people have but keep repressed. Alvarez Bravo wrote two more articles presenting works of Ferreira, one in 1993 called "Más allá la isla, de Ramón Ferreira," in which he reviews Ferreira's novel of the same title; and one in 1995 called "La Presentación del nuevo libro de Ramón Ferreira," in which he announces the debut of a compilation of Ferreira's short stories, *Papá, cuéntame un cuento*.

In 1993, columnist and poet Gastón Baquero published an article called "El Racismo en el teatro cubano" on the theatrical works of Ferreira that were presented in Madrid along with the works of other skilled playwrights. Similar to the quality of his short stories, Baquero affirms that Ferreira's work expresses "el conocimiento del corazón humano y de la psicología profunda de los seres, da a las obras una condición de intemporalidad, de aplicación siempre actual al sentir de las gentes, que es quizás la primera condición que ha de tener el buen teatro." Further evidencing the same characteristics as his prose fiction, he calls the play "muy bien escrita" due to its implicit messages rather than explicit, and because it spares the audience of superfluous dialogue. Baquero also comments directly on the short stories of Ferreira, suggesting that: "Estas

² These themes were receiving both positive and negative attention from the public. The majority of Ferreira's stories were rejected for publication in Cuba due to their politically threatening content matter, and were not published until he reached Miami in exile.

tersas tragedias, elegías en prosa, nos revelan que estamos antes un artista. A Ferreira le ha permitido escribir estos trágicos instantes de vidas diversas su compasión por el sufrimiento humano y su inclinación evidente de denunciarlo.” For the Cuban poet, Ferreira’s realistic style represents the expression of true compassion and interest in the state of society.

In another 2004 article of *El Nuevo Herald*, “Ramón Ferreira: El pasado que vuelve,” journalist Norma Niurka writes about the increasing popularity of Ferreira’s works, as they “relive and evolve in the hands of other generations and other voices”. In this article, Niurka interviews then 84-year-old Ferreira about his works of drama, his novels, his short stories, and his political influences. Later, in the same newspaper of 2005, journalist Olga Connor published “Eslabones en la historia de Cuba,” in which she mentions the influence Ferreira’s exile from Cuba had on his literature. Connor also touches on Ferreira’s friendship with Dr. Julio E. Hernández-Miyares, who compiled all of Ferreira’s political articles in his book, *Eslabones en el exilio*, and dedicated a prologue to Ferreira’s life and his writings.

Despite his prize-winning short stories and the recognition he has received from the media since he began publishing, Ferreira has not received significant attention when it comes to thorough literary analysis. What his readers have said with respect to his detailed and realistic descriptive techniques and his affinity for portraying the defected side of Cuban society is true; however, they have not fully explored what this unique author was trying to portray in his works. Ferreira’s short stories deserve a closer look, especially given their dark, social undertones, the historical context surrounding the

decade in which they were written, and Ferreira's travels and exposure to various societal 'types.'

In the chapters to come, I analyze three of his short stories; "Sueño sin nombre", "Lazo de oro", and "Cita a las nueve;" all of which examine a different social weakness observed by Ferreira in La Habana of the 50s. Each of his stories, all concluding with violent murders, emphasizes the disadvantageous social position of the protagonists within, as if born and naturalistically conditioned for carrying out deterministic acts of destruction. In my analysis and dissection of these marginalized protagonists' psyches, I will prove that these once overlooked beings gain their own sense of identity and placement in an advancing society through their acts of bloodshed; not as acts of rebellion against a negligent society, but as determined by their own blind fates and struggles for survival and acceptance as human agents. Through this analysis, I aim to give Ferreira's works the proper scholarly attention that they merit with respect to skilled detailed and realistic writing as well as his ability to write about that which was seldom discussed within the historical realm of the 50s.

CHAPTER ONE

DREAMING OF REALITY IN “SUEÑO SIN NOMBRE”

With the arrival of the *época republicana* in Cuba, the new generation of writers began to evolve away from styles such as the folklore of Lydia Cabrera and the magical realism of Alejo Carpentier. They moved towards fiction that demonstrated characteristics such as: the elimination of magical characters, the portrayal of a more realistic Cuban society, a wider freedom in writing style, and techniques that did not provide information, but rather, encouraged readers to participate intuitively in the readings (Izquierdo-Tejido 12). Influenced by this current literary evolution, the political changes altering the social living conditions of the Cuban people, and his personal exposure to Spanish and North American literature, Ramón Ferreira played a uniquely significant role in this growing tendency of realistic writers. During this time, Cuba was undergoing extreme socio-political transformation, undoubtedly calling for a unique literary response to such changes. With Batista practically “self-”elected and the country heading toward his dictatorship, much of Cuba responded with discontent. Violence was the primary reaction as Fidel Castro’s group of rebels carried out terrorist capers such as: “hit-and run raids, sabotage, and attacks on military installations,” according to historian Jaime Suchliki. As a result, the tourism of the island was greatly reduced, the economy suffered, and the quality of life in Cuba took a shattering hit (Suchliki 150). As the

situation in Cuba worsened, the literary interests and styles of writers became more representative of this dangerous atmosphere.

During this time, when new societal ‘types’ were developing as a result of adaptation to new social situations, Ferreira focused on the marginalized beings of this changing society in his writings. He demonstrated that they were part of sensational lifestyles that deserved a closer glance. In *Criticism and Fiction*, William Dean Howells describes this as a characteristic of the “true realist” in which the writer “cannot look upon human life and declare this thing or that thing unworthy of notice, any more than the scientist can declare a fact of the material world beneath the dignity of his inquiry” (15). This proves true to an extreme for Ferreira, since he takes a naturalistic approach while choosing to concentrate on the “héroe del presente,”¹ rather than characters with whom only the upper and middle classes could identify. Ferreira chose to focus on the ‘ugly’ being of society, or the less-accepted type affected by this changing atmosphere.

In his short story, “Sueño sin nombre,” Ferreira explores the darker side of Cuban society by delving into the psychological properties and social motifs of a young *vagabundo* from la Habana turned murderer. He portrays Raúl, the protagonist, in his situation of helplessness and social disadvantage, deprived of family nurture and education as a child, and now condemned to the streets to beg as an adolescent. The boy occasionally receives hand-outs from tourists which are now scarce as the economy worsens; thereby, he must resort to thievery. Occasionally, one of the prostitutes of the

¹ Sintia Molina in her study, *El naturalismo en la novela cubana*, describes the naturalistic protagonist as the “hero of the present,” or the urban, struggling character of a modernizing world that was seldom observed in prior idealistic literature, such as Romanticism (Molina 9).

town visits him and provides food and warmth. Later in the story, Raúl is spotted by two men, who, unknown to Raúl, are two political rebels trying to use the boy as a tool in their terrorist acts against the Batista regime. Tempted by money and hypnotized by the rebels' sentimental affection towards the boy, Raúl carries out the task of placing a bomb in front of a store, which results in the death of the prostitute that visits him.

In this story, Ferreira achieves a naturalistic panorama of the city lowlife, as he aimed to accomplish through his photography, but could not accurately capture, “la penuria del lugar,” “el aspecto miserable de la gente,” “el estado ruinoso” de sus casas, “su ingenuidad al hablar,” “la zonas más oscuras del prejuicio,” “las leyes tiránicas impuestas por una sociedad machista” (*Papá, cuéntame* vii). By carefully crafting the description of the setting, the characters, and Cuban society in “Sueño sin nombre,” Ferreira’s naturalistic image of this advancing society’s primordial instincts is sharpened to reveal the criminal act that will fatefully grant Raúl his sense of individuality.

The first characteristic that one should examine when considering how Ferreira portrays Cuban society through an uncensored, naturalistic lens is the way in which the young delinquent protagonist and the backdrop of his seemingly ‘surreal’ world are sculpted in the story. To the rest of society, Raúl is merely the typical cad who usually sleeps on a bench, steals and begs in order to survive, and lacks education and nurture. Raúl is simply a jelly-fish pushed through life by the current of an advancing Cuban society with which he cannot harmonize. As if to underline the boy’s insignificant role in society, Raúl remains anonymous until very late in the story when the “dos tipos,” the political rebels, ask him his name: “¿Cómo te sientes?, le preguntó y él dijo que se sentía

bien. Y cuando le preguntó cómo se llamaba le dijo que Raúl” (154). The names of characters, besides Raúl, who is not identified until much later, are not provided. Similarly, there is a lack of physical descriptions of Raúl, other characters, and details of the scenery. Instead, the characters are distinguishable only by the identifying adjective or noun designated to that character: the policemen are referred to as “el gordo” y “el flaco;” the rebels are called “el uno” y “el otro;” the woman that frequents his dreams as he sleeps in the park is “la mujer esa de los sueños;” and the other two petty-thief colleagues of Raúl are “el negrito y el blanquito,” although they only appear once. Details such as descriptions and names are almost completely left out of the story.

Raúl’s name is not introduced at an earlier point in the story because is not meant to represent great significance. The significance lies, rather, in the *lack* of identity given to this character, while placing full focus on how the character interacts with his world and what is being done to the character by others. Possessing little education and having been brought up in a dysfunctional family setting, Raúl has not developed a strong sense of identity. This creates the effect of an impersonal world in which all people that the boy encounters are simply ‘types.’ To the modernized society of the city, Raúl’s identity is nugatory and is reflected through his anonymity. His actions are in focus rather than his physical descriptions, which, from afar, deem him simply a homeless, petty-thief that commits murder. With this effect, it is easy to confirm negative assumptions about Raúl and direct one’s attention to the monstrousness of his ‘criminal’ act; however, ignoring the other details surrounding Raúl’s social situation would be to ignore the determinism that Ferreira was trying to portray.

Through the narration style of the story, the protagonist's socially insignificant identity underscores the psychological effects of the alienation of and disdain shown toward these societal types often seen in La Habana. The narrative voice characterizes how the social deprivation of types like Raúl causes alteration of one's idea of personal self-worth, resulting in doubts and confusion, as reflected in the story's peculiar third-person limited narration style. Any passage of the story reflects this effect. For example:

Acabado de levantar y ya estaba cansado. Pero el sol le quitaba el frío. El hambre no pero el frío sí. Podía cerrar los ojos y pensar en lo que quería. Menos en comida. Si pensaba en comida se sentía mal. Por eso pensó en la mujer del sueño. Y esta vez vio como si vinera caminando desde el sol. Parecía de verdad. Venía caminando desde el sol y él se quedó quieto y en seguida pensó lo que podía hacer. Se haría el dormido y la dejaría llegar. Era la primera vez que la veía despierto y esta vez no la dejaría escapar. Tenía que hablarle. Y luego tocarla. Y luego dejar que ella lo to- cara. Algo como la puta. Pero no como la puta. Que lo tocara y le dijera mijito. Por eso no iba a pensar en las ganas de comer. Seguiría teniendo hambre y no pensaría en la comida. Sólo en la mujer que se acercaba. Y cuando estuviera cerca abriría los ojos aunque le molestara el sol. Y le vería la cara y la llamaría por su nombre. Ahora sí. Ahora sí lo iba a saber en cuanto el sol dejara de taparla (*Papá, cuéntame* 153).

Through the lackadaisical pace of the story, it is evident that the narrator is experiencing lethargy and confusion. The abrupt transition of scenes and the simple, lean sentence structure demonstrate this effect. The feeling of fatigue sets in immediately when suddenly the reader learns that this character has just awoken and is still tired. Many of the sentences are short, representing this lack of energy to produce complete thoughts in a full sentence. For example: "Pero el sol le quitaba el frío. El hambre no pero el frío sí," and "Pero no como la puta. Que lo tocara y le dijera mijito." There are many pauses between thoughts in order to slow the velocity of these mental images.

This type of narration produces a surreal effect; however, the narration's function is not to recreate an imagined dream. This world only seems surreal. On the contrary, it is a realistic representation of the inner-stream of consciousness created by Raúl's mind, although at times simulating the same perception-blurring sensations of a dream. His current reality replicates the quality of a dream because; due to the lack of meaningful participation in his surrounding world and the indifference society has mutually shown towards his existence, Raúl lacks a sense of identity. This leads to the sensation of unreality and the unfamiliarity with his own existence and self-worth. In an article on the representation of crime and psychological thought processes in works of naturalism, Stephen Brennan explains that "our sense of self-worth depends largely on how others judge our social selves, and the "most fiendish punishment" imaginable is to be treated by others as "non-existing things" (187). The muddled representation of Raúl's consciousness can be explained by this idea. He cannot think clearly like a functioning, thriving individual because he hardly exists in his own mind.

This narrative voice belongs to Raúl's interior monologue alone, a perspective that cannot visibly or audibly be observed in reality. Dorrit Cohn cites Leon Edel in order to explain this concept:

...the most direct of the "stream-of-conscious techniques," interior monologue, is by definition limited to the linguistic activity of the mind, whereas the unconscious is by definition radically devoid of language. As Leon Edel aptly puts it: 'the unconscious cannot be expressed in its own unconscious form, since obviously this is unconscious. We can only infer it from symbols emerging in the conscious expressions of the person' (56).

Gathering from the rhythm of the narration, the short sentences and ideas, and the confusing scene transitions, we see the symbols that make up this inner-thought narration.

One might argue that an authentic portrayal of the individual inner thought process of a character such as Raúl would be better represented through first-person narration, however, Cohn points out that one does not narrate one's own thoughts in dreams nor in consciousness:

It is not difficult to see why dreams do not lend themselves through presentation through monologic techniques: a dreamer does not tell himself his dream while he dreams it, any more than a walking person tells himself his experiences while they are in progress (52).

In this way, the third-person narration that Cohn describes mimics Raúl's listless thought process most authentically, underlining his feeling of unawareness. Even though the pace has the slowing effects of a dream, this dream-like state is actually the daily reality of the protagonist. This technique brings the reader back to the naturalistic societal view of this marginalized being while forcing the reader to experience the thinking process of the socially unacceptable type of Cuban society during the 50s. This writing style forces the reader to comprehend the logic of this marginalized being and even sympathize with him.

These thoughts in third-person narration show the reader that 'types' like Raúl cannot think of themselves as functioning individuals, and that their opinions and personality have no worth in this developing Habana society. Käte Hamburger explains this comparison between subjectivity and objectivity of fictive narration:

...if I speak of a person as an object, then I define this concept as the opposite to that of subject in the ontological sense of an I-saying being: man is an I, a subject, the being who says "I" both of and to himself. This is the exact opposite of the concept of object in the sense of an object or thing. The self as a specifically I-saying being stands opposite a world of objects, to which, as far as it is concerned, even all other human beings, i.e., all other I-saying beings belong. It knows of them only as objects, not as subjects, since each I-saying being knows

only of itself as a subject; or if it knows of them as subjects, it does so only once they have articulated themselves (138).

Ferreira does not create a loud, subjective protagonist because the objective third-person narration of Raúl's own thoughts represents the lack of this differentiation between the protagonist as an "I-saying being," or a self-recognized individual, and society as other subjects. It underscores the idea that, to Raúl, both he and the rest of society are merely objects passing by one another in a world he does not understand. First-person narration is not suited for this story as it would not appropriately reflect Raúl's lack of individual self-worth in his own mind.

The fact that the reader is seeing Raúl's reality, which is itself like an unreality, is responsible for the muddled narration of the atmosphere that surrounds him. The setting is not introduced by a third person narrator but is discovered by putting together the short, fragmented, stream of Raúl's textually represented consciousness in a way that creates a hazy or dream-like effect. This brings full meaning to the significance of the story's title: "Sueño sin nombre." His reality is like a dream in which he has little control over his poor decision making, due to his lack of identity and incorporation into society. As if to peer through Raúl's glassy eyes at the very opening of the story, one must 'squint' in order to make-out a full, detailed picture of the surrounding scene. The reader is immediately stalled by the sensation of confusion upon reading the opening line:

Se despertó al sentir el sol, se incorporó en el banco y miró la mañana. Un policía se acercaba por el parque haciendo ruido con el palo. Era el policía gordo que a veces lo trataba bien y que un día le había dado una peseta. Al otro día no le dio nada y le dijo que se fuera. Hoy venía sin prisa, dando golpes con el palo y diciendo vamos (*Papá, cuéntame* 151).

One must put together minute details in order to form only incomplete pieces of the imagined setting. At the beginning, it is not directly divulged that the protagonist is in a park, nor do we get a sense of park-like scenery suggesting a particular image. Instead, the image of a policeman comes into view as he is nearing the park, banging his nightstick against the ground. It is only comprehended that the protagonist is in a park based on the descriptions of what Raúl sees the policeman doing. With the few details given, the image of the sun, the bench, the movement of the policeman, and the sound of the stick hitting the ground, the protagonist's surroundings start to come into view. The descriptions are ambiguous, forcing one to make speculations, and almost secretly keeping the full details of the surrounding scenery veiled.

Not providing the full scene descriptions directly produces many questions. For example, the imagery of the park is formed based only on hinted details that the reader perceives through the lethargic mind of Raúl. Details lazily come into focus, such as the sudden perception of the presence of tourists while learning about the mannerisms of the policemen. The fat policeman “lo dejaba pedir y que les anduviera atrás a los turistas” (*Papá, cuéntame* 152). The fact that many tourists usually come to the area is not divulged explicitly, rather, one bit of information can be gathered from another implicitly. This spares the reader from the pushy presence of a loud, objective narrator. The personal opinions of the narrator remain very distant and do not interfere with the natural stream of thought. For example, the following passage provides information in a very implicit manner, showing instead of telling.

Pero ahora no había muchos turistas. La situación y el calor decían los choferes de alquiler. Y se ponían a comentar con las putas que la cosa estaba mala. Las putas

eran raras. A veces lo trataban bien y lo querían abrazar. Una vez una lo besó y luego lo llevó a la fonda y le dijo al chino que le diera de comer. El chino no quería y ella sacó dinero de la cartera y se puso a gritar. Y el chino tuvo que traerle frijoles con arroz. La puta lo miraba comer y le decía mijito. Pero cuando acabó de comer le dijo que se fuera (*Papá, cuéntame* 152)

The presence of other aspects of the setting like the lack of tourists and, in a similar fashion, the prostitutes and chauffeurs, come into view only while other characteristics are described, matching the narrator's scattered thoughts and limited point of view. This is a reflection of the way that these 'types' that Raúl observes come and go, appearing almost at once and leaving with the same haste and unpredictability. People pass through the city, some acknowledging the boy and giving money, while others pay him no notice. The low hum of the conversation between the prostitutes and chauffeurs, whose presence is unknown before this sentence, is now audible. Only the surfacing of these details indicate that the action is taking place in an area that is well populated and often toured, which, in this story, is La Habana. Raúl is familiar with the sight of the tourists and is made aware of their absence from the talk on the street, just as the reader is made aware of this information. However, since the only way for him to learn of current events is through talk on the street, he does not know that the reason the tourists have not returned is because of the violent rebellion activity that has been taking place around the city. He is unaware of the current state of affairs due to his lack of education and access to current commodities, such as radio.

The protagonist's 'dream woman' is also introduced through only indirect details. When Raúl thinks about how he must constantly wander because no one from a particular area of the city wants to give him money more than once, his sudden thoughts of the

woman occur for the first time: “Porque sólo caminando la podría encontrar. La mujer esa que en los sueños lo tapaba” (*Papá, cuéntame* 125). The use of the pronoun “she” in the first sentence elevates this sense of ambiguity. *She* crosses his mind spontaneously as the reader also learns of this “she”, before who “she” *is* is divulged; it is the second sentence that reveals this new female character’s place in Raúl’s mind. This woman is the dream woman that spontaneously appears during Raúl’s frequent dozing. Like the other characters, she also comes and goes from Raúl’s consciousness which further emphasizes his confused state of mind, his alienation, and the neglect shown towards him by society. Specifically, the *dream woman* reflects the absence of a maternal guardian in Raúl’s life, because, like the compassionate prostitute from his reality, the woman from the dream brings him the same comforts while he sleeps. He is subconsciously dreaming about the possibilities of having this motherly care that he lacks.

Raúl’s inability to mingle with this society is reiterated through the lack of detail given to objects found in Raúl’s atmosphere, and his own failed attempts at thoroughly recognizing and identifying these modern objects. This is observed when he dreams of sleeping on a real bed instead of his usual park benches. The description of the bed is indeterminate, which reflects the seldom interaction he has had with this object in his nomadic lifestyle. The bed appears: “Y la dejaba acercarse a la cama. Era una cama diferente” (*Papá, cuéntame* 152). This description realistically represents the trouble his mind has with accurately identifying this modern commodity, which is foreign to him. The only information provided in order to form a mental image of this object is that the bed is different. It is not revealed what exactly is different about it while the tenebrous

descriptions continue: “No como el banco del parque ni como el suelo del portal” (*Papá, cuéntame* 152). Raúl can only imagine this bed by brainstorming what the bed is *not* like; not like the park bench and not like the ground. It is impossible for the narrator to provide clear and precise thoughts because Raúl’s mind lacks a clear perception of these modern luxuries in society; the rest is left to the imagination.

Raúl can only form this image of the bed based on images he has seen from the streets where he lives. He continues to envision the bed using this exposure to the object: “Era una cama de verdad. Como las que anuncian en las vidrieras de las tiendas. Todavía más grande que las que anuncian en las vidrieras” (*Papá, cuéntame* 152). The boy has not had access to this commodity, but he has seen them on display in the store windows. Consequently, extensive descriptions of the structure, colors, or the material of sheets are left out. Raúl’s mind avoids specific detail that for him is undecipherable and arbitrary. We only know that it is a *real*, sizable bed, like the ones he can view from the streets. Raúl is familiar with this general view of the displayed beds, but has not actually felt the bed or seen it in close proximity. Raúl’s thought process can only generate comparisons with things he is familiar with and has experienced in some way. Emphasizing his lack of participation in society and a functional home, he uses the general description of the *real* store bed as his only reference point. In this way, one is hearing the drowsy thought process of the main character in which only outlines matter and not detail.

Because of Raúl’s ignorance to modernized lifestyle, he can only see these outlines of foreign objects and society, which makes it impossible for him to accurately understand the people of this society and, in this case, their crooked intentions. His lack

of education and naivety subject him to be misguided easily. For example, the “dos tipos,” or the political rebels, are presented as “el uno” y “el otro,” heightening the confusion between their distinct identities and Raúl’s ignorance towards their deceit. The physical description of the two political rebels is insignificant because these two men are one entity in Raúl’s mind. This idea is evident through the lack of character voice differentiation: “Bueno, dijo uno. La cosa es, dijo el otro. Y se callaron los dos. Bueno, volvió a decir uno. Mira, dijo el otro. Déjame a mí, dijo uno, y el otro se apartó” (*Papá, cuéntame* 154). The rebels finish each other’s sentences, they constantly *look* at one another, and they seem unified by way of their interactions. They are like identical twins in Raúl’s perception, which creates a mirror effect. The repetition of their actions and simultaneous responses enhance the psychologically distorted feel of Raúl’s reality. These two mirrored beings speak in a way that the protagonist cannot understand: “hablando cosas que él no entendía” (*Papá, cuéntame* 154), reiterating the secretive nature of their rebellious activity. As this discourse demonstrates, Raúl cannot grasp the way this ‘civilized’ world functions. For Raúl, the agenda of these corrupt beings and the political turmoil of the city that drives their mission are unknown.

This concept of the “dos tipos” as a mirrored entity and the psychological confusion it creates for Raúl is amplified further through more repetitions of their gestures and phrases. The importance of *gaze* is stressed, for example, as it is mentioned multiple times that the rebels *stare* at each other and at Raúl. This is expressed with “lo miró” or “lo miraron” throughout the action when Raúl first encounters these men while resting against a column. A constant exchange of wordless *miradas* takes place between

the two political rebels, as they seem to be sizing-up their victim and exchanging secret coded glances between one another:

Uno lo miró y tomó un sorbo de café. Dijo algo y luego lo miró el otro. También tomó café y entonces lo miraron los dos. Él puso cara de pedir y se hizo el inocente. Uno lo volvió a mirar. Luego lo miró el otro. Y después lo volvieron a mirar los dos (*Papá, cuéntame* 153).

The action of staring is repeated silently and meticulously. Their actions reflect off one another, repeating everything twice. This technique of repetition heightens the feeling of secrecy and psychological mind games. With this *bizarre* element of the narration, reality continues to become distorted for Raúl, which reiterates the theme of being lost in a dream-like world.

Raúl's hazy state of mind and confusion is also reflected in the way that other aspects of the setting do not show up until the protagonist interacts with those spaces during a specific moment; such as: descriptions of streets, rooms, or buildings. Only few elements of the surroundings are visible close-up and remain foggy from afar. For example specific details are not provided as Raúl stares at people eating on the restaurant patio. Details such as what type of building the restaurant is are masked, because we are only allowed to focus on the present actions of Raúl. It is only during the movements of the main character when parts of the architecture come into view: "Había que velarlos cuando se ponían a tomar. Y no hacer nada mientras no pedían otro trago. Entonces se dejaba ver. Se arrimaba a la columna y los miraba sin pedir" (*Papá, cuéntame* 152). This specific part of the building, a single column, is only visible because the boy is standing against it. If the protagonist is not interacting with the scene, the other details do not exist. The scene only exists in close relation to the actions of the boy which still does not

enable the viewing of a complete image, but only fragments of a scene. The rest is blotted out by Raúl's sensation of being lost in an unfamiliar world.

Another example of this is present when Raúl is running through the streets after he accidentally grabs a strange woman that he thinks is the woman from his dream. While running, the atmosphere comes into view as he passes certain structures. Only quick passing glances of the surrounding city are visible. The boy passes the same streets, parks, and columns throughout the story, limiting the variation of scenery and emphasizing the psychological confusion from the repetition. At one moment, Raúl detects that he is running past an unnamed street corner where a woman is screaming, "se quedó gritando en la esquina." Next, he passes through a park and by an undecipherable street that seem to materialize out of nothing: "cruzó el parque y luego la calle." Following this, his rapidly occurring thoughts bring the reader through obscured doorways and finally to another column, "Se metió por una puerta y salió por otra. Hasta que se cansó y se arrimó a una columna" (*Papá, cuéntame* 153). The locations are left vague because Raúl does not know where he is and does not have a place where he belongs. These ambiguously repeated locations underscore the idea that a marginalized being in Raúl's position can try to advance, but will in Cuba during the 50s, he will only arrive at the same place as before. There are little opportunities for escape from the life that Raúl has been conditioned to live. Raúl possesses little awareness of his surroundings, and the reader is equally unaware of them, creating the effect of living the life of the disadvantaged protagonist. Subsequently, the reader comprehends the same reality of this boy abandoned by society.

These ambiguous setting descriptions emphasizing Raúl's feeling of being a lost member of society continue when he allows himself to be led by the "dos tipos." The protagonist asks, "¿A dónde vamos?" (*Papá, cuéntame* 154) on the way to the unknown destination as they once again pass through a park, doorways, and arrive at a final, mysterious doorway. With the vague nature of presenting the scenery details, the reader is forced to ask themselves the same question, to which one of the two men replies: "ya verás," adding suspense to the journey. As the protagonist is led blindly, so is the reader who must follow. Raúl perceives that he has suddenly been brought to a room or flat, comprehending hardly any description of hallways or staircases: "Al llegar arriba uno se volvió a poner delante y dijo qué lo pensara bien" (*Papá, cuéntame* 154). From this transition and the word "arriba" one can only guess where Raúl is; clearly not a first-floor location, while further detail is undecipherable.

The feeling of not knowing where the reader is being led continues within this room. As the two men begin arguing, other structures of the room come into view. "Luego se fueron a un rincón y volvieron a discutir. "Él se sentó en la cama y esperó" (*Papá, cuéntame* 154). The "rincón," although mentioned and now present in the text is still an empty, mysterious space without specific description. A bedroom comes into view as Raúl suddenly finds himself sitting on a bed, only present because it is involved in his current action, while he waits for something. Raúl doesn't know what he is waiting for, much like the marginalized 'types' that naturalism tends to portray. These individuals, typically described as being doomed for failure from their lack of nurture and societal incorporation from a very young age, are lost and "waiting" to do what their

disadvantaged lives have prepared them to do, that is, to commit crime, as Dreiser explained of these beings in a citation provided by Gary Scharnhorst. He explains that criminal types like Raúl “are overwhelmed by forces outside themselves,” and “react in certain ways which are due largely to their background and environment, and individually pay the penalty (“Murder Trial”)” (350).

Although the majority of the descriptions of scenery in the story are equivocal and do not reveal much detail, there is an occasional shift of focus that allows a more descriptive view than normal. In the scene where the boy is inside the rebels’ flat, we are suddenly nudged to glance in the direction of a pile of objects on a table:

Entonces fue a la mesa y le quitó los periódicos de encima. Todo estaba revuelto. Había botellas y latas con tuercas. Y tornillos. Y pedazos de metal. Y cajas chiquitas y cajas grandes. Y palabras americanas. ¿Ves esto?, le dijo y le enseñó un tubo de metal (*Papá, cuéntame* 157).

After such foggy descriptions of the surrounding atmosphere, this sudden sharpening of focus and more precise description stands out in the story. The specific detail and attention assigned to these objects denotes their significance. Not only can the shape of a table be seen, but now decipherable objects are witnessed on this table. The objects are not just shapes at this point, but they have fixed identities: bottles, cans, nuts, screws, boxes, and pieces of metal. Some objects even have descriptive adjectives that follow, bringing the item into an even closer view. Everything is described not as just a pile, but a pile that is “revuelto.” The boxes aren’t merely boxes, for example; they are “chiquitas” and “grandes.” The table is covered in newspapers with not just words, but specifically “American” words.

This sharpened image marks the end of Raúl's innocence. Raúl's mind processes the details of this image with more precision because the objects on the table will earn him money and a place of significance in society. As these objects come into view, it is as if the protagonist temporarily wakes up from his usual comatose state of mind. Raúl's mind, or the narrative voice, acts like a camera shifting the views of a film and focuses closely on what he now finds intriguing of this strange, modernized world. These objects will determine his actions throughout the rest of the story as the secretive and corrupt intentions of the rebels are revealed. As in a film, other details of the story remain blurry in order to further highlight this significant scene and distinguish it from the rest of the story.

These objects foretell Raúl's violent act, but his crime is not the most important detail of his identity transformation. The importance lies within the few societal details surrounding Raúl's atmosphere that cause him to do the crime. Although most of the physical descriptions have been excluded as has already been established, the narrative voice provides selective biographical descriptions. One example of this is how Raúl recalls his rough upbringing, clearly deficient of nurture. It is important to know that Raúl lacks a father figure at home: "Su padre era su tío. O su tío era su padre. Era lo mismo" (*Papá, cuéntame* 151). There is some figure in his life, but the lack of a fixed identity, whether the man is his father or his uncle, indicates that Raúl doesn't know or care because this person has not been a positively influential part of his life. With this information, it is more easily comprehended how a criminal act might be the result of a boy growing up without a valuable fatherly influence. His disadvantaged situation is

reiterated because we learn that the father figure: “Le pegaba si no traía dinero y si lo traía se lo quitaba. Luego le daba algo para que fuera a comer a la fonda. Y si hoy no llevaba dinero ni eso le iba a dar” (*Papá, cuéntame* 151). The focus is on Raúl’s defective upbringing within the family, underlining the naturalistic idea that Raúl has been conditioned to behave the way he does.

By assessing Raúl’s unfortunate background surrounding his actions, we are apt to feel sorry for Raúl. He cannot return home because he does not collect any money in the park during the day: “Pero si hoy no conseguía dinero tampoco volvería a la casa. Ayer no había conseguido y por eso se quedó en el parque y tuvo que comer las sobras que se había robado en los chinos. Y salir corriendo cuando llegó el policía” (*Papá, cuéntame* 151). There are several emotive elements that shape this excerpt. At first glance, a few words instill a criminal image of the homeless boy such as: “había robado,” “salir corriendo,” y “el policía.” It is possible to make a negative judgment of Raúl immediately if not made aware of the other details in this description such as: “tampoco volvería a la casa,” “se quedó en el parque,” “ayer no había conseguido,” and “tuvo que comer.” Raúl does not only rob the Chinese merchants and enjoy their products dishonestly, but he *must* resort to eating, “tuvo que comer,” the food he stole, and he *must* sleep in the park in order to avoid having to return home to a physically abusive setting. It is evident that he has no other choice but to resort to stealing because: “Ya la gente no le daba como antes. Porque ahora era más grande. Tan grande que querían que fuera a la escuela” (*Papá, cuéntame* 151); another detail one should take into consideration while assessing the innocence or guilt of this character. It is clear that he is uneducated and will

soon not know how to make it on his own after being supported for so long by tourist offerings. He has not received education from a nurturing home nor from an organized schooling system. The boy now appears less criminal and more innocent, ignorant, and completely lacking the kind of training to make effective life decisions.

As a result of his abusive situation at home and his lack of self-worth, it is no wonder that he allows himself to be vulnerably led by the rebels and guided to carry out this violent task. Not only do the “dos tipos” offer him money, and the possibility of living in a house like the one belonging to the politicians, they tempt him with a false sense of caring. For example, when Raúl practices the task given by the two men correctly, their affectionate reaction is observed: “Entonces vinieron corriendo y lo abrazaron los dos. Lo apretaron fuerte y le pasaron la mano por el pelo” (*Papá, cuéntame* 155). The contrast between Raúl’s world of the park where he lives like a hungry animal and the quick taste of having a job, purpose, and praise for his work is made clear in order to show what he has been lacking in his life. The affection he gets from these strange men emphasizes the desire for what he has been denied in his nomadic lifestyle, making him feel like more of an individual rather than an organism. Raúl’s agreement to complete the task now becomes understandable. The instant gratification proves to be worth more than the offered monetary value in his eyes. Raúl’s participation in this act will grant him the feeling of identity his life has lacked.

Raúl’s ignorance to the severity of his participation of placing the bomb in front of the store is reestablished through the way the narrative voice portrays his surprised and guilt-stricken reaction to the aftermath of the explosion. This is demonstrated through the

discourse: “Iba a correr cuando pasó. Pasó que hubo una explosión como el cañonazo de las nueve. La tierra tembló. Pero no era el cañonazo de las nueve porque los cristales de las vidrieras empezaron a llover” (*Papá, cuéntame* 159). In this narrative stream of consciousness, Raúl’s mind struggles to decipher what has happened. He *was going to run*, like an animal that quickly reacts and flees from a sound that startles it. His surprise to the sight of the explosion is expressed with “pasó que hubo”. The discourse does not simply narrate what happened with *there was an explosion*, but it focalizes his surprised reaction with *it happened that there was an explosion*.

Deprived of education, Raúl only has his animal instincts to prompt him in reacting to the explosion. He compares the noise to the cannon blast at nine PM that he hears every night (warning the soldiers in the fortress of La Cabaña that the outside walls are closing), which is the only thing he can relate it to in his world of poverty. He does not associate the sound with a bomb or gunfire because he is unfamiliar with these creations of the ‘civilized’ side of society. He has not learned about them in school or from television, and he does not perceive the political instability reflected in civilian unrest and terrorist organizations. This again underlines his extreme lack of knowledge and his inability to predict the consequences of his actions.

This image of the protagonist walking the opposite way of the rest of the crowd after the explosion symbolizes his clash with the rest of society: “La gente empezó a correr hacia donde había sonado la explosión. Entonces vio el humo saliendo de la vidriera y a algunos que corrían para allá. Él no. Él hechó a caminar. Porque había algo en el suelo que quería averiguar” (*Papá, cuéntame* 160). This scene reiterates the fact

that the people all live and advance in one direction while he seems to go the opposite way at a slower pace. Not only does Raúl walk *toward* the aftermath in order to see what is lying on the ground, but he does not react the way the rest of society does when hearing the explosion, which it demonstrates his lack of belonging in a normal functioning society. He has nothing in common with these urbanized people; he cannot understand what he has done. As he nears the site of the accident, he nears his sense of identity and understanding in this foreign world.

The blood at the scene of the explosion and Raúl's reaction to this substance demonstrate the culmination of this once naive character's identity. The narrative voice focuses in on the blood specifically, hypnotizing Raúl:

Y él que no podía moverse. Porque había visto a la mujer. Tirada boca abajo y tapada de cristales. Y un brazo doblado al revés y otro que no tenía mano. La sangre que corría parecía la otra mano. Se agrandaba y corría por el suelo. Hasta que llegó tan lejos que ya no podía ser la otra mano (*Papá, cuéntame* 160).

Raúl's mind unwillingly focuses in on this liquid substance which is personified with the verbs "corría" and "agrandaba." For Raúl, the blood is alive and has power over him. The boy is shocked at the sight of the blood because he did not expect this outcome, and is fixated on this substance which represents his incorporation into the corrupt modern society. Whereas to Raúl most details are unimportant and overlooked, the personifying movement and expansion of the blood is a contrast to this pattern; the sight both fascinates and mortifies him.

The violent image continues to captivate him: "Y cómo el brazo sin mano iba rayando de sangre los cristales" (*Papá, cuéntame* 160). Special descriptive attention is dedicated to the scene of the accident which shocks both Raúl and the reader. The body

that Raúl observes lying in the wreckage is not merely an outline, unlike his habitual way of comprehending his surroundings. Similar to the scene of the terrorist paraphernalia on the table, the image of the corpse is described with more detail. Raúl can decipher that the body is specifically a female body, positioned face-down, covered in glass, broken, backwards, and bloody. The typical, blurry dream vision to which both the reader and Raúl are accustomed from before has now been sharpened to reveal the ugly naturalistically-themed reality of murder and social disadvantage.

This identity transformation is further emphasized through the guilt the protagonist feels after the explosion. The guilt begins when he realizes the victim of the explosion is the prostitute that has tried to help him: “Y entonces le vio la cara” (*Papá, cuéntame* 160). At first he is numb from the sight and then he hurts physically. “Porque esta vez sintió el dolor en la cara. Y el dolor del empujón contra la pared. Y el otro golpe que le dieron porque no se acababa de quitar.” And finally his reaction to the pain and the bloody sight: “Pero todavía aguantó las ganas de llorar. Hasta que vio que se la llevaban de verdad” (*Papá, cuéntame* 160). When he recognizes that he has killed an innocent woman for money and acceptance who resembles the woman from his dreams, he feels the full guilt of his actions: “Y por algo que le dolía más según lo sentía despertar. El nombre de la mujer. Al fin lo había recordado y la podía llamar. Y según corría y corría detrás del automóvil, el nombre tanto tiempo buscado se le iba escapando entre sollozos” (*Papá, cuéntame* 160). The name that *he had for so long been searching* represents the absence of a maternal figure, or any caring guidance in his life. His unfortunate upbringing determines his fate. Not having a prior sense of individuality or self-worth, he

falls victim to the rebels' temptations, which strips him of his ignorance to the complex Habana society of the 50s.

Modeling naturalism's tendency to show the animal's way of adapting to evolution in a changing world, "Sueño sin nombre" portrays Raúl's psychological metamorphosis of adaption from his habitual world of poverty and ignorance to his tricked integration into the modernizing city life of la Habana. Richard Lehan explains this effect of naturalism brought about by urbanization of cities:

As a theory of evolution, it put the emphasis of the physical process of the universe, on matter unfolding in time. But as a theory of natural selection- that is, the theory that all species change through a process of adaption to their immediate environment- it put the emphasis on the accidental rather than on a necessary unfolding, thus seriously challenging the notion of design (51).

In the same way, Raúl is "accidentally" introduced to modernized Cuban society by the interception of the outside influences (the political rebels). His evolution and his acquisition of personal identity take place without warning or Raúl's awareness of this change. Ferreira shows us his ignorance to these changes through the dream-like narration of the story which represents Raúl's confused and naïve state of mind which are. Raúl's partaking in the final violent act of the story reminds us that although by criminal means and trickery, Raúl has been lifted of his veil of innocence, granting him a sense of identity and awareness of his surroundings. Subsequently, he is naturally integrated into the society from which he was previously alienated. The naturalistic portrayal of the psychological stream of consciousness, as well as the background information of this *vagabundo*, born into poverty and social deprivation is revealed, providing a more "scientific" explanation for Raúl's actions. Through this technique, the

reader becomes familiar with the social disadvantage of this marginalized being, thereby forcing us to sympathize with his situation and understand his behavior.

CHAPTER TWO

HOMOEROTIC TENSIONS IN “LAZO DE ORO”

In the short story, “Lazo de oro,” Ramón Ferreira delineates the social struggle within the marginalized groups of la Habana during the nineteen 50s, as is depicted in the other two stories aforementioned in this thesis: “Sueño sin nombre” and “Cita a las nueve.” Whereas “Sueño” demonstrates society’s tendency toward class discrimination, and “Cita” emphasizes the traditional *machista* culture of the region, “Lazo de oro” portrays the stigmatization and de-masculinization of male homosexuality in la Habana, which ultimately led to the need for homosexuals to conceal this lifestyle. “Lazo de oro” naturalistically exemplifies the protagonist’s violent response to these societal pressures. Due to the inability to express his sexuality freely in an environment of strict, traditional standards, he is imbued with the natural impulse to respond with violence, as a way of exerting these repressed feelings.¹ Ferreira challenges the conventional naturalist drift²

¹This, of course, complicates the typical description of North American naturalism that influences Ferreira, since the literary cannon traditionally excludes homosexuality. As Denise Cruz affirms in her post-modernist analysis of naturalist Frank Norris’s *McTeague*, this refusal to consider the homoerotic possibilities in the novel “illustrates an unquestioned assumption in scholarship on U.S. naturalism—that the genre’s characteristically hyperbolic masculinity is always heterosexual” (488).

Cruz provides an interesting perspective in re-examining the conventional works of U.S. naturalism, such as the ‘friendship’ between Mac and Mark in *McTeague*, which she suggests is riddled with homosexual nuances. However, her theories of this presence of homosexual undertones is based principally on a deconstructionist reading of *McTeague*, with evidence supported only by textual insinuations and indeterminate symbols rather than concrete instances from the work.

While Cruz’s reading seems subjective and can be interpreted based on presumed metaphors found in the text, “Lazo de oro” is a more effective example of this theory. Instead of using the ambiguous snippets from *McTeague*, a pairing of Cruz’s theory that violence stems from negation of homosexuality with a reading of “Lazo de oro” validates her argument. Unlike her vague interpretation of *McTeague*, the

by boldly delving into the seldom investigated topic of homosexuality in “Lazo de oro.” Subsequently, “Lazo de oro’s” narration, discourse style, and its dark, naturalistic theme, support the purpose of this thesis. The story exemplifies how these rejected beings of society attain self-expression through the act of murder, thereby gaining personal identity and self-worth through violence. This chapter will demonstrate the premises of the protagonist’s identity transformation and involuntary acquisition of individuality through his act of murder in “Lazo de oro.”

The setting in “Lazo de oro” is important for the story’s overall theme of secrecy.³

The action begins in a specified location, depicted by use of precise detail: “en un bar de

impetuous presence of homosexuality in “Lazo de oro” provides tangible examples of her theory (See superscript 4).

² Donald Pizer uses *Sister Carrie* as an exemplary work to his proposal that describes naturalism as more of a literary “drift” rather than an ideology; that is, a “tendency toward an expression of a large-scale view of human nature and experience” (7). I agree with Pizer’s idea of examining naturalism as a literary canon which can coalesce with other genres, which demonstrates a determinism that varies in levels, depending on the characters’ inherent circumstances.

He argues that *Carrie* demonstrates a certain agency over her fate, breaking away from the typical precept that an absolute determinism governs the characters’ lives in works of naturalism. In Ferreira’s works, it is arguable that the characters seem to gain some level of agency over their situations of silence, low social status, and repressed feelings. It can be said that their acts of murder result from a rebellious desire for change, and deliberate action taken towards that change, regardless of whether or not their acts of rebellion succeed in granting them the recognition they so desire.

Despite these possible assumptions, however, Ferreira deliberately highlights his characters’ absence of free will and premeditation through the mention of their turbulent upbringings and social settings. The protagonist in “Sueño” is poor, uneducated, and physically and mentally abused at home. In “Cita”, the niece presumably possesses physically unattractive genes, lives in isolation, and is abused by her aunt daily. The gold thief in “Lazo de oro” is marginalized due to his homosexuality and feels psychologically tormented, while exposing himself to the seedy nightlife of the clubs in La Habana.

What Ferreira wishes to portray here is how these characters “blossom in a mud puddle,” as described by naturalist Stephen Crane of the protagonist destined for failure in his own novel, *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets*. The idea is that these societal types cannot hide from their own instinctual behaviors or their destinies because they have not been conditioned to change them. They are surrounded by atmospheres that determine their demise, and are as a result, in nature’s own way, not responsible for their violent or devious behavior.

³ Historians Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich comment on the extreme prejudices shown towards homosexuals in Cuba of the 50s, claiming that this Havana ‘underworld’ was the only place where one could express differences in sexuality. They explain that the social consequences of revealing one’s sexuality were severely isolating: “The openly homosexual man or woman who remained in the interior

la playa que se llama Rumba Palace, ese que está frente al parque de diversiones y que tiene un show de transformistas” (*Papá, cuéntame* 129). It is only in this kind of atmosphere, at night in a popular pick-up club, where, much like the drag shows performed there, homosexuality was openly tolerated as a form of entertainment in Cuba. The idea of homosexuality was admissible as long as it did not interfere with a man’s macho image⁴; that is, as long as it was for entertainment purposes, such as the drag show scene.

Ironically, it is stated that this location that housed lewd entertainment is situated next to a theme park, which is another destination with the purpose of entertaining crowds. Both the theme park and the drag show venue represent places where certain types of people can go to temporarily relieve themselves of the pressures of reality. Families go to theme parks to break up the daily monotony of work, study, or chores, while closeted homosexuals could attend the drag shows openly as an accepted form of ignoring traditional standards and the preoccupation with maintaining one’s macho

was often ostracized or cast in the role of village queer—the homosexual version of the village idiot... everyday life was not easy for the working-class or petty-bourgeois homosexual.” (686). As suggested, homosexuals were marginalized, and due to the intolerance of these lifestyles in civilization, these groups of people were forced to seek refuge and counsel within themselves, like the protagonist-narrator of “Lazo de oro.”

⁴ In order to preserve a man’s macho image, these night clubs, like the one depicted in “Lazo de oro,” became unspoken pick-up clubs for homosexuals. It was in these locales where the spectacle of the drag show and same-sex coquetry could be enjoyed by a man without losing his sense of masculinity. According to Ferreira, homosexuality “era algo cómico y permisible mientras que formara parte de algún espectáculo” (*Papá, cuéntame* x). According to Ferreira, as long as homosexuality was viewed as comical, entertaining, and not serious, a man could shamelessly relish this controversial lifestyle while maintaining his “posición segura del macho” (*Papá, cuéntame* x).

In Cuba, the man was meant to be seen as dominant. Since the “penetrator” is the dominant figure in the act of coition, to be penetrated by another man jeopardizes his animalistic need for dominance. For these men, to be known as homosexual was to be known as someone who is penetrated, which endangers the macho, dominant status of his being. Thus, it was in his best interest to hide any feelings of homosexuality, which represented effeminacy.

status. As the fun experienced by children and families in a theme park is only temporary and cannot be converted into a realistic lifestyle, the nightclub for homosexuals also serves as only a temporary escape from the effeminate view of homosexuality that was perceived in Cuba.

The protagonist in “Lazo de oro,” a self-reflective and egotistical gold thief, represents the ambiguous homosexual ‘type’ of Cuban society. That is, like many closeted homosexuals of the early 50s in Cuba, he refuses to live an openly gay lifestyle because he is a feminization-fearing macho ‘type’.⁵ The protagonist is a societal lowlife who subconsciously questions his own sexuality and preys upon others he believes to be homosexual. He does not allow himself to identify and accept the reality that he himself is homosexual. Instead, he frequents these gay bars, nearing the flesh that he insecurely desires, and exerts these frustrations by robbing the men he meets. In order to maintain his “posición segura del macho,” he chooses to view homosexuality in others as a weakness, thus, serving as his justification for targeting them. The reader observes this early on in the story when the protagonist, while examining another man’s mannerisms from afar, is trying to guess “si el tipo era o no era” (*Papá, cuéntame* 131). Based on this affirmation, he will decide if this person is a prospective victim for robbery. He chooses

⁵ By referencing the theories of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Cruz discusses the theory of “homosexual panic” in which a man experiences homosexual desire but fears feminization that might result from acting on such desires. Cruz consults Sedgwick’s theory of the “paranoid gothic” genre that demonstrates violence resulting from this “homosexual panic” and the fear of confronting homosexual desires. Cruz claims that the “paranoid gothic” supports the idea of the “Freudian link between paranoia and repressed homosexual desire (EC, 186)...that links compulsory male-male bonds (such as mentorship and male rivalry) with the inevitable “homosexual panic” accompanying these relationships—the anxious fear of a potential collapse of homosocial space into the realm of perceived or actual homosexual desire (493).”

these presupposed homosexual victims because he subconsciously desires close contact with these people. He is fighting the recognition of his own homosexual tendencies.

Consequently, instead of succumbing to his own sexual needs, the protagonist's infatuation with men is replaced by his avowed obsession with gold and his animalistic need to possess this commodity. According to the protagonist, this obsession is responsible for his desire to approach the burly man wearing a sizable gold chain that he observes at the bar. Like his own sexual ambiguity, he spends a large part of the story deciphering whether or not the man wearing the chain is gay. While consumed by his observations, he declares that "la verdad es que yo nunca había visto una cadena de oro como la que el tipo tenía colgada al cuello" (*Papá, cuéntame* 129), as a way of hiding his sexual interest in the man. With this statement, he attempts to convince the implied listener (the authoritative figure that discovers him at the end of the story) that his interests are genuinely in the name of gold. The protagonist is aware that admitting his true interest in the man will make him look deficient and less manly in the eyes of Cuban society, and therefore must hide his true identity.

The importance of his unbridled weakness for gold is emphasized by the detailed imagery he dedicates to its first-person description. When the chain first catches his eye, he embellishes the description, as if the object were illuminated and shining brighter than the rest of the objects in the scene. The protagonist describes the scene almost cinematically where the reader is able to *peer* through the lens of his viewpoint. Suddenly, the object of desire is focalized: "Cuando el tipo vino hacia la rockola a poner un disco y se inclinó. Sucede que al tratar de leer los nombres de los discos se le salió la

medalla y se quedó meciendo cuatro brillantes como cuatro soles, y ahí mismo me perdí” (*Papá, cuéntame* 130).

In this description, the subject’s movements and the various elements of lighting are emphasized. The man wearing the chain moves towards the jukebox, a brightly lit, colorful, musical machine that, although not explicitly stated, seems to illuminate his actions in the dark bar. His image is highlighted as he stands in front of the light displaying the musical selections, while he tampers with the machine, “bending over” to read the names of the albums. Suddenly, the object for which the protagonist has been waiting seems to reveal itself in a fetishized way. The gold chain pops out of its hidden space under the clothing, shining brilliantly like “four suns.” The narrator describes his excitement at the unveiling of this object almost erotically, as if it were a forbidden part of the body which he is lucky enough to accidentally catch glimpse of.

Replete with erotic intonations, the protagonist continues describing what he sees: “El tipo regresó a su mesa y esta vez dejó la medalla sobre la camisa...” (*Papá, cuéntame* 130). He is shocked at the fact that the other man would knowingly leave his large, gold, chain exposed atop his shirt, as if this were a scandalous thing to do. This is because, to the voyeur protagonist, this jewel is like a sexual organ that clearly provokes arousal and should be covered conservatively in order to avoid negative attention from onlookers. The sight continues to excite him as the protagonist comments that: “se echó para atrás y se abrió de piernas como si fuera a quedarse allí toda la vida. Ya eso me pareció demasiado, y a un descarado así me gusta darle una lección. Claro que el tipo era muy grande” (*Papá, cuéntame* 130). In the eyes of the protagonist, the man wearing the gold

chain is performing a provocative, insinuating dance through his revealing actions. The protagonist's inner torture is evident, to the point where he affirms that this seducer has gone too far: "me pareció demasiado." Because of this deliberate teasing, the protagonist reasons that the man wearing the chain deserves his violent fate.⁶

The protagonist reacts in this way because the gold chain represents his proscribed homoerotic desires within, awakening his lascivious need to satisfy this silent, imprisoned urge. The protagonist's inability to discover and accept the traits of his identity and latent homosexual tendencies amplifies the gold's authority over the protagonist's actions. For the protagonist, it has a mind of its own: "Pero ya tenía la cadena metida en el cerebro y no podía pensar en otra cosa" (*Papá, cuéntame* 130). The narrator-protagonist simply "cannot" think of anything other than the chain because the object has taken possession of his free-will. After seeing the chain for the first time, he must try to subdue these savage desires, in the same way that male characters in other naturalist works must fight-off the "inner brute" of sexual desire⁷. At one point, the

⁶ This shares similar sexual undertones as many other exemplary naturalist works such as Stephen Crane's *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets*, in which the human body is commoditized. After Maggie is shunned from her family due to the defilement of her innocence and resorts to prostitution, she is eventually stalked and murdered by a man in the streets.

In the same way that the man with the chain in "Lazo" is victimized for tantalizingly displaying that which is desired by the protagonist, Maggie is also preyed upon due to her recalcitrant lifestyle and her exposition of that which stimulates and tempts voyeurs. Maggie makes her bodily offer known to all, but only those who can afford it will be able to purchase her sacred merchandise. Similarly, the man in "Lazo" allows his expensive jewelry to be seen by even those who cannot afford their own, which entices the protagonist, moving him to target the man for what visibly tempts and teases him.

Although naturalism usually disregards homosexual relations, similar natural forces and impulses exist between all human interactions. The savage tendency to possess what one cannot have may refer to literal objects, bodies, and social positions, no matter the sexual orientation, as observed in "Lazo de oro."

⁷ A warranted example of the naturalist theme of the inability to fight animalistic tendencies is Frank Norris's *McTeague*. In this work the narrator elucidates the human's indomitable sexual desires through the portrayal of McTeague's frenzied arousal during the interaction with his patient, Trina. While she is temporarily paralyzed by anesthetics during a cavity filling, he loses control over his inner "brute."

protagonist in “Lazo de oro” admits first hand that: “por un rato pude controlar el deseo de pedirle que me enseñara la medalla” (*Papá, cuéntame* 129). The “deseo” for this chain is what he may temporarily restrain at the present moment, but he implies that this self-control cannot and will not last. His instinctive craving for gold continues to grow, which completely overtakes his mind. In exchange for the ability to temporarily depart from his homosexual urges, the protagonist *must* and *will* do whatever it takes, including winning over a stranger’s trust and cutting off his head to get his hands on the gold that will pacify these desires.

The way he talks about the gold shows that, in its presence, he is transformed into an animal, blinded of any sense of emotion or empathy that human beings normally experience. In this way, the object owns his identity, which subsequently forces him to live for the sole purpose of obtaining the expensive jewel. This is demonstrated when the thief agrees to follow the man wearing the gold chain to his brother’s house. The man with the chain does not bring him to his own house because he has a wife and children, and so must use his brother’s house for his homosexual affairs. The protagonist-narrator spends the evening trying to get him drunk so that he will pass out, making the chain more accessible. Finally, after hours of failed attempts to bring the giant body down with alcohol, he knocks the victim out with the blow of a liquor bottle. The thief then tries to

After he “grossly” kisses the subdued Trina on the mouth, the narrator explains this fleshly reaction, almost as if he were a doctor diagnosing a patient: “But for all that, the brute was there. Long dormant, it was now at last alive, awake. From now on he would feel its presence continually; would feel it tugging at its chain, watching its opportunity. Ah, the pity of it! Why could he not always love her purely, cleanly? What was this perverse, vicious thing that lived within him, knitted to his flesh?” (24). Just as McTeague cannot bypass the laws of nature, neither can the wantonly troubled protagonist of “Lazo.” The story shows how his carnal needs must surface in some form or another.

Since Ferreira was well-versed in North American literature and was inspired by various American authors that expressed signs of different naturalist “drifts” in their works, Norris’s McTeague serves as a useful point of investigation when considering the naturalist themes in Ferreira’s works.

get the soldered chain off of the victim's neck: "Ahora sí que no me podía ir. La cadena era mía y el degenerado no la quería soltar" (*Papá, cuéntame* 138). The chain keeps him from leaving. This animalistic atavism mimics the same desperation of a primal creature clawing at an inaccessible food source. He becomes frustrated by having what he covets within reach but still unattainable.

The desperation felt by the protagonist to possess this object is continually emphasized: "Sólo veía la cadena. Buscando algo con qué cortar, veía la cadena. Cuando abría una gaveta. Cuando rebusqué entre los pedazos de botella. Sólo veía la cadena. Y la medalla. Y los cuatro brillantes como cuatro soles" (*Papá, cuéntame* 138)." *I saw the chain* is repeated throughout this fragment for emphasis on his one-track mind. Although it is declared in first-person, the narration represents his own stream of consciousness. He also repeats the shinning image of the "cuatro brillantes como cuatro soles" in order to show its hypnogogic properties; the object owns him.

This is because the chain represents more than just the value of gold or material riches. As we saw in "Sueño," Raúl is not attracted to the monetary reward of carrying out his dangerous task with the bomb; rather, he is intrigued by the thought of becoming incorporated into the urbanizing society that overlooked his existence on a daily basis. Accordingly, in "Cita a las nueve," the murder of the protagonist's aunt signifies more than just freedom from verbal abuse, emphasizing instead the girl's desire for self-acceptance and societal integration. Similarly, in "Lazo de oro," the thought of possessing gold promises a sense of power, identity, and self-satisfaction in a society where he is merely a nameless lowlife and cannot accept his own sexual tendencies. He

cannot establish himself meaningfully in the modernizing world of la Habana where the conservative society will criticize his sexual differences, consequently forcing him to remain in the lower class ‘underworld’ of La Habana. The thought of possessing the gold of other men assuages the impossibility of considering possessing them corporally.

As noted by theorist Mary E. Papke, this intense yearning to possess an object in naturalism typically represents a character’s generation of a false sense of self:

The things in these works speak deeply to the characters; indeed, they often speak the characters and the self-alienation and atomization experienced by those whose desires can be expressed only through the commodities in which they invest, commodities which in turn create a false sense of self which occludes the experience of self-commodification that they are forced to suffer because of historical and biological circumstance (297).

This theory applies to the protagonist in “Lazo de oro.” The true, carnal desires of this gold thief can only be expressed by obtaining the object that represents the fulfillment of that impossible desire, which temporarily satisfies him: gold. Papke proposes that the commoditized object is a “a reminder of social inclusion, acceptance, and agency” (297). The protagonist in “Lazo” is a subject that has been alienated by society, he is a typical lowlife of the city that is often ignored, and he cannot govern his own life due to the fear of further alienation from expressing his sexual tendencies. Until the murder of the victim at the end of the story, the narrator’s identity *is* gold. He defines himself with this object, and only gains autonomy through his murder of the man with the chain.

The protagonist possesses little faculty to discern individuality, which contradicts the arrogant and confident manner in which he narrates his own story. In “Sueño sin nombre,” for example, Raúl’s emphasized paucity of self-worth and identity is best

represented through the third-person limited narration, showing his inability to speak for himself. While “Sueño” authentically captures Raúl’s enervated thought process in which he lives lost in a dream-like state, “Lazo” concedes that the voice of this abject marginalized protagonist is heard first-hand. The difference here is that Raúl’s story takes place during the time of the action, *while* he is living the experience, although hazily. As his story unfolds, he has still not encountered the event that will awaken him from his naivety and absence of personal identity. The protagonist in “Lazo,” on the other hand, tells his own story in first-person *after* he has murdered his victim, which serves as his pinnacle of self-awareness. As he proudly relates his story, he speaks as a self-discovered individual, because he has committed an act that grants him noticeable existence in Cuba. Only after murdering the man that he wants can he feel like he has satisfied his need for contact with him.

It is through this extraverted, revealing narration that the reader learns of the protagonist’s character. In “Lazo, there is not a third-person narrator to explain details and backgrounds of characters, rather, the first-person narrator willingly and enthusiastically imposes his own commentary and opinions upon his implied listener. The protagonist is an explicit narrator who provides full disclosure of personal thoughts, which may not necessarily be reliable, since his primary interest is to convince his listener of the story. He has been caught at the scene of the crime, and his intent is to explain his reasoning and maintain some level of innocence through this reasoning. The narrator will provide *his* truth, but since he is the only living witness, we cannot know the completely accurate story, as suggested by Käte Hamburger:

The I of first-person narration does not intend to be a lyric I, but a historical one... It does narrate personal experience, but not with the tendency to present it as being only subjectively true, as being its experience-field in the more concentrated sense, but instead, like every historical I, is oriented toward the objective truth of the narrated (313).

Unlike the third-person narration styles in “Sueño sin nombre” and “Cita a las nueve” with presumptively unbiased storytellers, the reliability of the protagonist in “Lazo” must be questioned since he is providing a persuasive discourse. The most important detail is that he possesses a strong enough sense of identity after his crime to tell this story, whether it is true or embellished.

The protagonist’s self-descriptions are presented in a casual and prideful manner, signifying his renewed sense of individuality. Although society would consider him a criminal, his commentary is both self-righteous and critical of others around him. He wishes to portray himself as good-looking, intelligent, and confident, while he constantly judges those around him for mere surface qualities. He claims that he is a shorter man: “Se lo digo, yo a su lado parecía un enano” (*Papá, cuéntame* 132); however, this self-righteous narrator would never admit possessing a weak quality without trumping it with a virtuous one. He quickly orients the reader by explaining: “Pero los chiquitos tenemos otras virtudes y, como le dije, después de unos tragos no le tengo miedo ni al diablo” (*Papá, cuéntame* 132). He reassures himself and the present authoritative listener that he is strong and has important qualities of a valuable individual of society. Subsequently, his sense of pride makes him blind to his own flaws.

We see this type of complacent mentality in multiple circumstances, for example, as he again comments on his own physical appearance: “soy flaco.” This characteristic,

when singled out, makes him feel insecure, so he distracts the listener from the possibility of appearing defective. He redeems himself with: “pero bien parecido y cuando se de vestir no hay quien me ponga un pie delante” (*Papá, cuéntame* 131). Replacing negative self-image with the dramatization of positive characteristics shows his attempt to rid himself of insecurity. This action shows that he is not comfortable with his true self and must invent ways to feel valuable to society.

The narrator continues to audibly flatter himself by declaring his affinity for fashion: “Esta camisa que Usted ve la copié de un magazine americano y un sastre amigo mío me la interpretó en seda, aparte, claro está, de que yo soy de dos baños al día, de corte de pelo semanal y de masaje facial en la barbena. Y de las uñas ni hablar” (*Papá, cuéntame* 131). He boldly speaks directly to the implied authority figure with a sense of arrogance and superiority. Whereas most people found guilty of crime might show signs of embarrassment, desperation, sadness, or anger, the narrator does not evince any vestige of regret or fear while speaking. Contrarily, he brags about his tasteful fashion and other virtuous traits, as if there were no class difference between these two characters. This is because, in his mind, there is no difference, and as a result, he has no shame. He dresses as if he was a part of the upper class, but this is simply a failed attempt at fitting in. His true nature, as a homosexual man in the early 50’s, does not mesh with the macho image expected of men in Cuban society.

Theorist Andrew Lawson identifies this characteristic of acting and dressing as if one belonged to a different class as “class mimicry” or “class emulation.” While consulting the theories of Thorstein Veblen, Lawson argues that in naturalist works, “the

practice of emulation evolves from the desire to imitate another person with the aim of equaling or excelling him or her. Emulation is imitation with a competitive edge, a paradoxical engagement with another identity in the pursuit of difference” (598). As Lawson signifies, although a character may be a commonality, such as the narrator in “Lazo de oro,” his attempt to disguise himself as being of a higher class demonstrates his desire to possess that identity instead of the one he avoids discovering in himself. As a result, he instills a false sense of individuality. His intent is to appear as what he considers to be the ideal man, and to accept himself as homosexual, he would be going against this idealized macho figure.

He surmounts being a member of the working class by keeping himself clean and well-dressed in modern styles made of rich fabrics such as silk. Lawson affirms that this creates in the mind of the emulator “self-esteem through conspicuous consumption” (598). In the previous passage, the narrator admits to “copying” the shirt he saw in an American magazine. That is, the shirt mimics a modern and popular trend that he ultimately seeks to replicate, but the shirt is not authentic and only aids in his mimesis. It is merely an imitation of the real version. His friend has reinterpreted it, and although it is nearly identical, it can never be the original. This idea reiterates the criminal’s constant search for a place in society. He has no individual sense of identity due to the fact that he must question his lifestyle and personal tendencies, and therefore must mimic other visually pleasing examples of types he has seen that are accepted and welcomed by society. The protagonist is paranoid that he might be identified by his sexual preferences and so wishes to appear more macho, or *straight*.

Despite his attempts to avoid feminization, these mannerisms such as obsessing over hygiene, personal appearance, and fashion in American magazines, implies a sense of femininity. Emphasizing this feminine tendency, the narrator is also finicky about his standards of cleanliness:

No hay cosa que me enferme más pronto que unas uñas mal cuidadas; pero, como le decía, debido a que soy hombre aseado he tenido que dar más de un parón; esos tipos que le acercan a uno a pedir candela o con la disculpa de una dirección mal dada; usted se da cuenta en seguida y no hay problema, les da una mala contestación y se acaba el asunto; lo malo es cuando usted se deja llevar confiado y luego se le aparecen con lo mismo (*Papá, cuéntame* 131).

Recognizing his vanity, “soy hombre aseado,” a more feminine quality, he affirms that he attracts other men. Having to end “el asunto” between he and the “confused” male coquette is clearly not as dire a problem for this protagonist since he boasts this information with pride. He states the simple solution, “les da una mala contestación,” as if he is the object of many flirtatious suitors and revels in rejecting them. Just as he leads the man with the gold chain on at the bar only to rob and murder him, he also allows these other men to believe he is homosexual and then rejects them as a way of having control over his situation while maintaining his macho image. Like the stereotypical Cuban woman exemplified in “Cita a las nueve,” who is empowered solely by her beauty and ability to attract men with that beauty, the protagonist in “Lazo” also feels empowered by his attractiveness and his ability to tease, making him feel like he has power over other men.

The narrator’s feminine tendencies are reflected in his critique of the brother’s house. The protagonist immediately states his negative opinion of the living space: “Mire, yo no vivo en un palacio, pero nunca pensé que hubiera gente que vive de ese modo”

(*Papá, cuéntame* 133). He dislikes the old style of the house, and prefers to see something more modern and aesthetically pleasing, like the clothing styles from the American magazine. It is clear that the man with the chain's brother does not prioritize keeping up with modern interior design styles as the narrator describes his home:

No me gustan los pisos de tierra, ni las paredes de tabla porque dejan entrar insectos, y menos que el excusado esté fuera de la casa y que los vecinos se tengan que enterar cuando usted tiene que hacer sus necesidades. Tuve que aguantar las ganas de escupir, porque, ya le digo, más limpio que yo no hay nadie (*Papá, cuéntame* 133).

This highly trenchant critique reiterates the disapproving nature of the protagonist and his fastidious attention to cleanliness, elegance, and order, while simultaneously underscoring the differences between the protagonist and the typical male. The archaic dirt floor of the house is so appalling to the narrator that he has to constrain himself in order to avoid spitting in disgust. He tends to be drawn towards the urbanized, cosmopolitan aspects of modern society with liberal ideals, and although he avoids this, he subconsciously repels compliance with the image of the stereotypical male. He does not identify himself with the traditional male figure that fears nothing and conquers all like a dominant animal in nature. The absent brother's manly nature is symbolized by the nature found in his house, such as the dirt floors and the focalized figure of la Caridad on the desk, "de barro y muy chiquita" (*Papá, cuéntame* 135). This represents the conventional image of the masculine male's dominance over the rest of nature and his surrounding atmosphere. The protagonist-narrator does not comply with this image and subconsciously rejects this masculine identity, causing him to struggle with developing and recognizing his own identity.

The narration is full of these ambiguities that cause one the reader to question the sexuality of the narrator. Just as homosexuality was a closeted topic in Cuba during the 50s and therefore at times difficult to identify in another person, the way the narrator speaks is also undefinable. For example, the way he expresses his dislike for insects in the previous passage reiterates his effeminate qualities. While few people would actually want to coexist with insects in their homes, this man despises and even fears them. By admitting fear of such a tiny creature, he is showing softness that one relates to the feminine. He concludes this denouncement with the presumptuous statement that he is the cleanest person around, emphasizing again his good virtues and supremacy in these areas. Despite his attempts to maintain a macho image and to not appear feminized, his very descriptions of himself unveil his own true nature.

These descriptions indicate that the owner of the home, who is the brother of the man wearing the chain, is a masculine homosexual that isn't troubled by a little grit, such as dirt floors and insects. For the protagonist, this is both confusing and attractive, which is why instead of leaving immediately upon noticing such appalling living standards of a man, he decides: "Y le voy a ser franco, pasada la primera impresion el cuarto no estaba mal del todo. El piso era de tierra, es verdad, y por entre las tablas podían entrar hasta caimanes, pero estaban acabadas de pintar y la cama se veía limpia y estirada" (*Papá, cuéntame* 133). The fact that the old style decorations are accentuated with new coats of paint and appear to be in order suddenly forces him to ignore "la primera impresión." While he searches for reasons to hate the man wearing the chain, he also unknowingly searches for ways to allow himself to be attracted to him. It is as if he has been invited

into the den of the head pack wolf, which has been marked with the smell of his rugged masculinity and dominance, evoking both attraction and fear. His fickle opinions add to this effect of sexual ambiguity and his inability to confront his true feelings.

Although the narrator's femininity does reflect his homosexuality, he claims to despise homosexuality as part of his avoidance of confronting it. The narrator reasons that "no se puede permitir que un macho le enseñe a usted lo que usted tiene" (*Papá, cuéntame* 136), and therefore, in the end, decides to finally steal from the man with the gold chain who has done just this in his home. He states the idea as if it were a fact of nature. He does not need any further explication as to why this is an impossible option. However, for the protagonist, one "cannot allow" another man to show him "what he has" because *society* will not allow it. This does not mean that the narrator does not *desire* to allow it subconsciously. He asserts this personal theory confidently; however, his numerous insinuating comments that suggest his homoerotic feelings are present. He makes several direct, suggestive statements that possess sexual connotations. For example, when the narrator observes the gratuitous amount of alcohol consumed by the man wearing the gold chain, he comments: "qué garganta, mi amigo" (*Papá, cuéntame* 134). The narrator is not impressed by how much the man can drink; rather he is captivated by his body. He studies the throat as if it is a phallic organ, which represents his erotic interests. His imagination allows him to picture himself interacting with this body part. Ironically, at the end, he cuts through the same throat, symbolizing his inability to participate in the homoerotic and severing his unachievable interests in the phallic.

Another example of his suggestive commentary is present in the following passage when he observes the large man wearing the chain in the dark bar and realizes that the man appears more interested in the protagonist than in the single woman seated at a different table:

Claro que llegó el momento en que empezó a hablar enredado y a decir cosas que se podían tomar de muchos modos; pero yo, como si conmigo no fuera. Ahora lo único que me interesaba era que acabara de jalarse y luego ver cómo le quitaba la cadena sin problemas. Entonces el tipo no pudo más y se franqueó. ¡Óigame, compadre, hay que tener agallas para aguantar ese paquete! Decirle a uno que estaba aburrido de las mujeres, y decírselo como si uno también lo estuviera, pero yo me dije: calla y espera, que al tipo este lo tienes que joder (*Papá, cuéntame* 132).

This passage demonstrates how the narrator frequently contradicts himself, further evidencing his own confusion of personal identity. The narrator asserts that as the man with the chain begins to get intoxicated, he says many things that one can interpret “de muchos modos.” Ironically, the narrator does the same thing with his sexually insinuating discourse. For example, in the above text, the narrator comments that “one must have guts to handle a package like his.” Although in Cuban Spanish, the word *paquete* can refer to an annoying person that must be tolerated, his use of the word “paquete,” can also dually hint at the slang meaning of the phallic organ. The narrator refers to the idea of himself, a petite man, as noted earlier, “tolerating” the sizable body of the man with the gold chain sexually. Although this statement can be taken as a simple commentary on the man’s macho appearance juxtaposed with his presumptive interest in the narrator, the affirmation is riddled with homoerotic connotation.

The rest of the passage can be interpreted in several ways. He tries to disguise his sexual interest in the man, insisting that his only interest now is “que acabara de jalarse y

luego ver cómo le quitaba la cadena sin problemas.” He does not want obstacles preventing this process, but like an animal, he will go to extreme measures to obtain this object if the man does not give it up easily. He realizes that in this circumstance, since the alcohol is not having the desired impairing effects on the man, the protagonist will have to try another tactic. He concludes that “al tipo este lo tienes que joder,” implying the homoerotic. Whereas “joder” can mean to *injure*, to *insult*, or to *mess with*, the word “joder” is also a Spanish derogatory synonym of copulation. It is true that he plans on *messing with* the man by getting him to drink heavily and then stealing the chain while he is too drunk to react, but he is also interested in the man sexually. Since the chain represents his desire for the phallus, the second meaning also applies. The narrator’s own words possess double meanings, showing his contradictory nature.

The narrator is unable to admit his attraction to men to the implied listener, but his insinuating discourse makes these tendencies very clear. For example, when the narrator’s future victim removes his shirt at his brother’s house, the protagonist *checks him out*. The narrator explains that, at this point, he “had to” go sit on the bed next to him. He explains: “Por eso cuando me hizo señas me tuve que sentar en la cama a su lado. Se había quitado la camisa y estaba tratando de descorchar la botella con los dientes”⁸ (*Papá, cuéntame* 133). If the protagonist truly wanted to avoid seeing his

⁸ The image of the protagonist’s victim grasping the cork of the wine bottle with his teeth re-emphasizes the atavistic return. The man bites at what impedes access to the desired wine, highlighting the animalistic nature of these characters. These wild tendencies play an important role in both characters’ behaviors, and especially the narrator’s final violent act of murder. McTeague makes special reference to this atavistic return, not only through the protagonist’s inability to fight-off the “inner brute,” but also through the frequent incorporation of the image of the dog and cat. These animals appear throughout the work, foreshadowing both McTeague and Trina’s inevitable savage degenerations to having canine and feline characteristics.

victim's sexual organ he would have been aware of these obvious insinuations far in advance. The narrator is aware of what the man wants, but he speaks as though he does not understand what stripping and summoning another over to the bed indicates. This feigned ignorance helps to evade his true nature and echoes the fact that he is unsure about his own sexuality.

His insinuations become blunter as he comments on the image of the man's body: "¡Qué animal! óigame, ya en camiseta el tipo era imponente. Qué clase de dorsales" (*Papá, cuéntame* 133). He makes it known that he is admiring the victim's body and his muscular detail. He has allowed himself to follow this man home and spend so much time with him because he is testing his own willpower and curiosity, and not only for the sake of getting closer to the chain he desires.

The need for possessing another man sexually will not happen because he will only let this temptation go so far. The narrator is curious about these 'types,' but when allowing himself to get too close, he becomes afraid. This is because, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, he is both fascinated and intimidated by masculinity. As the drunken host of the brother's house begins removing his clothes, the protagonist comments that: "Ahora le cogí miedo, porque cuando dio la vuelta y me miró parecía un toro a punto de embestir" (*Papá, cuéntame* 135). Despite these assertions, he subconsciously desires to explore this forbidden curiosity. This is why he waits so long for an even more obvious sign revealing the man's homosexuality: "Lo único que quería era oírlo de una vez; o que en vez de decirlo, el tipo me tocara" (*Papá, cuéntame* 135). He affirms that he would take violent action only if this 'type' was to touch him, but he

has no problem with waiting until that point. The protagonist dares to near that which he cannot let himself have, and his violent reaction makes avoiding the shame of facing the person that facilitated this guilty pleasure possible. The protagonist remains focused on the thought of possessing the man's gold as temporary relief from his uncontrollable impulses of desire.

The only time the criminal is able to exercise free will and restrain his savage impulse is when he fixates on the photo album in the victim's brother's home. His gold obsession consumes him entirely throughout the story, but he is suddenly hypnotized by this album. The protagonist explains that these photos are different than any he has been exposed to previously: "En mi vida vi semejantes ejemplares. Usted sabe lo que pasa: la mayoría de las veces son fotos viejas y con gente que lucen muy antiguas. Éstas eran diferentes. Pero, para qué contarle, si usted también las vio" (*Papá, cuéntame* 136). The suggestion that the photos are not the traditional "old" photo that he is accustomed to seeing reminds us that he is very separated from the sophisticated society of modern Habana⁹. These photos are more contemporary of the times and temporarily steal his attention to the point that he forgets his entire mission of stealing the gold. When his victim passes out, he sees this album and is distracted by it: "Nó sé si le pasó lo que me pasó a mí, que al poco rato ya no sabía lo que hacía" (*Papá, cuéntame* 136). Compelled to view the photos repeatedly, he forgets his lowlife status, societal prejudices and expectations, and his need for gold: "Me olvidé del hombre y de la cadena, y me olvidé

⁹ Ferreira's background in the study of photography often shows is evident in his written works. Photographic mechanisms, such as adjustment of lighting in "Cita", altering focus in "Sueño", and the mention of things like the photo album in "Lazo", are reflected in his writing style. It is evident that this field has had a great impression on his literary descriptive techniques.

de que llovía y de lo que tenía que hacer. Las vi una y otra vez, porque cuando llegaba a la última tenía que volver a empezar” (*Papá, cuéntame* 136). The criminal forgets about the gold chain because the photos are just as fascinating. Like the gold, the photos are also bright and make him feel like he is a part of a different world. The pictures belong to the victim’s brother who does live in this sophisticated world, which is why he is not included in the story until the very end.

For the criminal, these bright, modern, “postales de relajo” take him to an ideal place in his mind where he no longer lives in this traditional society that does not welcome his homosexual lifestyle. Lost in these realistic images, for a brief moment he imagines that he is a part of that world, which makes him feel at peace. Soon his hypnosis is broken: “los ronquidos del tipo me volvieron a la realidad. Cerré el libro y lo mire” (*Papá, cuéntame* 136); and still feeling the pleasing effects of the images, he is ready to abandon his purpose: “Me iba a ir. Ahora lo digo de verdad. Después de todo el tipo no me había ofendido de palabra. Y, ya le digo, ni una sola vez me puso un dedo encima” (136). The controlling force of obsession for the gold that satisfies his need for power and inclusion appears to have abandoned him momentarily due to the satisfying feeling emanated by the photos. His thought of leaving vanishes when the victim, faking sleep, begins to touch himself. He describes the scene:

Y todo hubiera terminado ahí. Pero estaba visto que el tipo no se iba a rendir, y que seguía obsesionado. Entonces, botón a botón se fue desabrochando el calzoncillo. Usted hubiera hecho igual, porque no se puede permitir que un macho le enseñe a usted lo que usted tiene (*Papá, cuéntame* 136).

The protagonist becomes nervous and reacts violently, as a response to his own confusion in this situation. The protagonist does not initially plan to murder his victim,

but as previously stated, his animal instincts prompt him to react quickly and desperately. When he realizes the chain is soldered together, his purpose remains the same, even if murder is required to fulfill this purpose. He has lingered long enough to get close to what he desires, the chain that is, which represents his phallic desires. Stealing from the being that tempts him is like temporarily possessing the tempting being himself.

This act of murder transforms the protagonist, which is similar to the transformations that take place in the other two stories. The first sign of this identity transformation is evident in his reaction towards the blood coming from his victim's body. The narrator in "Lazo" despises dirty atmospheres such as the dirt floor of the victim's brother's house, and is subsequently frightened and sickened by the sight of blood. When he bashes the man in the head with the bottle of rum, he declares: "Estuve esperando para asegurarme, pero cuando vi cómo la sangre le iba haciendo un charco alrededor de la cabeza entró un miedo especial, algo así como el miedo de ensuciarme porque, óigame, la sangre avanzaba como loca" (*Papá, cuéntame* 137).

Initially he does not want to soil himself, however, when he realizes the chain has been soldered together and therefore must be removed by smashing the face of the victim to make it smaller, he begins to evolve in a dark way. His fear of the blood subsides as he claims that the blood begins to speak to him. It "tells" him "lo que tenía que hacer" (137).

From this moment he begins to enjoy his work while listening to the soothing tango background music:

Pero, nada. Solo la lluvia y el radio que tocaba. Me acuerdo porque era un tango que siempre me gustó. Eso me tranquilizó. La música siempre me hace sentir bien. Y hasta medio que tararé unas cuantas notas. Usted sabe cómo es: los nervios tratando de calmarse. Pero había que actuar (*Papá, cuéntame* 137).

Like a horror film, this twisted scene plays up the psychological juxtaposition of extreme gore and violence with soothing music and the protagonist's nonchalant way of relating these details to the implied listener. He even tries to relate to the audience by saying "you know how it is..." This shows the grotesque nature of the story plot and the protagonist.

Adding to this scene, when he fails to pull the chain over the head, the bloody face is personified:

Me incliné sobre él y con una mano le alcé la cabeza y con la otra traté de pasarle la cadena por detrás. Pero qué va, la cadena se incrustó en el cuello y por la nuca no pasaba. Pensé que tal vez fuera la posición de la cabeza. Se la puse de perfil, y usando las dos manos traté de sacársela otra vez. Nada. Si no era el codo era la nariz. Hasta que llegué a pensar que la cabeza estaba creciendo poco a poco (*Papá, cuéntame* 137).

The way he views the scene becomes more and more twisted as he begins to hallucinate that the head is swelling. The personified, growing head begins to intimidate the protagonist less. Returning to the scene of the hungry animal in action, he leaves the house to get a stone and fearlessly bash in the head of the victim. He quickly destroys his view of the enlarging human head:

Y alzando la piedra con las dos manos apunte y la dejó caer en medio, tan duro y con tan buena puntería que cuando volví a ya el hombre no tenía cara. Ahora era un muerto y un desconocido. Y eso me tranquilizó. Algo así como cuando usted se está muriendo de miedo con un sueño y se despierta (*Papá, cuéntame* 138).

As the man begins to appear less human due to the mutilation he inflicts, the narrator becomes bolder and can carry out this brutal act with tranquility. The protagonist who has been alienated and has avoided establishing meaningful relationships due to his insecure position in society now feels comforted in the fact that his victim looks

unrecognizable. Just as the narrator is unrecognizable in society and he prefers his solitude, he prefers to destroy the identity of his victim before taking the desired object. The protagonist is denied of his identity in this traditional Cuban setting, and therefore redeems this loss with taking another man's identity; much like the aunt in "Cita" robs her niece of her own identity, as we will see in the next chapter.

His identity transforms as this once cleanly man no longer fears the blood. He observes his soiled hands, free of disgust: "Me miré las manos. Estaba tinto hasta los codos. Y quiero que usted sepa que lo de la suciedad es una idea, porque al verme así creo que quedé curado para siempre. Es más, el no poderme ensuciar más fue lo que me dio la solución. Ahora podía cortar sin asco" (*Papá, cuéntame* 138). His renewed sense of arrogance and individuality has evolved as he expertly declares that dirtiness is "only an idea," which he has now bravely overcome in his mind. He is "cured forever" of his fear of blood. He has returned completely to his animalistic instincts in which he simply performs a task in order to obtain what he needs for survival. This is expressed in the final scene:

La sangre se me echó encima como un gato, y el hombre sacudió la cabeza a los dos lados y abrió los ojos como si estuviera despertando; los y me mir?, y luel?o vi cómo rodaban hacia atrás y se quedaban ciegos. Le di otro tajo y empecé a profundizar. Óigame, qué publicidad para las cuchillas de afeitar, si se pudiera decir cómo le entran a la carne. Corta que corta le fui dando vuelta a la cabeza (*Papá, cuéntame* 139).

He has regressed to the same primitive nature, "como un gato" who possesses no remorse or disgust for what he is doing. Instead, he finds humor in his work to the point that he jokes about it, entertained by the thought that his actions could be a good advertisement for a razor blade ad. This once cleanly man who aims at mimicking a

trendy, modernized being of society has regressed atavistically into an animalistic being fighting for survival.

When integration with society is avoided and sexual tolerance falls short, inner turmoil and confusion follow suit, as seen in the protagonist created by Ferreira in “Lazo de oro.” Just as La Habana was undergoing modernization to change the city, its people were also changing socially. Ferreira comments in his prologue that: “Mis observaciones eran distintas... me sorprendía descubrir el miedo que se adivinaba bajo esta división tan radical y oportuna, y a la vez hasta qué punto este miedo deformaba la mente de las personas que ocultaban una inclinación semejante” (*Papá, cuéntame* x). There was a stronger need to express these inner social differences that could often times be emotionally troubling if unable to identify it freely as an individual. Unfortunately, even for modernizing times, publicly turning against the conservative sexual standards of society during the 50s would mean self-alienation and converting oneself into “lo abnormal” of society. Like Raúl in “Sueño sin nombre,” the anonymous protagonist in “Lazo de oro” is also a criminal miscreant; however, his murderous motives are quite distinct from those of the unlearned Raúl. Raúl is naïve until he undergoes an identity transformation, turning his previously black and white dream-like world into a horrifying present reality in which he is fast-tracked into participation in the urbanizing Habana society. Although the protagonist in “Lazo de oro” possesses the self-awareness that Raúl lacked, like Raúl, his identity further evolves through his ‘criminal’ act. He only possesses a sense of pride and self-worth for the telling of the story because he has already completed the act of murder that has transformed his idea of self-worth.

Ferreira's marginal characters gain accidental identity and a sense of individuality from their crimes. Ferreira shows how this identity transformation unfurls through the narrator's development of the setting, characters, and action in "Lazo de oro."

CHAPTER THREE

SELF-IMAGE IN A NEW LIGHT IN “CITA A LAS NUEVE”

As the other two stories noted in this thesis, in Ramón Ferreira’s short story, “Cita a las nueve,” the presence of psychological turmoil and naturalistic suffering dominate the characters’ lives. Whereas “Lazo de oro” depicts the individual’s struggle against his homosexual nature, and “Sueño sin nombre” shows the disadvantaged position of the lower-class, uneducated *campesino*’s attempted integration into society, “Cita a las nueve” explores the theme of *machismo* and the role it played in forming the self-image of Cuban women in the 50s. In mid-century Cuba, similar to other Hispanic regions, the male-centered, traditional atmosphere created a tendency in which women were seen as objects and valued more for physical appearance rather than any other redeeming quality. Consequently, if she was not sexually attractive to men, she could not feel worthy in society. Any other positive quality such as intelligence, amiability, or creativity was insignificant in comparison to beauty, and only this quality would instill self-worth in women. Ferreira comments that this with respect to this concern for women’s physical appearance, “su tormento era el reflejo de las leyes tiránicas impuestas por una sociedad machista para oprimir a nuestras mujeres” (*Papá, cuéntame* x). This oppression and superficial idea of the acceptable image of women led to their oppression.

In “Cita a las nueve,” Ferreira demonstrates this exigent mentality with respect to feminine beauty. The story portrays a woman condemned to yearn for men’s approval

due to her alleged ugliness. The harsh words of her aunt remind the young woman daily that she was born hopelessly unattractive, and they fester and boil inside of her. The girl's inner torment eats away at her as she reminisces on the loss of her love interest, Daniel, to her sister: "había sido su hermana la que le cogió la mano para decirle que la esperara en el banco" (*Antología* 358); although the story never reveals details of the sister's physical beauty and is left vaguely to the reader's imagination. Subsequently, the protagonist's desperation to feel desirable and admired is evident through the repetition of her daily ritual of standing on the balcony after the sun has set behind her. With the sun behind her, she allows her feminine silhouette to be seen, enabling her to hide the details of her presumed unfortunate-looking face, which, like the sister's lack of description, is also left ambiguous. On the balcony at this time of day, the girl is briefly permitted to forget her unattractive features and feel desired by the voyeurs of the cantina below. Finally, after incessant verbal abuse from the aunt, the girl decides to remove the meddling voice from her atmosphere forever; for it is this abusive voice that supports the figurative barrier between the young girl and her integration into society.

This *cosificación*, or the converting into objects of women and their unfortunate role in society to simply be born beautiful, makes the protagonist feel like she exists without a purpose: "como la estrella de mar que había encontrado en la playa, y la había pisado porque sabía que no gritaría ni haría un gesto de dolor, ni echaría sangre" (*Antología* 358). She feels as if she is simply living because she has a pulse, but has no autonomy in her life. She is available to be observed, criticized, and consumed by society

for entertainment.¹ This emphasizes society's fascination with physical appearance and the expectations of women to meet these standards for beauty in Cuba. In "Cita a las nueve," Ferreira underscores this ambiance of machismo in which the people, including her own guardian, desired to see beauty and admire women's alluring features. Through the story's narration and descriptive techniques, Ferreira's portrayal of the psychological effects of the emotionally trapped protagonist and her resulting criminal activity reveal her impulse to break this expectation and her inadvertent evolution of self-worth.

Through the narration styles observed in "Sueño" and "Lazo," Ferreira achieves a naturalistic portrayal of the 'criminal' mind within the context of social atmosphere.

While "Sueño" presents the realistic development of Raúl's inner stream of consciousness and "Lazo" the first-person, discreditable account of a newly self-discovered murderer, "Cita a las nueve" is narrated in a third-person narration. Much like "Sueño's" third-person representation of Raúl's occurring thought process, the narration in "Cita" also represents the niece's thought process in a third-person way, but this narrator includes more detail. These details are limited, but descriptive enough to decipher the emotional states of being of the characters, their actions, and their thoughts.

¹ This is because society demanded physical beauty of women, which the protagonist lacks. Women were meant to be spectated, as suggested by Elizabeth Ruf in "¡Qué linda es Cuba! Issues of Gender, Color, and Nationalism in Cuba's Tropicana Nightclub Performance." She refers to the spectacle of the pre-Castro night club performer to demonstrate the way society viewed women in this way, as entertainment and viewing pleasure alone. She explains that the women on stage, in this case she exemplifies the mulattas, were dressed in attractive and flashy garments: "rabbit-ear bows in the front of their pink gingham head wraps," with long waists that "snapped like whips," short bustles that moved "maddeningly, independent of the round flesh and dental floss bikinis beneath." These performers "maddeningly" captivated the audience, playing on the male-centered desires of a patriarchal society. Ruf goes on to explain how some of the skirts were often "drawn open like stage curtains" to present to the carnal pleasures that were hidden beneath to appeal to this audience (Ruf 95).

As Ferreira portrays in "Cita a las nueve," this performance of women that often occurred on the Habana stage represents what society desired of all women. On stage, as in her role in society, she was meant to please and perform to the male's liking, while attracting and awing with her display of beauty.

The narration is omniscient and limited in that the narrator maintains emotive distance. Dorritt Cohn calls this phenomenon *narrative dissonance*, in which there is a dominant narrator of the work present, but “even as he focuses intently on the individual psyche, remains emphatically distanced from the conscious he narrates” (26). This is because the narrator of this story is in fact the undiscovered, meek voice of the protagonist’s inner-self. She is not opinionated with respect to these observations because she does not know how to assert herself. This stream of consciousness avoids giving opinions about the girl’s life or actions, remaining indifferent to possible outcomes or consequences to her negative situations. Cohn restates that in this case we have a story in which: “a dominant narrator presents the inner life in a manner as far removed from the psychic experience itself as a psychiatrist’s diagnostic notes might be from his patient’s free associations” (26). As suggested, the narrative commentary lacks emotion because she does not possess enough individuality to become enraged or express other strong emotional states. It is not overly intrusive or arrogant, unlike the opinionated, subjective narrator portrayed in “Lazo.” According to Kate Hamburger, we establish the objectivity of the narration upon noting that the characters are “presented as acting, feeling, and thinking” beings rather than beings who “present themselves” (150). As suggested, the protagonist is merely that: a subject to be observed; this is because her lack of identity and agency are in focus in this story.

This narration is important for portraying that the external events surrounding the protagonist in “Cita a las nueve” are a more important in the comprehension of the effects of the environment on the protagonist’s identity transformation, soon to be discussed.

Understanding the protagonist's inner thought process and psychology does not require focus on her own opinion of herself. Hamburger asserts:

...the mode of presentation can evoke the appearance of an "objective" reality-report, i.e., one directed toward the matter to be depicted; in this case the presentation of the persons involved is less oriented toward bringing their subjective experience to view. External events have priority over the persons (150).

The abuse being done to the protagonist and her psychological responses to her atmosphere of oppression are more important than her thoughts because the former gives validity to her final act of murder. The protagonist in "Cita a las nueve" never presents a sense of individuality, contrary to the narrator's arrogant self-awareness in "Lazo."

The reader learns of her actions and psychological state of being by means of a glimpse of her stream of this third-person stream of consciousness. At the beginning, we learn that: "Ella estaba otra vez frente al espejo porque eran ya las cinco de la tarde, pero todavía no se asomaría al balcón hasta el anochecer, cuando el sol rodara por detrás de las azoteas de enfrente" (*Antología* 356-357). It is emphasized that she is at the mirror *again* because it is *already* five o'clock. This information and these words stress the importance of time. The faculty of anticipation or urgency surfaces by use of the word "todavía," as if she feels she is losing time.

The passage contains two other important time references, which help to understand the many other mentions of time throughout the story. The use of "otra vez" indicates that this woman is frequently in front of the mirror, making the connection to habitual time important in understanding her psyche. The narrative discourse stresses that she isn't just slightly consumed with her looks; she is obsessed, as she confronts the

reflection of her face *again* and again. The passage also states a specific time, *five o'clock*; however, other than for portraying the importance of repetition of actions at certain times daily, specific times do not have significance in the story. No unique event will occur at five o'clock; rather, the same thing will happen that happens every day in the life of this girl at this hour, and also at nine o'clock, as hinted by the title, "Date at nine." Despite the specific hours mentioned, the use of specific times is exaggerated and ironic because she has nowhere to go. She has all the time in the world because the protagonist knows she will never be freed from her inherited flaw of ugliness.

This element of infinite repetition continues in order to underline the obsession that consumes the protagonist as she keeps reliving the same reality, which is inescapable. In this passage, she continues seeing the same objects as always, such as the comb: "y luego volvió a ver el peine y el pelo, como ayer o el año pasado, o como siempre..." (*Antología* 357). As Raúl could not distinguish if his guardian was his father or his uncle due to the notion that this figure was not a significant influence for the boy, the niece in "Cita a las nueve" does not know or care whether she can recall doing the same actions yesterday, last year, or at any point in the past. It has become part of her daily routine due to the frequency of completing this ritual, and as nothing new or pleasant ever comes of it, the repeated days blur together.

The repetition of the activities that surround her preparations for standing outside to be proudly observed is what is most important with respect to the reference of time in the story. The explanation for this interminable routine is explained: "porque desde hacía tanto tiempo que ya no se acordaba, podía peinarse sin verse la cara ni sentir que era ella;

y así era más fácil salir luego al balcón e imaginarse que era otra. Entonces la espera se llenaba de promesas y cada hombre que mirara hacia arriba podía deseársela” (*Antología* 357). It is now clear that the girl is not pleased with herself. She stands outside in front of the bright sunlight *to imagine that she is someone else*. With repetition, the narrator forces us to perceive that feeling ugly consumes the girl’s time, and has consumed it since she can remember. She repeatedly yearns for a different reality and a new identity in which she can live contently.

Another significant aspect of time is reflected in the diction of the story. Many of the sentences are lengthy and contain numerous pauses. This reiterates the fact that this girl has been an eternal slave to her tormented emotional state of mind. For example, when the memories of her lost love, Daniel, resurface, it is as if she is replaying a forlorn and tragic love story repeatedly, slowly and against her will. Once these memories start, there is no way to bar them, thereby tormenting her and forcing her to relive the pain:

Hubiera querido parar ahí, detener el recuerdo y volver a vivir los días de aquellas semanas en que se había asomado aferrada a la esperanza de que cuando Daniel le hablara sería para decirle que la quería, porque la había visto en el balcón todos los atardeceres esperando sus miradas, aunque ella pretendía no fijarse y hablaba con su hermana o se reía o miraba a otro lado; pero la ilusión no volvía aunque la tenía guardada en el recuerdo, porque volvió a ver a Daniel dando vueltas al parque y cómo ella y su hermana habían pasado pretendiendo no haberlo visto, porque eso era parte del juego hasta que él la cogiera por la mano para decirle que había esperado tanto; y cómo había sido su hermana la que le cogió la mano para decirle que la esperara en el banco, y ella se había sentado sin pensar y se quedó mirándolos dando vueltas al parque y riéndose por encima de lo que le dolía a ella; y cómo al pasar otra vez a su lado sin siquiera verle, se levantó y echó a andar hacia la casa, y cómo luego en la cama, con la cabeza debajo de la almohada escuchó la voz de su hermana hablando con la tía: —Me quiere, tía, me quiere y va a pedir entrada (*Antología* 357-358).

As we observe the structure of this lengthy expression of tormenting inner-consciousness, we note that she *would have wanted to stop the memory right there*, only thinking of the moments in which she felt Daniel loved her. She does not want the memory to continue, because it will result in the recollection of the way the affair ended in her sister's favor. Nevertheless, without pause, the haunting memory plays through in full as it always does. The troubling recurrence of this mental image is affirmed: "Volvió a escuchar las palabras, como si hubieran estado escondidas detrás del espejo, esperando a que las recordara" (*Antología* 358). Repetition adds to the idea that she is tortured by this past traumatic experience, heightening psychological tension.

Another important characteristic of this passage is that the conjunction "y" appears with elevated frequency starting with the second half of the paragraph. This indicates that these terrible memories are becoming less controllable. The word "and" combined with the absence of periods throughout the sentence effects the velocity of this memory, making each painful detail come faster to the protagonist's mind without warning or pause. Rather than complete thoughts followed by periods, the next detail of the memory enters almost colliding with the previous thought. It is as if she is being hit over and over again with the worst parts of the memory, adding to her sense of inner turmoil.

These long sentences accompanied by varied conjunctions are scattered throughout the work to add suspense for the reader. For example, when the protagonist is about to kill the aunt, all thoughts rush in at once, demonstrating her psychological torment:

Enderezó el cuerpo y alzó la mano poniendo la tijera entre ella y el tiempo, porque acababa de recordar las noches que se despertaba sobresaltada al escuchar la media, y luego se quedaba adivinando si serían las doce y media, o la una, o la una y media; sólo que ahora era tarde aunque fuera la media de las ocho, porque allá en el parque él podía levantarse de un momento a otro y marcharse, mirando hacia atrás antes de doblar la esquina, y luego no regresar más, aunque ella se sentara en el banco a esperar la media de las doce, la una, o la una y media (*Antología* 365).

This passage accentuates the element of time again as the protagonist raises the scissors *between her and time*, as if it were momentarily frozen. Whereas the other references to time indicated incessant hours of doing the same trivial activity each day in front of the mirror, in this scene, time is halted. We grasp this image of paused time because, while her hand is ready to strike with the scissors, there is still time for the other connected stream of thoughts to be processed. One moment is paused so that her mind, which never stops tormenting her, can keep producing this torment. This consciousness is presented without break between ideas, reiterating the incessant flow of torturous thoughts.

The thoughts muddle the protagonist's perception of reality, which is presented by the conjunction "o". For example, in this section, the conjunction represents an uncertainty of time, emphasizing her blurred comprehension of reality: "y luego se quedaba adivinando si serían las doce y media, o la una, o la una y media." By implementing the word "or" between these mental images, we see that the protagonist does not have a clear sense of what is going on. She is confused by what she has been driven to do, like Raúl in "Sueño." She does not understand why she has been inspired to react to her situation in this way; nevertheless, she follows what life has conditioned her to do.

Details of this girl's primary offender, her aunt, are also shown through the girl's own thoughts. For example, she primps in front of the mirror, lost in her memories, when suddenly she hears the intrusive voice of the aunt: "La tía arrugó los ojos en las esquinas para afilarlos antes de herirla: —Tú te has visto bien, muchacha, quién te va a querer con esa cara..." (*Antología* 358). Her voice interrupts the protagonist's solitude like an unwanted party guest. From this first, unannounced appearance of the aunt in the story and the sound of her irking voice, we are made aware that she is an undesired and impeding entity in the niece's thoughts. We also understand that she is verbally abusive. Her insults, much like the protagonist's unpleasant memories of her lost love, haunt her to the point of insanity.

Through her insults, the aunt targets a characteristic of the girl which is fixed and cannot be changed through her insults. Rather than insult the way she dresses, she focuses on the physical appearance of "esa cara." The beauty of one's face cannot be changed by lifestyle alteration alone, and therefore the protagonist has no other choice than to accept the sad blows time again. Although this is not physical abuse as observed in Raúl's case, this is an example of verbal abuse within the family, which affects the psyche of the victim. The recipient of the insults has been constantly exposed to this from a young age; therefore, the recipient begins to believe these claims after certain amount of exposure. As a result, the aunt's damaging words strip the protagonist of her opportunity to form and accept her own identity.

Instead of possessing a sense of individuality, the aunt consumes the identity of her niece. The aunt executes this swallowing of identities by verbally relating her own

situation to the situation of the protagonist: “No seas boba, ningún hombre te hará caso. No importa lo que sientas... eso no importa cuando somos feas... feas como tú y yo... Ningún hombre... ninguno. No para nosotras” (*Antología* 362). She doesn't only say that the girl is ugly, rather she implies that they are both ugly through the words *we* and *us*. The aunt believes that she, herself, is ugly and reminds herself that she is not alone in this ugliness. Her niece has inherited the same unattractive genes in her mind. Condemned to live with her unsightliness, the aunt drags the niece with her to this destiny of unhappiness. Consequently, by putting the girl down, the aunt gains a sense of identity and power. The aunt has already identified and accepted her supposed ugliness, which in turn has stripped her of her feeling of worth in society. Due to this weakness, she is not able to enjoy the company of a man or marry, and as a result, she now has no valued place in la Habana. The only way she has been able to remedy this situation and feel like an individual is by stealing her niece's identity. Literary critic Seymour Menton also comments on the niece's stripped identity:

Odia a su tía porque ésta le echa en cara su fealdad. Después se da cuenta de que esa fealdad y su frustración son reflejos de las de su tía. Se siente irremediamente identificada con ella y solo matándola puede liberarse. (*Antología* 367)

As Menton suggests, the ugliness that the aunt identifies in her niece is really a reflection of her own ugliness and insecurity. She would rather be miserable with someone else than alone, and therefore convinces the niece that she too is as unfortunate-looking as the aunt. She makes the niece feel ugly by constantly reminding her that “ningún hombre, ninuno” will pay attention to her, in order to gain power and individuality over her own life. Their identities are shared between them like Siamese

twins, and the niece wishes to sever this conflicting bond. Through these insults, the aunt owns, paralyzes, and imprisons the personality of the niece; its growth is prohibited in the aunt's possession.

Although we are led to assume that the physical appearance of both the aunt and the niece is unattractive, the reader is never actually given details of physical appearance. Other than the insulting commentary of the aunt and the notion that the niece is displeased with her self-image, there is nothing to indicate that either of them possesses hideous features. Since opinions of what is considered beautiful and what is considered ugly may vary, the appearances of these two women may be considered either by different viewers. Ferreira does not allow his narrative voice to focus on physical appearance detail because it emphasizes the fact that the protagonist, whose thoughts serve as the narrative voice, does not wish to discover these appearances. The lack of physical description underscores the psychological damage and obsession this problem creates in this woman's life, and it also supports the superficial nature of this issue. Not actually divulging these details serves as a way of refusing to focus on and form an opinion of that which is arbitrary and merely surface details. This technique proposes that there is more to a being and more to a person's unique story than simply physical attributes.

Because of this third-person narration, the narrative voice can focus more on other important elements of the setting, such as the elements of lighting and shading which hide the physical appearance of the characters. Whereas a first-person narrator primarily addresses the actions and details that he or she finds important while inserting personal

opinions that take away from other setting details, this third-person narration plays with setting elements in order to highlight the importance of hiding the true physical identities of these women. We see the setting through a primarily darkened lens, reiterating the theme of undiscovered self-identity. This affects both the mood and theme surrounding the action². Just as the lack of descriptive detail in “Sueño” produces a sense of secrecy, so does the gothic lighting element in “Cita a las nueve.” The characters use the darkness to hide their unsightly features. For example, the protagonist must await the setting of the sun before stepping out to be seen by society. The importance of darkness is emphasized: “Era temprano para refugiarse en el balcón, porque todavía el sol estaba pintado en la baranda y le iluminaba la cara; pero cuando la tía se fuera al parque por la noche, apagaría la luz y pondría el radio bajito, y después se pararía en el balcón y se enamoraría de todos los hombres que le gustaran, igual que todas las noches” (*Antología* 358-359). The protagonist can only feel beautiful when the light is not illuminating her facial features. She hides behind the darkness in order to keep her true identity hidden from society.

In this way, darkness represents the outline of beauty as expected by the Cuban society, or in other words, the outline that women had to try to fit for acceptance. In the darkness, the protagonist is simply a feminine silhouette where she may feel like an attractive and accepted figure of this society shaped by men’s narrow views. She must avoid the light because it will force her to confront who she really is and expose her to

² Having had years of study and professional practice in the field of photography prior to his authorship, it isn’t any wonder that Ferreira, whether knowingly or subconsciously, incorporated these emotive lighting effects in his writings.

the reaction and judgment of others. The light is feared and rejected by both women of the house during the majority of the story, because they cannot face themselves.

However, even if the protagonist were to allow herself the opportunity to realize and appreciate her own inner identity, society would condemn her physical identity before she had the chance to build up her self-confidence in this identity. Not possessing faculty of this individuality makes it easier for her to remain in the dark, where the protagonist will not have to discover herself or be discovered. By remaining in the dark, one can live in naivety and ignorance.

While the women prefer darkness as refuge, it is ironic that the blinding lamps in the house are not shaded. Attention is drawn to the seemingly-lifeless lamps by referring to them multiple times in the story. A look at the protagonist's memory, indicating her lower class social status, provides an explanation for the absence of the shades: "Eso le hizo recordar la pantalla de porcelana azul que vendían en el Ten Cent y que no había podido comprar porque le faltó un 'medio'" (*Antología* 361). Although she had some money, she was five cents short. She recognizes her own hideousness, but she cannot make shading the lamps a priority, and as we learn later in the story, it is also unnecessary because she is blind. As a consequence of staring into the unshaded light, the aunt has suffered vision loss: "y se quedó mirando el bombillo hasta que se inflamó dentro de los ojos cegándola del todo" (*Antología* 361). She has already been blinded by the ugly truth of her unsatisfactory identity. The light that she refuses to stifle represents her desire to spot the ugliness in the niece. This light has proven to be a dangerous thing for the aunt, exposing her to the bright truth of who she really is. Critical of that identity

and its ugliness, it has turned her into another revealing light that seeks to unveil and identify the same ugliness in others.

The narrator describes that this spotlight that seems to manifest in the condemning eyes of the aunt. Even in the dark where the protagonist feels like she is safe from her supposed ugly truth, the aunt's judging eyes seem to spot her like a search light in the night. This image of her glowing eyes in the dark bedroom, only lit by moonlight, is emphasized in the following passage:

...y el cuarto se llenó de luna que entró por el balcón abierto, sin que pudiera darse cuenta cuándo había dejado de ver a la tía para adivinarla, lentamente, como si los ojos la fueran sacando de una pesadilla olvidada, de la que sólo quedaba el recuerdo del miedo, y no fuera más que eso: un recuerdo sin filo: sentada ahora en el borde de la cama, en silencio, tanteando el suelo en busca de las chancletas, y los ojos húmedos de luna fijos en ella (*Antología* 362).

Although the room is only partially illuminated by the moonlight, the protagonist can still feel the torment of the aunt's criticism through the reflection of the glowing light in the very organs that perceive and judge her. In this way, the aunt's eyes are like a revealing light, where even when she hides, the "ojos húmedos" are still fixed on her, ready to condemn her every move. The aunt has been offended by her own unpleasant identity, symbolized by the blinding lamp exposing her physical features. Now the aunt is an empty skeleton, and described as being a corpse: "sólo vio su forma debajo del bombillo sin pantalla, deforme y con huecos de sombra debajo de los párpados" (*Antología* 361). We can only decipher the outline of this woman, with similar descriptive detail that one might give a decomposing body. The aunt's self-image has also been decomposed by over-exposure to this critical and superficial element of society. The unshaded lamps represent this exposure. As a result, the same ego-paralyzing beam

emitted from the lamps is embedded in the eyes of the aunt, empowering her to destroy the niece's self-image with her critical nature.

This light produced from the aunt's eyes reveals only the hideous defects of all they touch, and the niece wishes to 'turn off' the aunt's judgmental view permanently. This imagery is represented as the niece contemplates stabbing the aunt with scissors: "y se quedó quieta en espera de la fuerza que podía llevarse para siempre el terror de ser fea; si sólo pudiera alzar la mano y apagar en los ojos de la tía el secreto que ardía en ellos" (*Antología* 359). The verb "apagar" is used, placing stronger emphasis on the likeness between criticism and search lights. In referencing turning off the criticism that burns within the aunts eyes, these perceptive organs are granted similar function as the rest of the feared artificial lighting in the house. They reveal what one desires not to see. As one who avoids all lights in the house and on the balcony, the protagonist must somehow rid her atmosphere of this unflattering lighting.

The shadeless lamps scattered about the house function as the aunt's threatening beacons of truth that help keep the protagonist captive. In the story they are presented as screamingly bright in contrast to the obscure surrounding backdrop of the house, as if they are searching for beings hiding from their own identities in the darkness. When the protagonist contemplates abandoning the house and her sleeping aunt, she is afraid to enter the hall because she fears the lights will catch her. The narrator describes this scene: "ella no podía moverse de la banqueta ni cruzar el cuarto hacia la puerta y abrirla a la luz del pasillo, porque tampoco ese bombillo tenía pantalla y le escupiría la luz en la cara" (*Antología* 363). The light in this passage, while working as the aunt's prison guard, is

personified with punishing abilities. It will not only illuminate her face, but she knows that it will *spit* light in her face, like a cobra spits venom. The girl has spent her entire life avoiding confrontation with her true image because of the verbal abuse of the aunt, and the thought of allowing it to happen now brings her fear. The aunt has paralyzed her niece's self-confidence and keeps her locked in this prison heavily policed by these disparaging lights.

This personification continues: “y ella no podría bajar la escalera mientras no pudiera hacerlo lentamente, sin huir, dejando que la luz de todos los bombillos la rodeara sin sentir deseos de llevarse las manos a la cara” (*Antología* 363). Once more, the lights are described as predators that will discover and catch this escaping prey, causing her to second guess her self-worth while finding her discovered physical identity displeasing. The protagonist finds safety in the dark. Only silhouettes are perceivable, and there is no opportunity for the cruel eye of judgment to make its verdict with respect to her appearance. The girl has grown to fear her own identity and she has been brought up to hide it. This is how the aunt controls the true identity of the protagonist, keeping her locked up in this psychological cell surrounded by the threat of coming to see her own image the way her aunt sees her.

While the artificial lighting of the lamps represents the weighted value placed upon the superficial characteristic of beauty in Cuban society of the 50s, the element of natural moonlight in the story symbolizes the ability to overcome this criticism. The lamps serve as a debilitating means of keeping the girl's individuality from developing; but the moonlight serves as the guiding light that encourages the protagonist's identity

transformation. From the beginning, we see that the protagonist has a strong connection to the night. After the sun goes down, she can finally step out to the balcony where “cada hombre que mirara hacia arriba podía desearla” (*Antología* 357). Not only is she able to hide from her physical appearance in the shelter of the night, but it is also the only time that she forgets about the hurtful tendencies of her aunt. For example, when she flees from her aunt’s chastising comments once more in the house, she puts on a radio program with music that makes her feel as if she is once more in the safe haven of her balcony, “como si tuviera el sol a las espaldas y fuera una silueta fosforescente” (*Antología* 360). The night time serves as an escape, even in her imagination, from the reality of her daylight insecurities in which she can forget about her inability to meet the demands of the judgmental society. The narrator describes this liberating phenomenon: “empezó a llenar su soledad de una intimidad angustiosa, como si todo ello flotara en ese mundo de sonidos o fuera un sonido mismo, sin cuerpo, sin manos, sin cara” (*Antología* 360). She is obsessed with the life that the night has to offer, much like the murderer in “Lazo” is momentarily hypnotized by his victim’s photo album and like the way the bomb paraphernalia mesmerizes Raúl in “Sueño.” Each character is hypnotized by the possibilities of participating in other worlds, and they lose themselves in these pleasant dreams until reality wakes them once more.

In this moment, the protagonist is free to begin mending her wounded self-image; however, it is severed as always by the criticism of the aunt. She shatters her mental euphoria, “la voz de la tía llegó como un tajo cortando el sentimiento” (*Antología* 361), similar to the way the snoring of the sleeping victim in “Lazo” wakes the murderer from

his fixation with the photo book.. While she has reached capacity for withstanding verbal abuse, her instincts for survival have reached their maximum capacity of verbal abuse, the moonlight emphasizes her need to follow her natural instincts for survival by showing her how to escape from her oppressive situation.

The protagonist confides in the moonlight as it illuminates the way to permanently turn off the damaging artificial light personified in the aunt's eyes. As the lamp light manifests this power to criticize and make others feel unattractive, the moonbeams also empower by encouraging the girl to discover herself. For example, when she sees the man from the cantina waiting for her under the street light, she knows that she must find the courage to go out into the hallway where the lamps are positioned. The moonlight urges her to do this as it enters the room: "Estuvo un rato quieta en espera de que la luna rebotara en la profundidad del cuarto y le enseñara el camino hacia la puerta" (*Antología* 363-364). Like a nocturnal animal, the girl knows the patterns of the moon cycles well, since she lives her life in the dark shadows of the night. Unlike the other unreliable beings that come and go from her life, such as her sister and her stolen love, the moon is constant and trustworthy. It has sheltered her for years and will show her the way to survive.³

³ This naturalistic property relates directly to animal instincts interacting with nature, such as the final scene in Jack London's *To Build a Fire*. The protagonist from the urbanized and 'humanized' world of civilization is unable to survive the harsh cold of the wild Yukon. This is emphasized as he dies of hypothermia and his dog, still possessing its natural animal instincts for survival, catches the scent of death and heads back to the camp. Nature works in favor of this animal because the animal relies on it.

In "Cita a las nueve," the protagonist has been dehumanized because of her lack of identity, damaged by the aunt. She also relies on her bare instincts and nature to show her what she must do. She lives by the moonlight and in order to emphasize nature's power to help this girl, the moon's rays are personified as if they possess their own agency.

The moonbeam is personified and seems to move voluntarily around the room while changing shape. The narrative voice indicates that “la raya de luz debajo de la puerta le cruzaba el camino como un filo de navaja esperando la cara” (*Antología* 365). The ray of light is compared to a razor blade moving toward the aunt’s face, foreshadowing her violent fate. It continues morphing as “la respiración empezó a arrastrarse hacia ella, algo vivo llegando de todas partes” (*Antología* 365). This natural luminescence is “algo vivo,” as it moves like a living creature around the room. It creeps toward the face of the aunt, “hundiéndole dedos de sombra en la cara y torciéndole las líneas de los ojos primero y luego la boca” (*Antología* 365), distorting her face through the descriptive image of lines and shadows it produces. We see the features of her face change: the eyes and the mouth assume a different form, as if the moonlight were revealing her true, disfigured nature of this being. The moon does not make the aunt appear beautiful, but instead gives her the appearance of a monster. The protagonist observes this unveiling of the aunt’s grotesque nature both inside and out as the moonlight moves on to show her what she must do next: “mientras toda ella cedía blandamente al contacto, y se desfiguraba sin un grito de dolor ni echar sangre” (*Antología* 365). This glow attacks the face of the sleeping aunt and converts her into an evil creature. Demonstrating the ease with which the niece can and will remove her from her life, she is no longer afraid that her aunt will scream or bleed, because she is no longer human in the niece’s mind. She is a cold, menacing figure that only haunts her, and realizes that she must rid the world of this dangerous creature.

The moonlight not only shows her what to do, but it forces her to confront herself. As she stands in front of the mirror observing the way the light seems to be distorting the physical identity of the aunt, it begins to walk towards where she is standing: “Caminó hacia el espejo, y la imagen tembló en la profundidad del azogue, moviéndose hacia ella, hasta llegar a ser ella de los dos lados, los ojos en los ojos, la boca en la boca, y el llanto en un solo lado” (*Antología* 365). We have seen that the protagonist does not connect herself to an identity. She does not accept who she is physically, and cannot gain a sense of individuality. As the light crawls over to the mirror, it begins to show her that the girl she sees on the other side is, in fact, herself. For the first time, she sees that she is more than just “un pedazo de algo que estaba vivo sólo porque latía” (*Antología* 358). The light shows her that she is an individual, inspiring the beginning of this awaited identity transformation. However, in order to fully accept this self-image, she must kill the person that currently possesses it.

She is urged to carry out the task as the light burns her face: “El contacto del espejo le quemó la cara, y la mano apoyada en la mesa se cerró sobre la tijera” (*Antología* 365). The moon light is nudging, insisting that she not wait any longer. Continuing its mission of showing her the path to be taken, it slowly creeps back to the aunt’s face: “rastreaba las sombras y le buscaba otra vez la cara con los dedos” (*Antología* 365). The natural light is fully personified as we see how its fingers touch the face of the aunt. Because of her life of emotional torture, she has no other choice but to follow her natural instinct for survival, which is represented by the natural light of the moon. The only way she can survive is by murdering her abuser.

After the murder, the natural moonlight completes its task by showing her the way out. She follows it as it leaves the scene of the crime, “libre de miedo a la herida” (*Antología* 366). Like the light leaving without hesitation, the girl feels relieved and does not regret her actions. The light seems to open the door for her, “la puerta se abrió y la luz alumbró el cuarto” (*Antología* 366), and the room lights up, congratulating and awarding her for her job well done.

The protagonist has nearly completed her identity transformation when she experiences a sudden bout of doubt: “pero ella alzó la cabeza hacia el bombillo al fondo del pasillo, y por un instante se quedó así, desafiante, sintiendo el contacto acariciarle la cara” (*Antología* 366). For a moment, it appears that she second guesses her decision to go out into the hall of threatening lights. Despite this hesitation, her identity transformation and individuality development atrophies when we see that she is no longer afraid of confronting herself. The light in the hall does not condemn her by making her feel ugly, rather it begins to slowly:

...borrarle la fealdad de todos los contornos, sin que tuviera que cerrar los ojos ni pensar en pantallas de porcelana azul con que cubrir todos los bombillos de la tierra. Caminó sin apurarse hasta llegar debajo de la luz y pasar por encima de su propia sombra hacia la otra luz al fondo de la escalera; y así en busca del hombre que hacía años la esperaba en el parque, mientras del cuarto olvidado llegó el ritmo de un reloj dando las nueve (*Antología* 366).

Not only does she accept who she is, but she doesn't feel ugly. Now the girl possesses a strong enough sense of individuality to ignore the superficial expectations of society, and can find some beauty within herself. The light *erases her ugliness*, affirming that the aunt was forcing her to view herself as ugly, because she never had the opportunity to identify the beauty within herself.

In “Cita a las nueve,” Ferreira addresses another controversial topic of Cuban society during the 50s. He achieves a glimpse at the traditional mindset and male-centered atmosphere of the Habana society, while underscoring the psychological effects it had on these marginalized women. Through his use of third-person narration, the tormented inner-thoughts of the protagonist are successfully represented. This narration technique also creates the necessary effects for highlighting the most important aspects of the story’s message; such as: the focus on the girl’s emotional state of being, the blurring of her physical appearance, her lack of agency, and the role of the artificial lighting in the house and the natural moon light. The niece’s animalistic instincts and drive for survival are emphasized through her interaction with the night, and her final act of murder. The violence in this story, like the other stories discussed in this thesis, support Ferreira’s attentiveness to this dark side of La Habana and the idea that these marginalized beings have been conditioned to react to their oppressive situations.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that Ferreira recognized the defects imbedded in the Cuban social system which were often the consequence of ongoing traditions. Many of Ferreira's stories end in violence, not as a way of giving these marginalized protagonists a voice of protest, but as a way of making their situation known and showing what such a psychological state of mind can inevitably lead these characters to do. Raúl's impoverished situation, the history of familial abuse, and his lack of education determine his willingness to accept the convincing and friendly proposition of the affectionate political rebels. His horror at the sight of the prostitute's dismembered body emphasizes his naivety and his accidental incorporation into the politically corrupt society of the city. The real world is now in focus as he leaves his "anonymous dream" behind for good.

The protagonist's homosexual tendencies in "Lazo de oro" and his denial of those feelings lead him to exert his tensions with crime. He replaces his desire for the phallic with his search for gold in homosexual night clubs. The protagonist would rather subdue his frustrations than confront and accept them, since, to reveal himself would mean alienation from the traditional Cuban society. His psychological turmoil is to blame for his final act of murder.

In "Cita a las nueve", the female protagonist's exposure to verbal abuse and her feeling of helplessness is her driving force for killing her aunt. As a person that is tormented for her unfortunate physical appearance, she is denied the opportunity to

cherish her good qualities and develop a sense of identity not based on looks alone.

Finally, her world of darkness is illuminated as the stabbing of her aunt grants her the identity that the aunt had stolen from her.

This unique way of bringing social issues to the surface of society through the portrayal of marginalized characters' acts of murder is captivating in its literary technique. With the realistic and often grotesque portrayal of these crimes and criminal lives, the historical context of the works, and their discourse styles, these works deserve a closer look and analysis. Ferreira's other short stories demonstrate similar realistic quality and affinity for representing the primary issues of Cuba in the 50s.

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VITA

Haley L. Osborn was born and raised in Louisville, Kentucky, and also spent a large portion of her childhood in Atlanta, Georgia. Before attending Loyola University Chicago, she attended Hanover College in Madison, Indiana, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish Studies, with a minor in Communication.

While at Hanover, Haley was a member of Kappa Alpha Theta sorority. In addition, she participated annually in Hanover's presentation of the Vagina Monologues, as well as created an original monologue for the performance. In 2009, Hanover College awarded Haley for "Outstanding Creative Writing" under the "Poetry" category at the President Sue DeWine Honors the Arts Ceremony.

Haley has travelled extensively. She studied abroad in Ciudad Real, Spain in 2008 for one semester, where she took classes on Spanish Contemporary Art History, Greek Mythology, Linguistics, and Primitive Christian Art History at La Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha. In 2010, she returned to Spain to teach High School English in Villarrobledo, Albacete, for one year. During her stint in Villarrobledo, she escaped frequently to spend time in many other European countries.

From 2011 to 2012, Haley attended Loyola University Chicago, where she received a Master of Arts in Spanish. While at Loyola, Haley was selected for a two-year Teaching Assistant scholarship in which she served as instructor of undergraduate Spanish courses: Spanish 101, 102, and 104. Currently, Haley is teaching advanced

Spanish at Providence St. Mel High School in Chicago, IL, while she continues her independent investigations of Hispanic literature and culture.