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### DEFINING & REDEFINING THE MARGINS - AN EXPLORATION OF THE DISCOURSE OF POST-COLONIALITY IN THE VERSE OF NICOLÁS GUILLÉN, PABLO NERUDA & ERNESTO CARDENAL

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### THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR IN PHILOSOPHY

**APRIL 2000** 



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### SUMMARY

History teaches us that the imposition of hegemonic structures of the colonial centre can only be truly effective and complete when the cultural personality of the dominated community has been displaced. Aspects of the original history, language, culture and spirituality are distorted or subverted and gradually replaced by models derived from and determined by the colonial centre. Many strategies are employed by the colonising power to effect this displacement of the originary models of identification and definition. Consequently, given the centrality of culture within the discourse. cultural imperatives assume similar colonial а significance in the post-colonial context.

In the post-colonial context, a critique of these imposed models of identity is initiated and one views an inevitable thematic and textual drive for the creation of an altered sense of space. Initially, writers in a post-colonial situation demonstrate an anxiety to interrogate received models of definition. Gradually this evolves into a more discernible desire to re-inscribe 'variants' of history, language and culture in their decolonised texts. Landscapes and models crushed by the more dominant culture are retrieved and revalorised within the revised imaginative discourse.

What this thesis seeks to explore are the discourses of postcoloniality articulated by three Latin American poets; Nicolás Guillén, Pablo Neruda and Ernesto Cardenal. Although clearly distinct from one another, I have sought to identify a commonality of intention, as well as of textual and thematic approaches, which bind these three poets together.

In my view Guillén, Neruda and Cardenal, in particular during the specific periods in their lyrical careers which I have chosen to examine, are engaged in a search for and recuperation of historical, linguistic and cultural sources. All three are clearly seeking to create an alternative lyrical discourse to counter the underlying sense of dissatisfaction with the inherited canonical forms. This unease is also informed by a desire on their part to re-establish and reaffirm a fluidity of cultural and historical meaning which has been dislodged by the process of colonisation.

This revaluation of lyrical technique and production is, in my view, enabled by the poets' marginal position. Their ability to transform their ex-centric discourse into a creative and positive tool with which to challenge the hegemonic structures of meaning is highly significant. Peripherality, in my view, has provided the means by which the positionality of displaced models of identity is reaffirmed. to my parents, with love and thanks

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In his 1990 Nobel Prize speech, the Mexican poet and critic, Octavio Paz explored the issue of physical and cultural disinheritedness. Neither exclusive to Latin America nor to the colonial experience, Paz preferred to view this phenomenon in terms of a metaphysical experience common to all men and women who, at the moment of birth, are separated from their place of origin. He did however go on to make an interesting observation regarding the two types of responses this experience can provoke:

A veces sentimos la separación como una herida y entonces se transforma en escisión interna, conciencia desgarrada que nos invita al examen de nosotros mismos; otras parece como un reto, espuela que nos incita a la acción, a salir al encuentro de los otros y del mundo.<sup>1</sup>

In many ways, the lyrical discourses of Nicolás Guillén, Pablo Neruda and Ernesto Cardenal are underpinned by a similar sense of ambivalence. A sense of displacement and dispossession engendered by their shared colonised condition prompted these poets to unravel inherited perceptions of self and revise their sense of nationhood. Ultimately, such a challenge to inherited perceptions of the individual and collective identity also enabled a reassessment of their own roles and responsibilities within a revised collective cultural praxis. Consequently, what began as an exercise in personal re-discovery for these three poets evolved into a more collective reappraisal of the relationship between coloniser and colonised, and of the long-term effects of colonisation.

Along with the obvious political and economic intentions which propel colonialism, the process also seeks to invalidate, on a cultural, spiritual and linguistic level, the legitimacy of the society it encounters. The effects of the colonial experience on the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> 'La búsqueda del presente', Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos, Vol. XVI, 3 (Spring, 1992), p. 385.

colonised community are thus far-reaching. In an abrupt and alienating fashion, the colonised community is shorn of its originary models of language, culture and spirituality. Traditional patterns of identity are transformed radically as the colonised community, in an attempt to survive, engages in what could be interpreted as a transference of cultural referents. As a consequence of this process of assimilation, the superiority of the colonising power is assured and conversely, the invalidation of indigenous models of cultural expression is also affirmed.

Subsequently, intellectual concerns of originality and authenticity become central to the process of decolonisation. Many artists and writers embark on what appears to be an atavistic search for origins that results in a retrieval of these displaced originary sources and models. The process which ensues results in a discourse that persistently oscillates between past and present meanings, between public and private concerns and between a sense of filiation to, and separation from, an original identity.

I would suggest that in the verse of Guillén, Neruda and Cardenal, particularly in the periods which I have chosen to focus on, one detects a palpable desire on the part of each of these poets to uncover an alternative corpus of linguistic, cultural and historical references within the indigenous or popular traditions. By engaging with, and elaborating upon, these correspondences, these poets are seeking to reaffirm the validity of unspoken or displaced models of identity which they believe reflect more accurately the particulars of their respective identities. In my view, their aim is to establish a new counter-culture which challenges the sense of alterity and displacement that has defined their colonised identity to date.

The search for an alternative identity is often likened to a mythical journey. In order to articulate an altered sense of place and meaning, poets such as Guillén, Neruda and Cardenal must regress to an historical moment or cultural tradition that predates the present, in order to begin the process of recuperation and decolonisation. The complex mosaic of language, history and place

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that underpins both the individual and the national identity is interrogated and the manner in which the original identity was distorted by the experience of colonisation is also examined. Originary or more authentic sources and models of expression and history are then revalorised and reclaimed for both the individual poet and for the collective identity.

Often the primary focus in such a process is an examination of the nature of the ex-centric discourse. The encounter between a colonising power and a colonised community is generally articulated through an encounter between two quite distinct linguistic practices; in short between a literate and an oral culture. The inevitable result is the suppression of the oral and popular expressions of culture, as the literate culture and models pertaining to the colonial centre assume a superior position within this linguistic hierarchy. Linguistic estrangement is eradicated by both sides in this encounter either through assimilation or affirmation of the literate cultural models, thus further strengthening colonialist definitions of language and cultural meaning.

Consequently, orality and models of oralised or popular discourse assume a completely new significance in the post-colonial context, as they are often perceived as the locale of the more authentic linguistic identity. As Simon During suggests, the primacy of the linguistic in the post-colonial context can be attributed to its defining originary function within a language community:

In both literature and politics the post-colonial drive towards identity centres around language ... For the postcolonial to speak or write in the imperial tongues is to call forth a problem of identity, to be thrown into mimicry and ambivalence. The question of language for post-colonialism is political, cultural and literary, not in the transcendental sense ... but in the material sense that a choice of language is a choice of identity.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> 'Postmodernism or Post-colonialism Today', *Textual Practice*, Vol. I, No. I (Spring, 1987), p. 43.

Another significant feature of post-colonial writing is the manner in which the narrative of history is reconstructed and re-inscribed within post-colonial discourse. During the course of this study of the verse of Guillén, Neruda and Cardenal, I will illustrate how such a privation of historical meaning and its subsequent recovery is central to these poets' redefinition of self and of the lyric. By reaffirming the positionality of their displaced historical narrative these poets are seeking to dislodge the sense of historical alienation and distortion of heredity which have defined them thus far.

In the post-colonial context, culture also assumes additional new challenges and functions and the demands upon the writer are also radically transformed. In the retrieval and validation of an alternative identity, material normally extraneous to the lyric, such as issues of historical and political significance, are often intermeshed with more subjective concerns of self that normally propel the lyrical voice. As S. R. Cudjoe has observed:

In a colonial society emerging from political dependence, struggling for national liberation and searching for national identity, the fusion of both processes (politics and literature) is not only indistinguishable, it literally becomes indissoluble.<sup>3</sup>

Terry Eagleton has also emphasised the interrelatedness of literary production and the material reality in defining a revised cultural context. However he cautions against any simplistic approaches to such an extension of aesthetic boundaries:

'Commitment' is more than just a matter of presenting correct political opinions in one's art; it reveals itself in how far the artist reconstructs the artistic forms at his disposal, turning authors, readers and spectators into collaborators.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Resistance and Caribbean Literature (Ohio University Press, 1980), p. 68. <sup>4</sup> Marxism & Literary Criticism (London: Methuen, 1976), p. 62.

In my view, there is evidence in the work of these three poets of a clear synthesis between concerns pertaining to the creative act and issues relating to the material reality. It must be noted that the process of cultural decolonisation does not necessarily prompt such a re-alliance of poetry and the poet with the prevailing socio-political reality, but it is pertinent to the verse of Guillén, Neruda and Cardenal during specific periods of their lives.

As noted before, the process of cultural decolonisation often implies an atavistic search for origins and cultural precursors. However, this search does not of necessity demand a wholly essentialist approach. As Amilcar Cabral, leader of the PAIGC revolutionary movement in the West African country of Guinea-Bissau suggested, an acknowledgement of the positive and creative potential of cross-culturality and a reconciliation of the disparate voices is central to any honest reappraisal of existing perceptions of self and nation:

A people who free themselves from foreign domination will be free culturally only if, without complexes and without underestimating the importance of positive accretions from the oppressor and other cultures, they return to the upward paths of their own culture, which is nourished by the living reality of its environment, and which negates both harmful influences and any kind of subjection to foreign culture.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, a complete denial of such inherited or imposed influences or models is frequently viewed as an unsophisticated response to the nature and consequences of the colonial experience.

The manner in which each of these poets engage with their inherited identity forms the basis for this study. What I intend to illustrate during the course of Chapters Two, Three and Four is the manner in which each poet interrogates, and, to a degree, subverts canonical assumptions of language, form and meaning. While the nature of their individual responses is quite distinct, theirs is a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> 'National Liberation and Culture', *Return to the Source - Selected Speeches* by Amilcar Cabral (Africa Information Service, ed.) (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), p. 43.

project that is linked by a commonality of experience and intentions. The resulting poetic text, the poetics of opposition, if you will, serves two primary purposes; firstly, to identify and acknowledge the cultural assimilation which has taken place during the process of colonisation and secondly, to challenge existing perceptions and referents and thus transform their poetics into something which reflects more accurately the reality of cross-culturality. I will also review their individual responses to the hybridity of cultural identity.

Chapter One will explore the nature and relevance of the colonialist discourse with particular reference to the Latin American context. It will examine the manner in which the colonial construct of the Other is achieved and perpetuated and its impact on the subsequent cultural formation of a colonised community. I will then proceed to examine the nature of the process of decolonisation and explore the relationship between literary production and the material reality in the revised postcolonial context. The teleology of issues such as language, history and spirituality in redefining inherited perceptions of self and nationhood in contexts specific to these three poets is also assessed.

Chapter Two will explore the nature of the post-colonial discourse articulated by the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén. I have chosen to focus on three early collections by Guillén; *Motivos de son* (1930), *Sóngoro cosongo* (1931) and *West Indies, Ltd.* (1934), but will also examine his lyrical production diachronically by exploring the influence of literary movements such as Modernism and other contemporaneous expressions of Negritude on his poetic discourse. In addition, by examining his prose writing of the same period, I will illustrate the manner in which extraneous historical and political factors impacted upon his literary development.

Chapter Three will focus on the *Canto general* of Pablo Neruda, first published in 1950. In common with my analysis of the other two poets, I will also trace the evolution of Neruda's lyrical discourse by focusing on the earlier *Residencia en la tierra* 

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collections with the aim of highlighting the radical lyrical transition viewed in the *Canto general*. I will also examine some of his primary literary influences as well as the most significant political and historical factors that contributed to the development of this lyric.

Chapter Four is a study of *Homenaje a los indios americanos*, the 1969 anthology of poems by the Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal. Here too I will explore the confluence of historical, political and literary influences which shaped the production of this anthology. These include his research into the indigenous cultures of Spanish America, the effects of his spiritual conversion on his literary production and his subsequent involvement in the Sandinista struggle in Nicaragua. In addition, an examination of the precedents set by the Nicaraguan vanguardia as well as the Imagist movement is central to my analysis of *Homenaje a los indios americanos*.

The fact that I have approached these three poets in this particular chronological fashion does not presume any suggestion on my part of the development of the discourse of post-coloniality in the broader context of Latin American poetics. What I do hope to illustrate is how in their distinct ways, poets such as Guillén, Neruda and Cardenal, utilised their condition of marginality as a positive, creative and regenerative force within Latin American letters. Precisely because of their sense of historical estrangement and of ex-centricity, they were enabled to question, interrogate and ultimately transform this inherited discourse. As a result, an identification with, and articulation of, values and models derived from their displaced identity engender the production of a radically transformed sense of landscape, history and language.

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### **CHAPTER ONE**

### Constructing Alterity & Re-colonising the Other

The principal aim of any colonising discourse is the subversion of, and, ultimately, the assimilation of the colonised Other. This process is underpinned and enabled by assertions of cultural, linguistic or ethnic superiority on the part of the colonising power. In his study of alterity, the Palestinian intellectual, Edward Said, asserted that such issues of cultural and ethnic import often transcend the more obvious desire for territorial or political control and, as a consequence, propel the discourse of colonialism in a distinct and altogether more significant fashion.<sup>1</sup>

The imposition of any new, unfamiliar political or cultural hegemony is a sophisticated and often complex exercise. It impacts on many distinct levels of societal development and structures and on given strategies of self and collective definition, both on an individual and collective level. The cultural and political discourses which develop are largely constructed and pre-determined by colonial perceptions of its own antithetical nature. The true essence of the original identity is radically altered or displaced altogether by a cultural, ethnic or linguistic discourse alien to its own. Cultural imperatives which articulated the original identity are increasingly informed by an unfamiliar tradition imposed during the process of colonisation. The Other, that subverted self, is invariably dehumanised and divested of its cultural and ethnic valence by the more dominant colonising perspective with the result that perceptions of the colonised community are inscribed with a sense of negativity and inferiority that serves to enhance further colonial perceptions of superiority.

The effects of this encounter are often quickly assimilated and thus the nature and durability of this imposed colonial hegemony are not always easily understood. Any genuine attempts at an

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London/Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 6.

examination of the nature of this process or of the resulting hegemony are inhibited for many subsequent generations precisely because of the acute sense of inferiority generated by the colonial experience. Consequently, the colonised community is enveloped by a sense of cultural, spiritual and linguistic disinheritedness, as its identity is gradually subverted and displaced by standards and canons derived principally from the colonial centre.

In a lecture to the Lyceum Women's Association in Havana, in 1932, Nicolás Guillén outlined some of the consequences of this assimilation of European cultural models for black Cubans:

El negro fue arrancado de su tierra y cultivado por el blanco. A éste le debe los elementos de la civilización, las artes y las ciencias. De él tomó el gusto helénico por lo bello, y el troquel en que debía vaciar la sustancia de su espíritu en busca de la suma perfección formal. Venus y Apolo han sido sus modelos, dos tipos de estructura blanca en los que jamás se pudo reconocer.<sup>2</sup>

The consequences of this transference of canonical models and associations would, in Guillén's view, have a far-reaching negative influence on strategies of self assessment within the colonised community. The result, Guillén asserted, was that the black community in the Americas came to revile the true essence of its identity:

Al reconocerse oscuro, se sintió feo. Y al sentirse feo, se encontró inferior.<sup>3</sup>

For some writers and artists, an awareness of their colonised community and the displacement of an originary model of identity generates feelings of loss and cultural disinheritedness. For others however, this ex-centric or peripheral location constructed as a result of colonialism can be transformed into an enriching and

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> 'Presencia en el Lyceum', Prosa de prisa I (La Habana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1975), p. 45.
 <sup>3</sup> ibidem

highly creative dialectic. In my view, the three poets whom I have chosen to examine, Nicolás Guillén, Pablo Neruda and Ernesto Cardenal, are defined by their shared colonial history and during the course of the subsequent chapters I hope to illustrate how this experience came to shape their creative production in a positive and fruitful fashion.

What I want to explore now is the nature of the colonialist discourse and the manner in which alterity is constructed and employed by colonial powers. I will examine this primarily in the context of the colonialist encounter between Europe and the Americas but will also cite experiences of other colonised communities. By exploring the manner of these encounters, I hope to illustrate how colonialism impacted upon and irrevocably shaped the cultural, linguistic and ethnic identity of Latin America.

### The Colonisation of America

Fifteenth century Europe was driven by a tremendous spirit of adventure and discovery. Spain was particularly buoyant, given that Aragon and Castille had recently been reunited by the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella and they had overseen the expulsion of the Moors from Spanish soil. In many ways the Spanish engagement with the Americas exemplifies the western tradition of reflection on the New World and the initial responses of Christopher Columbus to these lands and people define the polarities of the broader western debate.

Inspired by the memoirs of a fellow Italian, Marco Polo, and by the writings of Sir John Mandeville, Christopher Columbus stumbled across Española (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic) in 1492, *en route* to Asia and to the court of the Grand Khan.<sup>4</sup> Although he believed in the sphericity of the globe and in the possibility of circumnavigation, Columbus made a crucial

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Cecil Jane suggests that Columbus may also have seen a manuscript copy of Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly's *Imago Mundi*, which was published some time between 1480-3. See *Select Documents Illustrating the Four Voyages of Columbus, Vol. I* (Cecil Jane, ed.) (London: Hakluyt Society, 1930), p. lxxxix.

navigational error which he never acknowledged even up to his death, convinced as he was, that he had reached Asia. Being deeply pious and spiritual, Columbus perceived his mission as sacred and one whose success was wholly dependent upon the grace of God and Providence. He subsequently claimed these new lands which he discovered in the name of God and on behalf of the Spanish Crown. This navigational error initiated a discourse between Europe and the Americas which continues to define and influence both continent's perceptions of self and their Other, to this day.

Accounts of Columbus's first voyage attest to the genuine sense of wonderment experienced by the Europeans in the Americas. Columbus's initial descriptions chart the unparalleled nature of the landscapes that he had discovered:

... son fertilísimas en demasiado grado ... en ella ay muchos puertos en la costa de la mar, sin comparación de otros que yo sepa en cristianos, y fartos ríos y buenos y grandes, que es maravilla. las tierras d'ella son altas, y en ella muy muchas sierras y montañas altísimas, sin comparación de la ysla de Teneryfe; todos fermosísimas. <sup>5</sup>

His abundant use of superlatives and the repetition by Columbus of 'sin comparación' confirm the novelty of the climate, people and landscape for the colonising Europeans. Later in the same account Columbus would remark of Española:

esta es para desear, é, v(ista), es para nunca dexar.<sup>6</sup>

Accounts of Columbus's second voyage, recorded by Doctor Chanca, corroborate Columbus's initial impressions of these new territories. In the following extracts from Dr. Chanca's letter, again we note the use of superlatives and a similar inability to find words or equivalents within the European experience:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13.

Era en todo aquello que parecia desta isla todo montaña muy hermosa y muy verde, fasta el agua que era alegría en mirarla, porque en aquel tiempo no hay en nuestra tierra apenas cosa verde.<sup>7</sup>

Chanca described a waterfall in the following manner:

... era la mas hermosa cosa del mundo de ver cuan alto se despeñaba é de tan poco logar nacia tan gran golpe de agua.<sup>8</sup>

By the third voyage, Columbus had come to view these lands as an earthly paradise, similar to that predicted in the Book of Genesis:

grandes indiçios son estos del parayso terrenal, porqu'el sitio es conforme á la opinión d'estos sanctos y sanos theólogos.<sup>9</sup>

Initially, the inhabitants of this new world were also held in high esteem:

... ellos son tanto sin engaño y tan liberales de lo que tienen, que no lo creería sino el que lo viese ...<sup>10</sup>

Described as timid and generous, also apparently unfamiliar qualities for the Europeans, Columbus nevertheless concluded that they were highly intelligent:

... creían muy firme que yo con estos navíos y gente venía del cielo, y en tal catamiento me recebían en todo cabo, después de haver perdido el miedo. y esto no procede porque sean ignorantes, salvo de muy sotil ingenio.<sup>11</sup>

What is clearly apparent even at this early stage of the process, was that Columbus was supremely self-assured and convinced of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Select Documents Illustrating the Four Voyages of Columbus, Vol. II (London: Hakluyt Society, 1933), p. 39.
<sup>10</sup> Select Documents Illustrating the Four Voyages of Columbus, Vol. I: op. cit., p. 9.
<sup>11</sup> ibid., p. 11.

the validity of his position and intentions. Ultimately it would be this sense of superiority that would determine the nature of the colonial relationship with the indigenous cultures they encountered. The relationship between the colonial centre and its Other would always be inequitable and what ensued was an inevitable process of subversion and appropriation of the autochthonous cultures of America.

The initial European attitude of admiration and inquiry towards these newly-discovered cultures quickly degenerated into a posture which was characterised by some of the more negative aspects of civilisation; namely condescension and racism. In reality, Columbus and the other colonisers had arrived on American soil with many pre-conceived notions about the 'natural' inferiority and barbarism of the inhabitants and culture of this *novus mundus*, further testimony of the Eurocentric belief in its own superiority and advancement. In the account of Columbus's first journey to the Americas, he unquestioningly catalogued the province of 'Avan', on the island of 'Juana' as:

### adonde nasça la gente con cola ...<sup>12</sup>

It is clear that he had been expecting to find savage and cannibalistic people, even though he had found very little evidence of them to date:

En estas islas fasta aquí no he hallado hombres mostrudos, como muchos pensavan  $\dots^{13}$ 

However, as soon as he encountered any hostility or opposition to the process of colonisation and expansion, his pre-conceived notions of barbarism and inhumanity were unleashed against the hostile people. The Caribs, in particular, were repeatedly demonised and categorised according to Columbus's perceptions of civility. Given that they were not in compliance with the European definition of civility, they were dismissed quite readily as savages

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 15.

and cannibals and any references to them inscribed with suggestions of monstrousness or barbarity:

La costumbre desta gente de Caribes es bestial.<sup>14</sup>

The colonial fixation with the forbidden vice of cannibalism was another hugely influential factor in the sublimation of European culture and in the subsequent brutalisation of the indigenous cultures. It was often cited as a bulwark against barbarism over which any civilised society should not scale.<sup>15</sup> The European fascination with cannibalism is evident in many of the early accounts of the New World. In the account of his first journey, Columbus recorded:

así que mostruos no he hallado, ni noticia, salvo de una ysla 'Quaris', la segunda á la entrada de las Yndias, que es poblada de una gente que tienen en todas las yslas por muy ferozes, los quales comen carne humana.<sup>16</sup>

On his second voyage, it is apparent that any indicators of cannibalism were assimilated by Columbus and his fellow travellers without question and without the need for further proof. Lurid tales of cannibalism and fear had begun to influence and distort the colonisers' perceptions of some of the inhabitants of the New World. On one occasion they witnessed bones and concluded quite readily:

Luego que aquello vimos sospechamos que aquellas islas eran las de Caribe, que son habitadas de gente que comen carne humana.<sup>17</sup>

Peter Hulme has examined the etymology of *cannibal* in some depth and concludes that the word has its etymological origins not in the practice of cannibalism itself, but in Columbus's inability to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Dr. Chanca's account of Columbus's second voyage, *ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> ibidem

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Account of Columbus's first journey, op. cit., pp. 15-7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Dr. Chanca's account, op. cit., p. 27.

comprehend and corral the apparently hostile Carib people.<sup>18</sup> This inability to control on a linguistic level had led to a distortion of the essential identity of one particular group of people. Certainly, by the third voyage, for Columbus 'caribe' and 'caníbal' would appear to have become interchangeable phenomena:

mas todos me dezían que no fuese allá, porque allí comían los hombres, y entendí entonçes que dezían que eran hombres caníbales y que serían como los otros.<sup>19</sup>

Several critics suggest that many of these European assumptions about the presumed barbarism of unknown peoples were sourced in much earlier classical and medieval presumptions. Both Christopher Miller and Peter Mason for example, illustrate in some detail how this posture vis-a-vis unfamiliar cultures, was not solely the preserve of the fifteenth century European intellect.<sup>20</sup> Miller and Mason demonstrate how many of the Both representations of the unfamiliar in both early Hellenic and Roman cultures - with regard to language, culture and ethnicity were inscribed with a similar monstrousness and implied barbarity.<sup>21</sup> Mason, in particular, believes that subsequent Eurocentric misconceptions about the Americas an as undeveloped, monstrous and therefore cultureless civilisation were sourced in European interpretations of classical mythology and literature.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, it follows that as a consequence of this classical education, the inhabitants of the Antilles and Mesoamerica were invariably transformed in the minds of the early colonisers into their mythological equivalents, and the non-Western world became defined by preconceptions derived

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Colonial Encounters (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 16-7 & pp. 67-78. Peter Mason has also examined this issue and the impact of cannibalism on the European definition of the Other in *Deconstructing America* - *Representations of the Other* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 111.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Select Documents Illustrating the Four Voyages of Columbus, Vol. II: op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Christopher Miller, Blank Darkness - Africanist Discourse in French (University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 23-32 & Peter Mason, op. cit., pp. 71-82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Also see Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), pp. 8-9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Mason, op. cit., pp. 71-117. Also see Tzvetan Todorov, The Conquest of America - The Question of the Other (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), p. 15.

principally from classical sources. Clearly the Spanish attitude to linguistic, spiritual and ethnic identity of the cultural. autochthonous America was underpinned and shaped by their over-riding European assumption of rational and racial superiority. It would appear that the European mindset was a propensity to define the non-European possessed of as subhuman and uncivilised. From the outset the autochthonous population of the Americas was categorised according to erroneous Western codes and Eurocentric preconceptions of civilisation. Those failing to meet these criteria were defined as inherently barbaric and thus beyond redemption.

Edward Said suggests that perceptions of the Other, with attendant classifications of this Other as uncivilised or barbaric, are often completely arbitrary. They are never, Said asserts, a reflection of the true nature or true reality, but merely an agreed assumption and perception of this reality:

... this universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is 'ours' and an unfamiliar space beyond 'ours' which is 'theirs' is a way of making geographical distinctions which can be entirely arbitrary.<sup>23</sup>

He goes on to say:

All kinds of suppositions, associations, and fictions appear to crowd the unfamiliar space outside one's own.<sup>24</sup>

So it was that assumptions of barbarity regarding the indigenous people of the New World became one of the principal means by which the colonising Europeans could justify territorial expansionism and their continued ill-treatment of the indigenous inhabitants of the region.

Although the New World was perceived initially as a paradise by some, this enthusiasm was gradually replaced by the view that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> ibidem

these lands were corruptive and ultimately dangerous. This resulted in a series of ambiguous and incoherent appraisals of the autochthonous culture of the New World.<sup>25</sup> This transition in the European response to the New World can, as I have illustrated, be readily observed in Columbus's changing attitude to the Americas. It is evident in the journals of his later voyages that Columbus's initial sense of observation and wonderment had been transposed by an increasing sense of disgust and abhorrence at the apparent inhumanity of the New World. In reality, his views had been recast by other significant considerations.

This negation of the humanity of the autochthonous people of the Americas was inherently linked with the covetous objectives of the Spanish Crown. Although Columbus may have viewed his maiden expedition to the Americas as a test of his navigational skills and as part of some divine mission to convert pagans, subsequent expeditions were to reveal the base economic motives that underwrote the entire enterprise. There is clearly a marked difference between his aforementioned first observations on the New World and those contained in letters pertaining to the third and fourth voyages, in 1498 and 1503 respectively. Admittedly, in the accounts of the first two journeys to New Spain, Columbus did draw attention to the abundance of spices, plants and the material potential offered by these new territories. He justified his fair treatment of the indigenous inhabitants precisely because of the material rewards this approach produced:

... é procuren é nos dar de las cosas que tienen en abundancia, que nos son necesarias.<sup>26</sup>

Of the rivers, he remarked:

... los más de los quales traen oro.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Anthony Pagden, European Encounters with the New World (Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 56-68.
<sup>26</sup>Select Documents Illustrating the Four Voyages of Columbus, Vol. I: op. cit., pp. 9-11.
<sup>27</sup> ibid., p. 7.

One island was described in the following fashion:

en esta ay oro sin cuento.<sup>28</sup>

And of the overall project:

... havrá gran trato é ganancia.<sup>29</sup>

Doctor Chanca repeatedly draws attention to the material potential offered by the second voyage. He recalled the logic behind one particular navigational decision:

Acordó el Almirante nos tornásemos por la costa arriba por do habíamos venido de Castilla, porque la nueva del oro era fasta allá.<sup>30</sup>

But this phenomenon becomes increasingly more frequent in the later letters, where Columbus's focus on the easy availability of gold and other valuables clearly has become more pronounced. At the beginning of the third letter, Columbus asserts the expanse of land claimed in the name of the Spanish Crown, his emphasis clearly on the amount of money which could be expected to be paid under tribute from the inhabitants of these lands.<sup>31</sup> He continues:

... les truxe abastante muestra de oro, y que ay mineros y granos muy grandes, y asimismo de cobre.<sup>32</sup>

The fourth letter contains similar observations by Columbus on the material gain of the new territories:

... las tierras, que acá obedecen á Vuestras Altezas, son más

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup>Select Documents Illustrating the Four Voyages of Columbus, Vol. II: op. cit., p. 5. <sup>32</sup>ibid., p. 7.

### que todas las otras de cristianos, i ricas.<sup>33</sup>

This change in focus viewed in Columbus's letters can in part be explained by the severe criticism he received for the lack of material gain produced by the first two expeditions. It was also engendered by Columbus's ongoing insecurity with regard to future financial support from the Spanish Crown. The necessity to chronicle and catalogue the material resources of the region would ultimately take precedence over any observations on the geographical and anthropological novelty of the region. Perhaps one of the most evocative articulations of the true motives behind the colonisation of America is reflected in a poem composed around 1523 by an indigenous poet:

Se nos puso precio. Precio del joven, del sacerdote, del nino y de la doncella.

Basta: de un pobre era el precio sólo dos puñados de maíz, sólo diez tortas de mosco; sólo era nuestro precio veinte tortas de grama salitrosa.<sup>34</sup>

The Spanish unwillingness to acknowledge the fundamental material objectives of the colonialist project allowed their colonisation of the Americas to become identified as an entirely different exercise. Firstly, they viewed themselves as educators, bringing culture to an otherwise inferior, cultureless society. An important corollary to this attitude was their belief that the more oral-based cultures of the New World were infinitely inferior to their chirographic-based culture. Secondly, and this is particularly true of the early colonisers, they believed that their mission was imbued with evangelical intent, and that they were charged with

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> ibid., p. 109. Also see pp. 21, 23, 45, 103 & 105 of Vol. II for further examples from Columbus's letters describing his 3rd and 4th voyages.
 <sup>34</sup> 'Cantos tristes de la conquista', A. M. Garibay & M. León-Portilla, Visión de

los vencidos - Relaciones indígenas de la conquista (México: UNAM, 1961), pp. 166-7.

the conversion and ultimately the salvation of a pagan and idolatrous people.

### Colonising Language

From the outset, the encounter between Europe and pre-Columbian America was shaped by the distinct linguistic practices which defined each of these cultural traditions. It was ostensibly an encounter between an oral and a literate culture.

One critic, Walter Ong, defines an oral community as one without any knowledge of writing.<sup>35</sup> However this definition proves problematic as most ethnolinguists and anthropologists confirm that the majority of the autochthonous cultures of America employed some form of a graphic system of enumeration and had a certain knowledge of writing prior to the arrival of the Europeans.<sup>36</sup> Martin Lienhard highlights the sophistication of the 'Kipu' employed by the Quechuan people and the complex system of hieroglyphs and ideographs used throughout MesoAmerica, also citing the Mayan system as a particularly good example of pre-Columbian America's sophistication in this regard.<sup>37</sup> Thus, what Lienhard proposes as the differentiation between the cultures of Europe and Latin America is a distinction between alphabetisation and other equally valid manifestations of writing in existence in the New World. Although he lauds the refinement of many of the indigenous systems of writing, Lienhard does acknowledge that most pre-conquest manifestations of writing occurred within the parameters of what is generally defined as orality.38 In reality, the forms of cultural expression that existed in pre-Columbian America were dependent in the main for their diffusion, and, consequently for their continued survival, on an interaction

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Walter Ong, Orality and Literacy - The Technologizing of the Word (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Some useful studies in this regard include Miguel León-Portilla, 'Tradición y anales del México antiguo', *Los antiguos mexicanos a través de sus crónicas y cantares* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992), pp. 48-70 and León-Portilla, 'La palabra antigua y nueva del hombre de Mesoamérica', *Revista Iberoamericana*, 127 (April-June, 1984), pp. 345-366. <sup>37</sup> Martin Lienhard, *La voz y su huella* (La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1990), pp. 36-49. <sup>38</sup> *ibid* pp. 47.8

between speaker and audience. The bulk of these pre-literate models, of an historical, genealogical, spiritual or numerical nature, were learnt by heart by the intellectuals of these communities in the 'calmécac', 'escuelas literarias' or in the 'casas de canto' and subsequently interpreted and passed on orally to the next generation. The Popol-Vuh, for example, a comprehensive record of the traditions of the Quiché-Maya was preserved in this fashion for centuries and only transcribed and recorded in written form by a Spanish priest between 1544 and 1555, many years after the conquest. On the one hand, such a process of assimilation and apprenticeship did ensure the continued survival of this corpus of cultural models but it was an arbitrary and shifting body of material, subject to and dependent upon the skills of the speaker, the reactions of the audience and upon the specific context in which it was delivered. The content would have been repeatedly altered and refashioned to suit the context of each subsequent telling and the composition and needs of the distinct narrators and audiences. Thus, as Walter Ong suggests, such a cultural expression effectively approaches its dissolution at the precise moment of enunciation, as words are never again repeated in the same format and their survival is dependent entirely upon the mnemonic skills of the speakers and of the audience.<sup>39</sup>

A written culture, on the other hand, has quite distinct capacities for retention. It can rely on dictionaries and scholarly texts to record its evolution and history and has, therefore, a record that is more permanent and less vulnerable to change. As Walter Ong confirms:

# Written words are residue. Oral tradition has no such residue or deposit.<sup>40</sup>

However one should not overlook the fact that a written text can always be subject to and influenced by the theoretical or moral assumptions appropriate to the chronicler or recipient. There is abundant historical evidence to indicate that both the indigenous

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> op. cit., pp. 33-4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p. 11.

scribes and the Spanish chroniclers, who were in the main religious clerics, chose to refashion many of the accounts of the traditions and cultures of pre-conquest America produced during the sixteenth century. For the indigenous scribes, often this process of self-censorship was prompted by a concern for the survival of some aspects of their indigenous culture and by their awareness of the Spanish repugnance for the apparently idolatrous or sexual content of many of these accounts.

Convinced that their chirographic culture was ample proof of the advanced nature of their civilisation, the Europeans set out to subvert the essentially oral culture and education of indigenous America. Consequently, an inherent and often unspoken hierarchy began to characterise the relationship between orality and literacy and between these two traditions. Those communities whose cultural expression was embedded in orality began to dissipate as native people, in a gesture of self-preservation, allowed themselves to be assimilated by the new literate tradition. Consequently, indigenous systems of memory, orature and history began to disappear.<sup>41</sup>

As Walter Ong suggests, this transposition of oral and literate cultures is often enacted with a conscious awareness on the part of the oral community of the value of that which they are discarding:

This awareness is agony for persons rooted in primary orality, who want literacy passionately but who also know very well that moving into the exciting world of literacy means leaving behind much that is exciting and deeply loved in the earlier oral world.<sup>42</sup>

Once an oral community comes into contact with a written culture, the absence of a written history inevitably engenders feelings of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> The term 'orature' has become synonymous with cultural material created and performed by methods of traditional narration in a pre-literate or oralised context.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Orality and Literacy: op. cit., p. 15.

inferiority within the former.<sup>43</sup> It is clear that a belief in the potentiality of chirography contributed in a very direct fashion to the inevitable demise of many oral cultures. Western epistemological theories of superiority were enabled because of the apparent lack of 'history', culture or tradition in non-Western societies. Martin Lienhard, in *La voz y su huella*, suggests that the revocation and displacement of traditional forms of expression, memory, ownership and spirituality in pre-colonial America were enabled also by the almost fetishistic attitude of the native inhabitants to writing:

Los autóctonos, despojados 'legalmente' (por la escritura) de sus tierras, sometidos a juicios por su 'idolatría', no pudieron ignorar por mucho tiempo el aparente poder - un poder delegado - de la escritura administrativa, diplomática o judicial. A veces llegaron, sin duda, a sobrevalorarlo, a atribuirle una eficacia poco menos que mágica.<sup>44</sup>

In Latin America, modes of writing and cultural expression that were viewed as alternatives to the Eurocentric literate model were persistently negated or ignored as the written word became the primary means of control.<sup>45</sup>

Tzvetan Todorov has also examined the question of inferiority often experienced by oral communities by examining the encounter between Montezuma and Cortés during the colonisation of Mexico.<sup>46</sup> In *The Conquest of America* he questioned how it was possible for several hundred Spanish soldiers to subdue the much larger Aztec army. Although Cortés was undoubtedly aided by the internal dissent evident within the Aztec empire, (in particular by the dissension between the Aztecs and the Tlaxcalans) and by the indecisiveness of Montezuma, Todorov concludes that Cortés's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Walter Ong evidenced this in the reactions of a group of illiterate Yugoslav singers who believed literate singers had the capacity to deliver more superior performances, *ibid.*, p.61. <sup>44</sup> op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, 'Anahuac y sus otros - La cuestión de la letra en el nuevo mundo', *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*, 28 (Semestre II, 1988), pp. 29-53.

 $<sup>^{46}</sup>$  op. cit., chapter 2.

success lay in the Spaniard's effective manipulation of meaning and language.<sup>47</sup> Todorov thus suggests that Montezuma perhaps erroneously interpreted the potentiality of the intruders through the written texts presented to him by Cortés's emissaries. In reality, one can only imagine the impact of the written text on someone shaped by an essentially oral education.

As a consequence of the distinction between these two means of communication, the political and cultural relationship which evolved between these two distinct communities was also inevitably characterised within the same assumed hierarchy. The written legislation issued from the colonial centre governing the colonies and its people affirmed the positionality of the European colonisers and further endorsed the power of the written word over its oral equivalent. As the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* affirm:

Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order' and 'reality' become established.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, in the colonial context, the written text came to symbolise and reaffirm the colonisers' superiority over an indigenous population. As Peter Hulme suggests, the written word was viewed:

... as much as possible as the defining characteristic of western culture, the pinnacle of human achievement, with non-phonetic scripts disparaged, and non-western

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> The Aztec belief in the return of Quetzalcóatl also contributed to the ultimate success of Cortés. This manipulation and subversion of meaning by the Spanish colonisers is further illustrated by the Spanish manipulation and misinterpretation of the relationship between the Caribs and the Arawaks, whom they encountered in the Caribbean. Given the Spanish perception of the Caribs as hostile invaders, they were thus able to represent their own motives as more egalitarian in nature, as simply a desire to restore power to the dispossessed Arawaks.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* - *Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 7.

scripts, when unavoidably recognised as such, usually seen as beyond the ken of their cultural descendants.<sup>49</sup>

For the Spanish colonisers writing became a practical and highly effective means of legitimising the conquest of America. In Spain, Nebrija's *Gramática castellana*, coincidentally also published in 1492, affirmed 'castellano' as the 'lengua culta' of the expanding empire, effectively supplanting not only other languages spoken in the peninsula but also any alternative or subaltern language. Castilian Spanish was confirmed as 'la lengua compañera del imperio' and, by extension, linguistic conformity and homogeneity, as necessary and effective tools of political expansion. Thus, already armed with assumed political and moral rights to these new American lands, its people and its natural resources, the Spanish began to apply similar standards in language upon the colonies. They sought to corral and, in a fashion, control the novelty and distinctiveness of the New World within the confines of their literate Eurocentric and Castilian perspective.

In the account of his first expedition, clearly Columbus was initially confounded and frustrated by his inability to define accurately what he had witnessed and to communicate with the indigenous people he encountered:

... con la gente de las quales no podía haver fable. <sup>50</sup>

However, once he established his own perception of understanding, he lauded the apparent uniformity of this new culture:

En todas estas yslas no vide mucha diversidad de la fechura de la gente, ni en las costumbres ni en la lengua...<sup>51</sup>

He appeared to be applying the following simple analogy; linguistic homogeneity, such as that seen in the colonial centre, was evidence of a civilised community, linguistic diversity or

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Peter Hulme, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Select Documents, Vol. I: op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p. 11.

heterogeneity, such as that viewed in the New World, was akin to savagery. Consequently, once he encountered a group of people who spoke an unfamiliar language or several different languages, as on his fourth voyage, Columbus's inability to comprehend, his diminution of linguistic control and his sense of linguistic estrangement led him to dismiss this community as 'gente salvaje'.<sup>52</sup> Thus, from the outset, the indigenous people's unwillingness or inability to conform to linguistic codes established by the colonial centre, were categorised according to Eurocentric codes of civility and savagery. In reality any distortion of this alternative culture was sourced in an inability by the Spanish to comprehend and to categorise linguistically.

Lienhard illustrates the centrality of the written word within the process of colonisation, through an examination of the role of the scribe or notary. As the first chronicler of events, as the recorder of the many incursions and debates which took place at the beginning of the process, the notary, according to Lienhard, played a primary and fundamental role:

... este personaje desempeñará la función de preservar por medio de la escritura, el control metropolitano sobre las empresas colonizadoras. <sup>53</sup>

He was, according to Lienhard, responsible for recording the renomination of the region as Columbus and subsequent colonisers, in almost Adamic fashion, gave Spanish names to this unfamiliar landscape and thus appropriated it on a linguistic level. Indigenous names were replaced by what Columbus and others perceived as approximations to their European languages.

Columbus repeatedly sought out equivalents in his own linguistic experiences. The scarves that the indigenous women wore were in his view similar to Moorish head-dresses, the maize was similar to wheat with which he was familiar and, on one occasion, while describing a particular landscape, Columbus compared it to the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Select Documents, Vol. II: op. cit., p. 103

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, p. 32.

gardens of Valencia in April.<sup>54</sup> Anthony Pagden refers to this phenomenon of linguistic appropriation and assimilation as 'attachment' and suggests that it was done to counter the colonisers' palpable sense of 'detachment' within the New World.55 Pagden illustrates how the spiritual, geographical and behavioural practices of indigenous America were also 're-cognised' and named. The desire to categorise, define and thus appropriate the unfamiliar propelled the European mission in the New World. One cannot overlook some of the other consequences of this process of linguistic appropriation. Columbus's penchant for naming the New World after Catholic saints such as Isla de Santa María de Concepción and San Salvador, clearly reflects his essential piety but also more serious proselytising intentions.<sup>56</sup> As Walter Ong suggests, such a process of nomination often simply reaffirms the sense of empowerment people feel over what they named.<sup>57</sup> His nomination of two islands after the Spanish King and Queen (Isla Fernandina and Isla Isabella) further confirms Columbus's inherent belief in the potentiality of the written word. Once ownership by the Spanish Crown was transcribed and recorded in this fashion, the rights of the original inhabitants to these lands were supplanted. Consequently, the positionality of the European colonisers was further endorsed.

What is apparent from this process of nomination and linguistic appropriation was that a crucial association was being established between language, in particular the written language, and political power. Thus, it seems valid to suggest that the colonial appropriation of the Americas was aided by the system of writing it imposed and by the inevitable inferiority experienced by the colonised oral community. This process culminated less than three hundred years after the arrival of the Spanish when, in 1770, Carlos III issued a decree which effectively abolished the use of any indigenous language in New Spain and prohibited any form of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Select Letters of Christopher Columbus (London: Hakluyt Society, 1870), pp. 120, 126 & 137.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Anthony Pagden, op. cit., pp. 17-49.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Christopher Miller also indicates how many of the African placenames were inscribed with similar colonialist religious prejudices and expectations of race and rational ability, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-11. <sup>57</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 33.

writing or printing in the colonies. This not only contributed to the further demise of the indigenous languages and cultures but also eroded further any sense of self-worth or legitimacy remaining within the colonised society.

When an oral culture is undermined by an unfamiliar, literate culture, mechanisms of defining self and national identity are also irrevocably distorted and altered. Colonial models of language and culture quickly become the primary and most effective means by which the canons and values of the colonising culture are established and sublimated.

The Kenyan novelist and critic, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, has explored the defining role of language on his own creative formation. As English and English literature were transformed into the official media of education and cultural expression in Kenya, his native language, Gikuyu, and in turn his authentic mode of expression, were irrevocably displaced. He recalled:

The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture ... language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds.<sup>58</sup>

What Ngugi wa Thiong'o has done is to strip language back to its essential communicative significance thus concluding that language is the essential means by which a community's ethical and aesthetic values are developed and explored:

Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world.<sup>59</sup>

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> 'The Language of African Literature', New Left Review (March-April, 1985), pp. 114 & 115.
 <sup>59</sup> ibid., p. 118.

He uncovered a process effected by the colonial centre which not only determined the manner in which his colonised self defined itself, but also the manner in which he came to be perceived by others. For Ngugi wa Thiong'o, language thus became the most effective tool applied by the colonisers to subvert the autochthonous community and identity:

In my view language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner.<sup>60</sup>

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's experiences were not unique. It was also the experience of many native speakers of the Irish language. When the National School system was established in Ireland in the 1830s, English became the language of commerce, law and modernity. Consequently, the Irish language quickly fell into decline, becoming a symbol of shame and retrogression, its usage largely restricted to isolated rural areas and to supposedly uneducated people. Linguistic colonisation is clearly most effective when the supplanted language and culture are defined primarily by orality, as was the case in Ireland, in pre-Columbian America and Africa. Both Pablo Neruda and Ernesto Cardenal have explored the defining role of language within the indigenous cultures of America, and as we will see in Chapters Three and Four, throughout much of the Canto general and Homenaje a los indios americanos, both poets equate a loss of identity with the displacement of language and indigenous language practices that occurred during colonisation.

However, on a socio-cultural level, this colonialist project can also divest the indigenous population of any sense of self-valence. Nicolás Guillén explored the consequences of this alienation for contemporary black Cuban's perceptions of self. A negation of their true cultural and linguistic identity, had, he believed, led to a complete distortion of self:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Decolonising the Mind - The Politics of Language in African Literature (London: James Currey, 1986), p. 9.

El negro cubano - para constreñir más nuestro pensamiento - vive al margen de su propia belleza. Siempre que tenga quien lo oiga, abomina del son, que hoy tanto tiene del negro; denigra la rumba, en cuyo ritmo cálido, bosteza el melodía africano, y cierra los ojos, como para que no le descubran un destello de comprensión, frente al profundo requerimiento del bongó, con su voz grave de abuelo. Parece que existe el miedo de ser negro.<sup>61</sup>

It is clear that any initial feelings of unfamiliarity and displacement which the early colonisers may have experienced on arrival in the Americas had been dispelled and replaced quite rapidly by an overriding sense of cultural and linguistic rectitude. Conversely, the success of the European project in the New World signalled the complete displacement and disintegration of the original identity of the region. The alternative identity that evolved as a result of this encounter between two distinct cultures would take many generations to unravel.

As one critic has pointed out, the construction of alternative identities was possible for many of the Spanish colonisers precisely because of their exploits in the 'New World'. Columbus renounced his more modest origins as a Genoese sailor and assumed the title of Admiral, Cortés, clearly not a learned man, became 'alcalde' and later Captain General, while Francisco Pizarro, coloniser of the Inca Empire, was able to shed his more humble origins as an illegitimate and illiterate orphan, and assume the rank of Marquis.<sup>62</sup>

### Spiritual Conversion of the Other

By the late fifteenth century, there was a nascent curiosity and thirst for information about the New World, as evidenced by the number of chronicles and historico-anthropological texts produced during this period. Around this time, concepts of race - of superior and inferior races - had also begun to emerge in Spain. This was

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> 'Rosendo Ruíz', Prosa de prisa I: op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Pagden, op. cit., pp. 4 & 35.

probably fomented by the onset of the Inquisition in 1478, which, I believe, played a major role in propagating the sense of insularity and intolerance viewed subsequently in Spanish attitudes in the New World. Spain at that time was seized by religious and social hysteria and by a widespread fear of the unknown.

The Inquisition required the conversion of Jews and Muslims to Christianity or to exile. However, the religious credentials of these new converts were continually questioned and as a group the 'conversos' were repeatedly perceived as a threat to the stability of the Spanish Empire. This sense of insecurity and insularity was further exacerbated by the discovery of some Protestant communities in Valladolid and Sevilla. When they arrived in the newly colonised lands, the Spanish simply transferred these perceptions of Catholicism as the one true religion and of its role as the defining indicator of civilisation. The apparently disparate, idolatrous practices which they observed in the New World, simply confirmed their belief that the non-Christian or paganism was akin to savagery.

Consequently, another underlying but highly influential factor underpinning the colonialist project was the divergence in religious beliefs between the Peninsula and the New World. This divergence convinced the early Spanish colonisers of the inherent savagery of the inhabitants of these new lands, and of their fundamental Christian duty to take charge of the spiritual conversion of the indigenous population. In the opinion of Martin Lienhard, this religious arrogance was inherently linked to their belief in the superiority of a chirographic culture:

Imbuidos de la 'universidad' del cristianismo y de su Escritura, los europeos se habían preparado para la conquista de Nuevos Mundos antes de saber a ciencia cierta si éstos existían. La Escritura y sus apéndices (las elaboraciones teológico-filosófico-gramaticales) les otorgaban el derecho de seguir tal práctica expansionista.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, they readily dismissed indigenous religious practices as barbaric and idolatrous and asserted the moral and legal superiority of their own traditions. Columbus was an extremely devout individual and, as I have suggested, this was not only apparent in his nomination of the new lands but also in his letters to the King and Queen of Spain, where he repeatedly drew attention to the potential for conversion of the native inhabitants of the New World:

y no conocían ninguna seta nin idolatría ... todos se entienden, que es cosa muy singular para lo que espero que determinarán Sus Altezas para la conversión d'ellos á nuestra fe, á la qual son muy dispuestos.<sup>64</sup>

As I have suggested, the early Spanish colonisers were undoubtedly influenced by the inquisitorial spirit of the time and their insistence on the conversion of the native inhabitants would, in common with their desire for cultural and linguistic homogeneity, prove to have long-term and complex consequences for the Native American psyche. In reality, what the Spanish were insisting upon was the conversion of the indigenous people from a polytheistic-based belief system which was inextricably linked to the cosmos and to the natural world, to the more markedly monotheistic world of the Christian belief system of Europe.

Peter Hulme provides further insight into European perceptions of indigenous American spirituality when he cites the phenomenon of the hurricane. Hulme has illustrated how this was often manipulated by the Europeans to attest to their own superlative spiritual identity and thereby justify their extra-evangelical activities.<sup>65</sup> For the English colonisers of the 16th and 17th centuries, the hurricane was an entirely novel meteorological experience and was initially viewed by them as a sign of God's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> Select Documents, Vol. I: op. cit., pp. 11-13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Hulme, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-101.

castigation of the native population. Gradually a link was implied between this unfamiliar meteorological phenomenon and the savagery of the indigenous inhabitants of the New World, prior to the arrival of the Christian colonisers. The storm and the subsequent post-storm calm thus became an allegorical representation of the indigent's deliverance from impiety and barbarity, by the civilising, evangelising imperial powers. Colonial expansion could thus be viewed as providential in nature and, as Hulme suggests, ultimately justifiable.

The complexities of the spiritual encounter between the European and the indigenous traditions can be illustrated further by an examination of the figure of Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas. Las Casas first travelled to the New World in 1502 as a soldier and chaplain and partook of the spoils of empire with little apparent reluctance.66 However, two significant incidents would contribute to his own 'conversion' and recast him in the role of defender of the rights of the indigenous population. The first of these incidents occurred in 1512 when Las Casas, a deeply religious man, was refused absolution on the grounds that he owned Indian slaves. In 1514, he became aware of a famous sermon delivered by Brother Antonio de Montesinos, condemning the barbarous injustices perpetrated by the Spanish colonisers. Subsequently, Las Casas underwent a spiritual and moral conversion. He returned to Spain and went to study in Salamanca and then to the Dominican friary in Valladolid, where he took his final vows in 1524. Although he had been engaged in a sustained debate concerning the very nature of the indigenous people of the New World from 1514 onwards, his ordination propelled him into a life-long defence of this same native population.

The debate concerning the indigenous population of the New World centred on the supposed racial and cultural inferiority of the original inhabitants of the New World and the moral and legal right of the Spanish Crown to colonise it. This polemic developed quite rapidly, from the beginning of the conquest and reached its

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> José Ortega, 'Las Casas, reformador social y precursor de la *teología de la liberación*', *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 466 (April, 1989), pp. 70-1.

apogee in an important debate which took place between Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in 1550-1, less than 60 years after Columbus's first voyage to the Americas. Although a Papal Bull of 1508 would confer the Spanish with the 'legal authority' to colonise the New World, Las Casas continued to contest the barbarity of the methods employed.<sup>67</sup>

Having witnessed at first hand the brutality and extremes of cruelty inflicted on the native population, Las Casas had begun to question the legitimacy of the Spanish colonisation. He refused to concur with those who believed that the Indians were natural slaves and thus inconvertible on a spiritual level. On the contrary, he held the view that their personal freedom was essential to their future religious conversion and moral salvation.<sup>68</sup> Curiously Sepúlveda, Las Casas's interlocutor, was in many ways emblematic of a position which had already begun to wane in 16th century Spain, insofar as he advocated the necessary use of violence to liberate the native Americans from their inherent barbarity and inhumanity. He based his primary arguments on Aristotle's *Politics* and on the Aristotelian belief that subject people were inherently inferior.

Therefore, given the supposed idolatrous and barbaric nature of the religious practices of the native Americans, Sepúlveda concluded that the Spanish Crown had a legitimate right, indeed an obligation, to civilise and convert the pagan population to Christianity. He believed that their idolatrous practices and their barbarous practice of human sacrifices placed them virtually beyond the realms of humanity.

Las Casas, however, proposed a series of counter arguments. In his *Apología*, he refuted many of Sepúlveda's arguments and defended the humanity of the Indians with the following assertion:

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 74-9.

Dios ... no despreció a estos pueblos del Nuevo Mundo de tal manera que quisiera que estuvieran faltos de razón y los hiciera semejantes a los brutos animales, hasta el punto de que deban ser llamados bárbaros, inhumanos, salvajes y brutos como ésos (Sepúlveda y sus partidarios) piensan e imaginan.<sup>69</sup>

Las Casas went on to suggest:

Los indios son de tan buenos entendimientos y tan agudos de ingenio, de tanta capacidad y tan dóciles para cualquiera sciencia moral y especulativa doctrina, y tan ordenados, por la mayor parte, proveídos y razonables en su policía, teniendo muchas leyes justísimas.<sup>70</sup>

In their defence, Las Casas also highlighted the sophisticated levels of societal organisation which the native Americans had achieved prior to the arrival of the Spaniards:

... tenían estados rectamente organizados ... prudentemente administrados con excelentes leyes, religión e instituciones. Cultivaba la amistad y unidos en sociedad de vida, habitaban muy grandes ciudades, en las que prudentemente, con justicia y equidad, administraban los negocios tanto de la paz como de la guerra.<sup>71</sup>

Although Las Casas would suggest the importation of slaves from Africa as an alternative to any further exploitation of the native Americans, a proposal he would subsequently withdraw, he had genuinely sought to alleviate the plight of the indigenous people.<sup>72</sup> Las Casas is nevertheless a rather polemical figure because, as José Ortega points out, although he sought to humanise the practices of the Spanish, he was also emblematic of the colonial enterprise:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> 'Apologia', Obras completas, Vol. IX (Madrid: Alianza, 1988), pp. 81-3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Tratados de Fray Bartolomé de las Casas (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1965), p. 377.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Obras completas: op. cit., pp. 105-7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Jose Ortega, op. cit., pp. 79-82 and Todorov, op. cit., Chapter 3.

... no dejó de debatirse entre el problema de la justicia respecto al indio y una colonización rentable.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, the spiritual colonisation of the New World continued unabated, with many generations of priests and evangelists conceiving of their mission as one that bore the imprimatur of God.

#### Defining the Other

The ambiguity and inconsistency of the European response to the New World would remain constant throughout much of the next three centuries and is very much in evidence in its cultural and philosophical responses. In both The Tempest and Othello for example, Shakespeare appears to reinforce many of the stereotypes and assumptions prevalent during the 17th century. In The Tempest - first performed in 1611 - Miranda and Prospero, cast adrift in an unknown, but, exotic location, are confronted by two antithetical representations of the Other.74 Caliban, the deformed and 'savage' slave is perceived as cultureless, with unbridled sexual instincts. Ariel, his antipodal alternative, is an embodiment of a free artistic spirit and of the contrary positive potential also offered by the new world.<sup>75</sup> Shakespeare's representation of Othello is also inscribed with a similar ambivalence. Although at the outset he is apparently noble, he is ultimately degraded and exposed as flawed. The expressed ethnic distinctions between Desdemona and Othello are malevolently manipulated by Iago to bring about Othello's downfall and ultimately his suicide. On one occasion Iago plants doubt in Othello's mind about the nature of Desdemona's love for him, by suggesting a misalliance based solely on their ethnic differences:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> (London: Penguin Books, 1968)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Peter Hulme chronicles the repeated dehumanisation of Caliban by Shakespeare and notes that 'monster' or a derivative of same is employed on 37 occasions to describe Caliban, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-14.

... to be bold with you, Not to affect many proposèd matches Of her own clime, complexion, and degree, Whereto we see in all things nature tends, Foh! One may smell in such a will most rank, Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural.<sup>76</sup>

The apparently sophisticated nature of European society during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, fuelled largely by the industrial and scientific advances of the period, not only reinforced earlier assumptions of racial and rational superiority but also continued to provoke paradoxical responses. Over the first two hundred years of the colonisation, Europe had viewed high levels of sophistication in some indigenous societies and obvious advances in mathematics and astronomy. Alongside these were the continuing antagonistic perceptions of the indigenous people as cannibals and sun-worshippers. As Christopher Miller suggests:

The dual image of the noble and the ignoble savage that was to flower in the eighteenth century was already captured in the constant representation of indians as cannibals alongside the image of them as innocent beings.<sup>77</sup>

Hence it was that in 1750, Rousseau could refer to the 'noble savage', so beloved of the period of the Enlightenment and Kant could continue to negate the humanity of the indigenous population of the Americas by referring to them as half-beasts, completely devoid of human emotions. Anthropology during the 18th and 19th centuries was conflated with philosophy and morality. Thus, the apparent unsophistication of the societies of the New World implied an inability on the part of the inhabitants of these societies to distinguish between right and wrong, thus further distancing the rationalism of European thought from the intuitive and more impulsive nature of the non-European world. The subsequent rise of capitalism and the cult of individualism

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Othello (Middlesex: Penguin, 1983), Act III, scene iii, vv. 226-31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> op. cit., p. 5. Also see Peter Wade, op. cit., p. 26; Todorov, op. cit., p. 49 and Peter Mason, op, cit., p. 22.

inherent in European development (particularly during the 17th and 18th centuries) should also, I believe, be considered as important contributing factors in Europe's predatory relationship with the Americas. If the region and its people were still perceived as uncivilised and barbaric, it would appear that Europe, as the superior culture, also had a legitimate right to appropriate and possess.<sup>78</sup>

This debate carried on apace and perhaps one of the most reprehensible manifestations of the inherent racism which underpinned European thought during the period of 'enlightenment' was the science of phrenology - the measuring of head circumferences - which came into vogue in the early nineteenth century. Bogus scientific experiments had, it seemed, produced irrefutable proof that non-white/non-European people were inferior or inadequate because of the size of their heads which, according to the thinking at the time, measured the capacity for rational thought. Thus, the supposed barbarity and animality of the non-European, (especially non-white Europeans) had been transformed into undisputed scientific fact. One critic, María Teresa Martínez Blanco, suggests that this European sense of racial superiority and conversely the supposed bestiality of the non-European, was derived principally from the sense of decline and decadence prevalent in 19th century France. It manifested itself, Martínez claims, in an assault on all things non-Germanic or Anglo-Saxon in origin, as these were deemed to have contributed to the decline of Europe.<sup>79</sup>

Allied to the important scientific and industrial breakthroughs of the time, Europe was also gripped by a pseudo-scientific curiosity about the nature and origins of humanity. By the mid-19th century this had prompted widespread anthropological investigation into what were considered 'primitive' societies of this other world, which Aimé Césaire dismisses as 'rigged investigations' and 'self-serving generalisations', but which

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Peter Wade, *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> María Teresa Martínez Blanco, *Identidad cultural de Hispanoamérica - Europeísmo y originalidad americana* (Madrid: Editorial de la Universidad Complutense, 1988), pp. 51-4.

contributed to a further development of existing theories of inferior and superior races.<sup>80</sup> Jules Ferry's speech to the 1884-5 Berlin Conference is indicative of the prevailing view of the time:

It must be openly said that the superior races have rights over inferior races ... I repeat that the superior races have a right because they have a duty. They have a duty to civilize the inferior races.<sup>81</sup>

The German philosopher, Friedrich Büchner, believed that black people existed somewhere on the evolutionary scale between man and animals. In Büchner's view, the alleged irrationality and instinctiveness of these marginal peoples put them on a par with brute animals. The French philosopher Joseph de Gobineau, a contemporary of Büchner, wrote a famous essay entitled 'Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines' (written between 1853-5) in which he offered similar theories on the supposed irrationality of the Black African. The explicit racism of his theory is exemplified in the following statement on the irrationality of black people:

Ce n'est cependant pas une brute pure et simple, que ce nègre à front étroit et fuyant, qui porte, dans la partie moyenne de son crâne, les indices de certaines énergies grossièement puissantes. Si ces facultés pensantes sont médiocres ou même nulles, il possède dans le désir et par suite dans la volunté, une intensité souvent terrible.<sup>82</sup>

However, as Leo Frobenius, the German ethnologist who would prove to be so influential for the Négritude movements, suggested in a lecture in 1931:

... traffic in human beings has never been an easy business to answer for. It demanded justification. So the negro was

- <sup>81</sup> Quoted by Julio Finn, Voices of Négritude (London: Quartet Books, 1988), p. 15.
- <sup>82</sup> Quoted in Miller, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 35.

transformed into a semi-animal, an article of trade ... the concept of the 'barbaric negro' is a European creation ...<sup>83</sup>

The emergence of these new sciences, with their emphasis on rationalism and materialism, also prompted a nostalgia for innocence and subsequently fuelled a primitivism in the European artistic imagination during the second half of the 19th century. Darwin's theory of evolution and in particular that elaborated in his two important studies; The Origin of Species (1859) and The Descent of Man (1871) were also significant contributing factors to this new fascination with so-called primitive societies and the New World. Darwin proposed that all life forms had evolved from a common ancestry, from a more primeval model, through a process of natural selection. Subsequently, these primitive societies were seen to have been supplanted by the far superior models of society and culture in existence in white European society. In 1890, the Scottish anthropologist James George Frazer also published a comparative study of the myths and rituals of primitive societies entitled The Golden Bough. Frazer's thesis was, like Darwin's, evolutionary in nature although he did seek to validate in some way the folklore and religiosity of these primitive societies.

In addition, the Romantic movement, generally viewed as a reaction against the industrialism and utilitarianism of the age, sought to revive a pride in the *volksgeist*, and in the past heroism and folk-tales of ancestors. This essential negation of modernity and tradition served to stimulate further interest in what were generally considered to be primitive peoples. The characterisation of Don Alvaro in the Duque de Rivas's Romantic play *Don Alvaro o la fuerza del sino* (1835) however testifies to a continuing ambivalence underpinning the European position in this regard. Although ultimately viewed as far superior to the Calatrava family, Don Alvaro is nevertheless regarded with a mixture of unease and mistrust by the Calatravas and some of the other characters, precisely because of his non-peninsular origins. As was

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>83</sup> 'Reflections on African Art', *Leo Frobenius - An Anthology* (Eike Haberland, ed.) (Weisbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GmbH., 1973), p. 58.

commonplace throughout much of European letters of the period, blackness or a darker complexion were equated repeatedly with the devil or with a sense of sin and punishment.<sup>84</sup> The unfamiliar or the incomprehensible continued to be perceived as a form of retribution for sins committed or as the subhuman.

However, by the late 19th century, many European artists, most notably Gauguin, had begun to look to the colour and vitality of the non-European world for alternative inspiration. The apparently uncorrupted landscapes of the New Worlds facilitated a return to a 'beginning of art' and were thus viewed as a welcome alternative to what many artists saw as the contaminated landscapes of Europe. The exotic utopianism and novelty of the American and African terrains appear to have provided an alternative to the *fin de siècle* crisis of faith that had shattered the European psyche.

In the early years of the new century, the German ethnologist Leo Frobenius had begun a series of investigations into African societies and culture which would also question the rationalism of 19th century approaches to anthropology. What Frobenius sought to assert was that all nations, societies and cultures develop linearly, thus countering previous assumptions about the innate superiority of European society. He based his theory on an analogy between societal development and the natural evolution of the human mind, from the more intuitive world of childhood, through the ideational processes of youth culminating in the more reflective and rational stages of adulthood.<sup>85</sup>

Later, artists such as Picasso and Braque began to explore more 'primitivising' influences of art, such as those of the early Greek and Egyptian traditions. Picasso, in particular in the early phases of Cubism, was heavily influenced by the conceptual approach of Negro sculpture which he had become acquainted with through Matisse and Derain and which he believed signified a more honest and complete representation of the human form than any

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> Wade, op. cit., p. 8 & Miller, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> 'The Nature of Culture', Leo Frobenius - An Anthology: op. cit., pp. 19-55.

European model to date. This influence is particularly evident in a painting such as his 'Les Demoiselles d'Avignon' (1907).<sup>86</sup>

Thus it is clear that from the initial contact between these two worlds there existed an underlying ambivalence and polarity in the European attitude to the new worlds. For the most part, Europe engaged in a determined and deliberate campaign to subvert and destroy the alternative identity it had encountered, rather than engage and relate to its alterity and difference. Latin America continued to signify the non-civilised and the barbaric in the European mindset, and its apparent impenetrability and novelty prompted an unrelenting wave of colonisers, from golddiggers and proselytisers to anthropologists and archaeologists, all of whom were intent on (re)defining, modifying and ultimately taming the apparently unbridled instincts and structures of these new worlds. Invariably it proved easier for most of these colonisers to disavow and dehumanise the native Americans and assimilate them to their European perceptions, rather than relate with any degree of honesty to their difference.

## Re-colonising the Other

The imposition of any new spiritual, linguistic or cultural hegemony is, as I have outlined, a complex and labyrinthine process. The manner in which alterity is established and sustained and the nature of the colonialist discourse contribute to the diverse responses to the task of cultural decolonisation. Nonetheless, at a certain point in their historical development, most colonised communities begin to unravel and question the nature of their relationship with the colonial centre. From an initial sense of incomprehension of the imposed colonial culture, colonised self gradually arrives at the a moment of comprehension, when the imposed perceptions of self and nationhood are decoded and unravelled. A realisation of the enormity of that which has been subverted or lost ultimately leads to a more intuitive stage of prehension, and ultimately, the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> Douglas Cooper, *The Cubist Epoch* (New York: Phaidon Press, 1971), pp. 17-42.

reassertion of a revised and renewed sense of identity. The ensuing discourse is, without question, complex and often incomplete.<sup>87</sup> It is an ongoing process, an exercise in transitu, not dissimilar to the process of colonisation itself. As a discourse, it embraces many discrete critical and imaginative responses all of seek to address issues such as retrogression which and recuperation of a pre-colonial reality, as well as hybridisation and positive issues of cross-culturality. The process more of decolonisation is often, but not always, allied to movements or aspirations for political change and independence, but issues relating to the political permutations of the originary colonial experience are, I believe, inevitably foregrounded.

In The Wretched of the Earth, Frantz Fanon, the Algerian revolutionary theorist, outlined what he believed was the evolutionary nature of this process in the following manner.<sup>88</sup> The initial phase, Fanon suggested, is rarely destructive or rejectionist nature but rather assimilative. Fanon believed that such in mimeticism and self-censorship, on both a cultural and linguistic level, is often designed to ensure continued self-preservation and instil a sense of belonging and placement within the colonised culture. At this stage, a desire to conform and belong invariably overshadows any underlying desire to create or define an innovative and independent identity. The next phase is quite distinct. Fanon suggested that at this juncture, the native intellectual begins to recall, by means of a 'borrowed aestheticism', a reality which predates the colonised reality. Fanon referred to this phase as a 'disturbed phase' and clearly viewed it as a more reflective and nostalgic period, wherein a suppressed collective memory is reactivated. Subsequent to this experience is the third and final phase. As suggested by Fanon, it is not only the most complex but also the most creative period in the evolution of any post-colonial culture. He referred to it as the 'fighting phase'. This phase, in his view, is essentially an exercise in self and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Even the term post-colonial has prompted debate. See Stephen Slemon, 'Post-colonial Critical Theories', *New National and Post-colonial Literatures* (Bruce King, ed.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 178-97.
<sup>88</sup> (UK: Penguin, 1969), pp. 178-9.

collective re-assertion and invariably impels the production of a new kind of national literature.

What is most striking about Fanon's definition of the development of post-colonial culture is that he viewed it as an exercise which comprises the identification and reconciliation of both pre-colonial and colonial influences. The process of decolonisation was never viewed by Fanon as an essentialist project, which seeks to reinvent an original, more 'authentic' pre-colonial culture as the only true expression of the native culture. In its place, Fanon proposes a representation of a revised native culture, which seeks to celebrate the binary influences that have shaped and contributed to the emerging post-colonial identity.

I believe that if one interprets post-coloniality in this way, as a process of reconciliation, as an acceptance of the convergence of both colonial and pre-colonial factors, the natural fluidity of cultural development is more ably described. As a consequence, the quest for a wholesale rehabilitation of a pre-colonial 'authenticity' is rendered largely invalid.

As a colonised community begins to unravel its relationship with the colonial centre, invariably the means of cultural expression assume a new significance. Language, and, in particular a recognition of the linguistic differences which distinguish the excentric discourse from that of the colonial centre prove pivotal to the processes of individual and collective redefinition which occur during the process of decolonisation. The perceived inequality of the counter-discourse prompts many native intellectuals to reexamine the very nature of the language of this discourse. In *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, we recall how Stephen Dedalus articulated his sense of linguistic estrangement, as he compared his use of the English language to that spoken by the Dean of English Studies:

How different are the words 'home', 'Christ', 'ale', 'master', on his lips and on mine. I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech.<sup>89</sup>

The authors of The Empire Writes Back suggest that a revision of language often begins with an abrogation of the privileging of the language of centre.<sup>90</sup> Bill Ashcroft et al suggest that this process is often manifest in the manner in which the colonised community begins to exhibit a nascent frustration with the inherited or imposed idiom and subsequently question its normative position. This is coupled with an appropriation or re-appropriation of the de-privileged ex-centric idiom by the marginalised, colonised community. What ensues is a reshaping of the imposed language, so that it more ably reflects local expression and experience. The first phase in this decolonisation of language necessarily comprises a process of negation and destruction of established canons. This is allied to, or followed by, a more regenerative and creative process, which builds on existing hybridised structures, inscribing them with a validity and positionality hitherto denied. To this end, Chantal Zabus, citing both Salman Rushdie and the Iranian writer Taghi Modarressi, writes:

When 'the Empire writes back to the centre', it does so not so much with a vengeance as 'with an accent', by using language that topples discourse conventions of the so-called 'centre' and inscribing post-colonial language variants from the 'margin' or 'the periphery' in the text.<sup>91</sup>

A growing awareness of the nature of marginalised expression can evoke several complex responses. For some writers, such as the Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe, there is a certain jarring inevitability about their choice of language:

... for me there is no other choice, I have been given the language and I intend to use it.  $^{92}$ 

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> (London: Secker & Warburg, 1994), pp. 198-9.
 <sup>90</sup> op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> 'Language, Orality and Literature', New National and Post-colonial Literatures: op. cit, p. 34.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> Quoted in 'The Language of African Literature' by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

For others, the challenges afforded by their position as writers on the periphery are both privileged and positive. In *Confieso que he vivido*, Pablo Neruda recalled how throughout his life he had felt a desire to expand upon the inherited Spanish idiom and adapt it to reflect the local reality more accurately:

Mi frontera tenía que sobrepasarla yo mismo; no me la había trazado en el bastidor de una cultura distante. Yo tenía que ser yo mismo, esforzándome por extenderme como las propias tierras en donde me tocó nacer.<sup>93</sup>

Oscar Wilde, for example, commenting on the paradox of his experience as an Irishman writing in English, would boast:

The Saxons took our lands from us and made them destitute ... but we took their language and added new beauties to it.<sup>94</sup>

Neruda, although acutely conscious of the need to reshape the colonial language which he had inherited, also acknowledged the positive contributions of this colonial language. In *Confieso que he vivido*, he observed:

Qué buen idioma el mío, qué buena lengua heredamos de los conquistadores torvos ...<sup>95</sup>

He then went on to illustrate how this linguistic discourse between the coloniser and the colonised was in reality a reciprocal transference of influences:

Éstos andaban a zancadas por las tremendas cordilleras, por las Américas encrespadas, buscando patatas, butifarras, frijolitos, tabaco negro, oro maíz, huevos fritos, con aquel apetito voraz que nunca más se ha visto en el mundo ... Todo se lo tragaban, con religiones, pirámides, tribus, idolatrías iguales a las que ellos traían en sus grandes bolsas ... Por

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> Confieso que he vivido (Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, 1976), p. 364.
 <sup>94</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), p. 35.
 <sup>95</sup> op. cit., p. 77.

donde pasaban quedaba arrasada la tierra ... Pero a los bárbaros se les caían de las botas, de las barbas, de los yelmos, de las herraduras, como piedrecitas, las palabras luminosas que se quedaron aquí resplandecientes ... el idioma. Salimos perdiendo ... Salimos ganando ... Se llevaron el oro y nos dejaron el oro ... Se lo llevaron todo y nos dejaron todo ... Nos dejaron las palabras.<sup>96</sup>

This positive appraisal of the creative potential of crossculturality can be detected repeatedly in both the poetry and prose of Nicolás Guillén. It is evident in poems such as 'La canción del bongó' and 'Balada de los dos abuelos' where Guillén repeatedly highlights the syncretism of his Cuban identity, by celebrating the contributions of both the colonial and African traditions. In this regard one of the most important influences on Guillén was his compatriot José Martí who as we will see in Chapter Two, repeatedly affirmed the development and enrichment of the inherited peninsular idiom as one of the central objectives of Modernism.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o also sought to make the language of the colonial centre much more inclusive of and responsive to the idiom of the margins. His response, in common with those of Neruda and Guillén, was also to celebrate the creative potential afforded by his peripherality. In *Writing against Colonialism*, he pointed to the vibrancy of the hybridised language, especially that exhibited in the work of many African writers during the 1950s and 1960s:

The writer even flaunted his right to use the language of the former colonial master anyway he liked ... The Caliban of the colonial world had been given European languages and he was going to use them even to subvert the master.<sup>97</sup>

This affirmative embrace of the imposed language is also evident in the responses of many writers in the English-speaking Caribbean. The Guyanese writer Wilson Harris envisaged a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 77-8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> Writing against Colonialism (Middlesex: Vita Books, 1986), pp. 2-3.

creative renaissance which was sourced in the revised imaginative responses of the artist or writer that could transcend the fetters of the colonial experience:

I believe the possibility exists for us to become involved in perspectives of renascence which can bring into play a figurative meaning beyond an apparently real world or prison of history - I believe a philosophy of history may well lie buried in the arts of the imagination.<sup>98</sup>

In a similar fashion, Derek Walcott urged New World writers to transcend the limitations of history. Rather than being subservient and respondent to their colonial past, Walcott urged writers in the post-colonial context to embrace the potentiality of a new 'history-less' present. On this occasion, Walcott was not suggesting a negation of the colonial reality, but rather urged the creation of a new idiom which would articulate the binary and 'ambi-valent' influences which had shaped the language of the colonies:

The great poetry of the New World does not pretend to such innocence, its vision is not naive. Rather, like its fruits, its savour is a mixture of the acid and the sweet, the apples of its second Eden have the tartness of experience.<sup>99</sup>

In an article exploring the demise of the centrality of the English colonial tradition, Terry Eagleton suggests that the nature of postcolonial culture originates in and is determined precisely by the ex-centric formation of its writers:

Positioned as they were within essentially peripheral histories, such artists could view native English lineages less

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> Quoted in Michael Dash, 'Marvellous Realism - The Way out of Negritude', *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (Bill Ashcroft *et al.*, eds.) (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 200-201. Also see Wilson Harris's article 'Adversarial Contexts and Creativity', *New Left Review*, 154 (November-December, 1985), pp. 124-7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> 'The Muse of History', *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* (Alison Donnell & Sarah Lawson Welsh, eds.) (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 356-7.

as a heritage to be protected than as an object to be problematized. <sup>100</sup>

For many post-colonial writers however even the denomination of their hybridised idiom presents a dilemma. In The Empire Writes Back the ex-centric use of English is distinguished from that employed by the colonial centre, with the lower-case 'english' used to denote the language of the margins.<sup>101</sup> However such a term carries connotations of inferiority. The marginal language is also often referred to as a 'dialect', but this term similarly resonates with suggestions of inferiority. However, the West Indian writer, Edward Kamau Brathwaite suggests an interesting alternative - 'nation language' - to connote English as it is spoken in the Caribbean.<sup>102</sup> According to Brathwaite, for too long, the English-speaking Caribbean had been defined by canonical standards imposed from the colonial centre. This neologism therefore inscribes the ex-centric idiom, the language of the margins, with a validity and a positionality which celebrates and affirms its alterity, rather than negating it.

One of the key ways in which the ex-centric language or 'nationlanguage' is reaffirmed, and, by which colonialism is further interrogated, is by the privileging of orality or oralised discourse within written literature. Invariably this is articulated by the resuscitation of what are perceived to be the more collective, participatory art-forms characteristic of traditional societies, often referred to as orature.<sup>103</sup> These discourses, which seek to approximate orality, are inextricably linked to the processes of narration or performance and are often perceived by post-colonial writers as the locale of a more authentic, pre-colonial idiom. By reclaiming orality - the locale of the pre-colonial - they are also reclaiming an authenticity lost to them as a result of colonialism.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>100</sup> 'The end of English', *Textual Practice*, Vol. I, no. I (Spring, 1987), p. 1. <sup>101</sup> op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> 'Nation Language', *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader: op. cit.*, pp. 309-313. <sup>103</sup> For many critics, the term 'orature' has replaced the more problematic term of 'oral literature' to describe the culture of an oral tradition, given that it does not imply a variance of writing as the etymology of the latter suggests. See Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: op. cit.*, pp. 10-11 and *The Empire Writes Back: op. cit.*, pp. 127-8.

Such a prioritisation of oral art-forms is central to the verse of both Guillén and Cardenal. In *Motivos de son* (1930), Guillén clearly evokes and recreates the speech-patterns of the oral vernacular. Although hugely controversial in Cuba at the time of its publication, Guillén justified the language models used in *Motivos de son* as a means of reaffirming the role and contributions of black people to Cuban letters and culture:

Yo creo que ellos hicieron volver los ojos de la crítica oficial hacia un fenómeno no considerado hasta entonces importante ... el papel del negro en la cultura nacional, de que eran prueba aquellos poemas cuyo ritmo indicaba la posibilidad de amulatar el romance español, esto es, cubanizarlo, volviéndolo a su ser prístino.<sup>104</sup>

The suggestion of an alternative idiom, structures and rhythms was central to Guillén's perception of a revitalised lyrical tradition. Similarly, Cardenal's concern with a retrieval of a more authentic idiom is viewed in his evocation of the processes of language production in indigenous societies and in his incorporation of snippets of contemporary conversations, of swear words and colloquial terms into the lyrical context. Neruda may not have been as concerned with such a representation of the oral vernacular as Guillén and Cardenal were, but he was acutely conscious of one of the central tenets of orature; the delivery and communication of his poetry. In Confieso que he vivido, he recalls a particularly evocative moment among coal-miners in Lota. Just as he was about to read from his poem 'Nuevo canto de amor a Stalingrado', the crowd simultaneously raised their hats in recognition of his contribution to their endeavours. Neruda thus remarked:

*Entonces mi poema creció y cobró como nunca su acento de guerra y de liberación.*<sup>105</sup>

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> 'Conversación con Nicolás Guillén', *Recopilación de textos sobre Nicolás Guillén* (Nancy Morejón, ed.) (La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1974), p. 42.
 <sup>105</sup> op. cit., p. 357.

In his Nobel speech he also affirmed this collective and communicative function of verse, by citing the principal aim of poetry as 'la comunicación de lo que somos'.<sup>106</sup>

Chantal Zabus suggests the term 'relexification' to describe how colonised writers inscribe the imposed or inherited idiom with the lexicon and rhythms of the indigenous language or the oral vernacular.<sup>107</sup> The inherent danger in such a revalorisation of orality, of a supposed indigenity, is that the work produced by both indigenous artists and by indigenist sympathisers can often be an invented, fictionalised construct of the indigenous from a post-colonial perspective, rather than one which accurately reflects the pre-colonial reality.

The issue of the retrieval of a pre-colonial purity can be quite divisive within theories of post-coloniality. Many question whether the re-invention of such an uncontaminated, 'authentic' pre-colonial idiom is possible, and if the negation of the cross-culturality which inevitably unfolds within the colonialist experience is at all plausible.<sup>108</sup> The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* also affirm the complexities of such a task:

The post-colonial text is always a complex and hybridised formation. It is inadequate to read it either as a reconstruction of pure traditional values or as simply foreign and intrusive. The reconstruction of 'pure' cultural value is always conducted within a radically altered dynamic of power relations.<sup>109</sup>

Helen Tiffin also believes that any attempt to retrieve a pure, uncontaminated pre-colonial text or idiom, is impossible. She suggests that writers addressing issues of post-coloniality do have

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> Discurso pronunciado con ocasión de la entrega del Premio Nobel de Literatura, 1971 (Paris: Centre de Recherches Hispaniques, 1972), pp. 18-19.
<sup>107</sup> op. cit., pp. 35-37. Also see another article by Zabus entitled 'Relexification', where she explores this issue in more depth in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader: op. cit.*, pp. 314-8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>108</sup> See Linda Hutcheon, 'Circling the Downspout of Empire' and Gareth Griffiths, 'The Myth of Authenticity' in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader: op. cit.*, pp. 130-5 and pp. 237-241 respectively. <sup>109</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 110.

two other primary functions; firstly to 'interrogate' the resultant hybridised discourses and secondly, to 'investigate' the manner in which the colonial hegemony was imposed and perpetuated.<sup>110</sup>

By and large, the work produced by 'authentic' indigenous groups is unavoidably hybridised and contaminated, although some traditional, uncontaminated art-forms can be located within isolated pre-literate communities. However, if a community has been exposed to a distinct culture, either on a visual, verbal or literate level, its original synthesis is inevitably contaminated.

For some writers however, once their alterity is recognised, the continued use of the colonial language in any form evokes feelings of guilt and anxiety at having abandoned their autochthonous language. Rather than celebrating the creative potential of the hybridised counter-discourse as Wilde chose to do, some writers begin to experience a growing unease with this imposed idiom. For Ngugi wa Thiong'o such continued unease with the use of the colonial language prompted him to revert to his native Gikuyu in 1977.<sup>111</sup> By doing so, he hoped not to return to an idealised, pre-colonial condition, but rather saw it as an additional, reaffirming tool within the process of decolonisation, and one which was inextricably linked to the continuing political struggles:

I believe that my writing in Gikuyu language, a Kenyan language, an African language, is part and parcel of the antiimperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples ... But writing in our languages ... will not in itself bring about the renaissance in African cultures if that literature does not carry the content of our peoples' anti-imperialist struggles to liberate their productive forces from foreign control.<sup>112</sup>

An interrogation of colonialism can, I believe, be articulated through this privileging of orality or an oralised discourse within the post-colonial culture. It can also, as I have illustrated, be

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>110</sup> Helen Tiffin, 'Post-colonial Literatures and Counter-discourse', *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader: op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>111</sup> Recalled in 'The Language of African Literature', *op. cit*, p. 125. <sup>112</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 126 & 127.

achieved by a recognition of the potentiality of the resultant hybridised idiom.

## Politics and the Post-colonial Discourse

Another way in which the colonial discourse is interrogated, and ultimately subverted, is through a foregrounding of the political or material reality. The question of a politicised literary discourse is an often vexed and highly problematic issue as Tom Paulin has suggested:

We have been taught, many of us, to believe that art and politics are separated by the thickest and most enduring of partitions. Art is a garden of pure perfect forms which effortlessly 'transcends' that world of compromise, cruelty, dead language and junk cars which Manicheans dismiss as mere politics. Art stands for freedom, while politics is a degrading bondage we must reject and escape from.<sup>113</sup>

The de-politicised universalism which modernism and postmodernism often seek to promote is undermined by the centrality of ideology evident in much post-colonial discourse. As the Haitian poet and critic René Depestre observed of this intermeshing of concerns of socio-political importance and those pertaining to the aesthetic:

... the relationships between consciousness and reality are extremely complex. That's why it is equally necessary to decolonise our minds, our inner life, at the same time that we decolonise society.<sup>114</sup>

However, in the post-colonial context the political is all too often misunderstood or mistakenly prioritised over aesthetic considerations. From the outset, it is imperative to stress that not all post-colonial counter-discourse is overtly political either in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> The Faber Book of Political Verse (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), p. 15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>114</sup> Observed during the course of an interview with Aimé Césaire in 1967, in Havana contained in *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 78.

nature or in design. Much post-colonial writing prefers to lay emphasis on other equally significant issues, such as those already discussed; the nature and formation of linguistic expression and other issues pertaining to cross-culturality. However, Guillén, Neruda and Cardenal, particularly in the periods which I have chosen to focus on, stressed the intertextuality of life experiences and endorsed the belief that cultural identity is an intrinsic component of the much broader debate surrounding political and historical identity. However, all three poets underwent periods of transition as they were not always of the view that politics and culture could be or were conjoined in such a fashion.

A combination of political and economic events, together with several incidents of artistic significance, would propel Guillén's rejection of his previous apolitical verse. In the late 1920s, prior to the publication of both *Motivos de son* and *Sóngoro cosongo*, the poet was clearly frustrated with the limitations and content of the lyrical form. On the whole, he viewed poetry as elitist and irrelevant with regard to the material reality:

# ¡Oh, si pudiera expresarse la poesía eliminando el verso! 115

He abandoned his legal studies and stopped writing poetry altogether. Angel Augier suggests that this decision was in many ways one of the most significant he would ever make in his life:

Al abandonar su torre de marfil, recuperó la condición de hombre común que comparte con sus semejantes la existencia cotidiana sin complicaciones retóricas ni sutilezas líricas.<sup>116</sup>

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War would confirm this realliance with the world. In 1937, as he recalled the successes of El*mono azul*, the journal of the 'Alliance of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals for the Defence of Culture', Guillén observed:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>115</sup> Letter to Félix Nápoles. Cited by Angel Augier in the prologue to Obra poética I (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1995), p. xv.
<sup>116</sup> ibid., p. xiii.

... vino a demostrar objetivamente que la 'torre de marfil' es estúpida, egoísta, y que humanidad y cultura, arte y vida, son conceptos correlativos en nuestros días.<sup>117</sup>

Many years later, in a lecture given at the 'Second Conference of Afro-Asian Writers' in 1962, Guillén again stressed this link between politics and culture by highlighting the manner in which colonialism seeks to negate and distort the cultural identity of colonised nations:

Durante mucho tiempo los pueblos de América Latina han vivido sin conocerse, y no exageramos al decir que no se conocen realmente todavía ... Junto a la presión económica, los Estados Unidos ejercen en los países latinoamericanos ... una influencia nefasta, destinada a deformar y no pocas veces destruir las culturas propias.<sup>118</sup>

Consequently, in the poet's view, the Cuban revolution had of necessity to embrace issues relating to culture and cultural identity, as well as those of economic and political significance:

Por eso nuestra revolución no ha sido sólo contra lo político, lo económico, lo social que estaba podrido en Cuba, sino también contra lo que había de corrompido en la cultura cubana a causa de la cercanía imperial.<sup>119</sup>

Cardenal was of a similar opinion regarding the links between culture and the material reality. In the prologue to *Poesía nueva de Nicaragua*, Cardenal declared:

El antologista es de los que creen que la literatura sola, la literatura por la literatura, no sirve para nada. La literatura debe prestar un servicio. Debe estar - como todo lo demás en el universo - al servicio del hombre.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> 'Cultura contra fascismo - La alianza de intelectuales españoles', Prosa de prisa I: op. cit., p. 103.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>118</sup> 'Segunda conferencia de escritores afroasiáticos', *Prosa de prisa III* (La Habana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1976), p. 30.
 <sup>119</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 30-1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>120</sup> (Buenos Aires: Cuadernos Latinoamericanos, 1974), p. 9.

In the wake of the Sandinista triumph in Nicaragua, he would observe:

Our countries are promoting rapid change - not just of the traditional social structures, but also of cultural values and cultural needs. In order to leave economic underdevelopment behind, we've united cultural transformations with the idea of creating a society free of violence.<sup>121</sup>

Cardenal attributed his politicisation to the gospel and to the influence of his spiritual adviser in the Trappists, the poet and philosopher, Thomas Merton:

My former teacher, Thomas Merton, instigator and spiritual director of this community, had told me that the contemplative in Latin America was not able to remain outside of political struggles ... What politically radicalised us most was the Gospel. Each Sunday in the Mass we commented on the Gospel in the form of a dialogue with the peasants and they, with admirable simplicity and profound theology, began to understand the essence of the Gospel message, the announcement of the Kingdom of God. That is, the establishment on earth of a just society, without exploitation, with all goods in common as in the society in which the first Christians lived.<sup>122</sup>

Neruda was always acutely conscious of criticism levelled against the extra-literary concerns articulated in his verse. Nevertheless he continued to stress their centrality to his lyric. His desire to embrace such concerns was primarily motivated by a deep sense of shared humanity and solidarity. In the prologue to *La lira* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> From 'La democratización de la cultura', *Hacia una política cultural* in Stephen White's *Culture & Politics in Nicaragua* (New York: Lumen Books, 1986), p. 62.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>122</sup> 'Conversation between Brothers - Ernesto Cardenal & Daniel Berrigan', Movement (Dublin), 35 (1978), p. 3.

popular (1966), he dismissed those poets who distanced themselves from the everyday reality and confessed:

Siempre he querido que en la poesía se vean las manos del hombre. Siempre he deseado una poesía con huellas digitales. Una poesía de greda para que cante en ella el agua. Una poesía de pan, para que se la coma todo el mundo.<sup>123</sup>

In his Nobel acceptance speech in 1971, he also made the following observation:

... creo que mis deberes de poeta no sólo me indicaban la fraternidad con la rosa y la simetría con el exaltado amor y con la nostalgia infinita, sino también con las ásperas tareas humanas que incorporé a mi poesía.<sup>124</sup>

Neruda traced the transformation in his poetics and in his views to the brutality he witnessed during the Spanish Civil war. In his memoirs *Confieso que he vivido*, he remarked:

... de pronto veo que desde el sur de la soledad he ido hacia el norte que es el pueblo, el pueblo al cual mi humilde poesía quisiera servir de espada y de pañuelo, para secar el sudor de sus grandes dolores y para darle un arma en la lucha del pan.<sup>125</sup>

This convergence of history and individual meaning was central to the process of cultural decolonisation for all three poets, as, of necessity, it demanded a transformation of aesthetic conventions.

Marxist cultural politics have always emphasised such a synthesis between the cultural, the socio-political and the historical. Marx's theory of historical materialism centred on the view that societal and historical development were determined by a multitude of simultaneous forces and perceptions; ideological, economic,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>123</sup> 'Poeta de los pueblos', *Para nacer he nacido* (Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, 1978), p. 150.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>124</sup> op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>125</sup> Confieso que he vivido: op. cit., p. 209.

scientific, historical and philosophical. Therefore, as Ernst Fischer notes, for Marx:

Intellectual production does not follow material production but occurs simultaneously and in constant interaction with it.<sup>126</sup>

This emphasis on the sociology of culture and cultural production can be traced, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o has suggested in 'The Language of African Literature' to an essential link between language production and its societal determinants.<sup>127</sup> As the Kenyan writer has illustrated, language is often the primary vehicle through which perceptions of self and community are formed and perpetuated. I believe that one must view cultural expression in this way, inextricably linked to the processes and signs of collective and individual identity, and not as an isolated body of ideas formulated and contained within a universalised and immutable continuum.

In the 1920s, the Italian writer and theorist, Antonio Gramsci, initiated a reappraisal of the traditional Marxist view on the transference of influences between the superstructure and the base structure. society and its constituent structures. Gramsci believed that the inherent nature of society should no longer be defined by economic determinants alone. According to Gramsci's new interpretation of society, the superstructure (politics, culture, philosophy, science) could also impact upon the base structure (the economy). Gramsci laid particular emphasis on the defining position of culture within this revised hegemony and stressed that culture could never be viewed as superfluous to society:

Together with the problem of gaining political and economic power, the proletariat must also face the problem of winning intellectual power. Just as it has thought to organise itself politically and economically, it must also think about organising itself culturally.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>126</sup> Ernst Fischer, *Marx in his own Words* (UK: Pelican Books, 1977), p. 90.
<sup>127</sup> 'The Language of African Literature', *op. cit.*, pp. 116-8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>128</sup> Selections from Cultural Writings (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1985, p.41.

In an interview with Ciro Bianchi Ross, Nicolás Guillén's views on the centrality of culture in the revolutionary process bear a striking resemblance to those articulated by Gramsci:

Del mismo modo que somos libres política y económicamente, queremos serlo en el orden cultural.<sup>129</sup>

Gramsci's concept of hegemony thus perceived culture as an effective arbiter of change, as an integral and constituent factor within any 'alternative hegemony', rather than as a by-product of the desired 'alternative hegemony'. This revised concept of hegemony thus enabled a broader and more liberal appraisal of the traditional Marxist view on the transference of influences between the superstructure and the base structure. It presupposes a broadening of the conventional boundaries which separated the aesthetic from society. These extend beyond questions of economic significance, and stress the necessity to comprehend the role of factors such as the influence of authorial and aesthetic ideology along with issues of historical and political import. To this end, Raymond Williams concludes:

All writing carries references, meanings and values. To suppress or displace them is in the end impossible.<sup>130</sup>

Both G. V. Plekhanov and Terry Eagleton have suggested that it is imperative for writers and artists to acknowledge such extrinsic factors, given the crucial role they have played - consciously and subconsciously - in the process of cultural formation. In *Art and Social Life*, Plekhanov articulated the view that artists who are indifferent to the broader socio-political questions of their time, whose work is devoid of references to these ideological considerations, are invariably at odds with their society. He even went so far as to suggest that:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>129</sup> 'Conversación con Nicolás Guillén', op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>130</sup> Marxism & Literature (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 155.

... when artists become blind to the major social trends of their time, the inherent value of the ideas they express in their works is seriously impaired.<sup>131</sup>

For his part, Eagleton has stressed that engagement, on both a critical and cultural level, with issues conventionally extrinsic to an appreciation of literature, serves further to embellish and enhance the potentiality of the text rather than detract from its inherent value.<sup>132</sup> Like Williams, Eagleton believes that the extrinsicality of literary production in itself demands such an interpretation.

Many Latin American intellectuals have explored the significance of ideology for their literary production. Many feel that by forging links between political and ideological concerns, cultural aspirations can be reinforced and consolidated. Writing in the 1920s, the Peruvian writer, José Carlos Mariátegui embraced the Marxist view of the inseparable nature of culture and politics:

... mi concepción estética se unimisma, en la intimidad de mi conciencia, con mis concepciones morales, políticas y religiosas, y que, sin dejar de ser concepción estrictamente estética, no puede operar independiente o diversamente.<sup>133</sup>

Later, Mariátegui would affirm the defining influences of political and economic reality on the cultural production of a given society:

La literatura de un pueblo se alimenta y se apoya en su 'substratum' económico y político.<sup>134</sup>

The Uruguayan writer and critic, Mario Benedetti, has traced the pre-eminence of politics in contemporary Latin American letters

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), p. 34.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>132</sup> Criticism & Ideology - A Study in Marxist Literary Theory (London: Verso, 1978), pp. 44-63.
 <sup>133</sup> Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana (Lima: Editorial

Horizonte, 1991), p. 198. <sup>134</sup> *ibid.*, p. 205.

to the successful outcome of the Cuban Revolution in 1959.<sup>135</sup> However, another critic, Oscar Collazos believes that considerations of ideology and the material reality have always been an inevitable component of Latin American letters precisely because of the marginalised and conflictive nature of Latin American history:

Detrás de cada literatura 'nacional' ... hay un esfuerzo que, en últimas consecuencias, deriva de un proyecto ideológico o político.<sup>136</sup>

For many, such as Julio Ortega, the inseparable nature of cultural and political regeneration is unambiguous:

En la cultura ... no es concebible una recuperación nacional de la práctica de la identidad sin la desmonopolización de los aparatos ideológicos de Estado.<sup>137</sup>

Julio Cortázar also came to view political activism as an enriching and necessary component of artistic production:

... political participation in no way imposes a limitation of the artist's creative value and function; rather, his literary or artistic creation develops within a context that includes the historical situation and its political options, which, in a subtle or direct manner, will be reflected in the most vital aspect of his work.<sup>138</sup>

However, despite the above examples, Edward Said has asserted that there is a continued reluctance on the part of many intellectuals and critics to accept that culture can be, either

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>135</sup> El escritor latinoamericano y la revolución posible (México: Ediciones Nueva Imagen, 1977), p. 95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>136</sup> 'Sobre literatura e ideología en América Latina', *Nueva Estafeta*, 38 (January, 1982), p. 69.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>137</sup> Julio Ortega, 'Cultura nacional y revolución', *Cambio* (April-June, 1977), p.49. Also see Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 39 for further explication of the Althusserian theory of culture.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>138</sup> 'Politics and the Intellectual', *The Final Island* (Jaime Alazraki & Ivar Ivask, eds.) (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), p. 39.

directly or indirectly, shaped by factors extrinsic to the aesthetic.<sup>139</sup> Many critics continue to hold the view that the aesthetic is a purely subjective text, a product of ideas and thought, and thus uncontaminated by extra-textual factors. The more politicised discourse is consequently often viewed as a negative or 'denigrated' form of a purer aesthetic. However as Said suggests, rather than viewing imperialist culture and the imposition of an alien hegemony as a limiting and repressive experience, these political and historical influences should be viewed in a more positive and creative manner:

... we can better understand the persistence and the durability of saturating hegemonic systems like culture when we realise that their internal constraints upon writers and thinkers were <u>productive</u>, not unilaterally inhibiting.<sup>140</sup>

In terms of Marxist aesthetics, culture is clearly always aligned with considerations of a social or political nature. However, the primary criticism of a politicised aesthetic is that all too often the two components have been linked in a contrived and crude fashion. Such a devaluation of aesthetic considerations was most visible in Stalinist cultural politics, whereby the aesthetic was compromised and subservient to the political objectives of the ruling party, and degenerated into pure propagandist literature. Some artists and critics have been guilty of focusing solely on the significance of the political message, ignoring or failing to appraise fully the aesthetic validity of the text.

Ernesto Cardenal however was fully cognisant of the perils inherent in writing political verse and stressed the need to maintain the integrity of the poetry as well as responding to the political exigencies foisted upon the poet:

Por lo mismo la poesía también debe de ser política. Aunque no propaganda política, sino poesía política.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>139</sup> Orientalism: op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>140</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14. [My emphasis]

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>141</sup> In the prologue to Poesía nueva de Nicaragua: op. cit., p. 9.

Herbert Marcuse proposed that the potentiality of a politicised aesthetic should always be appraised primarily within the parameters of the aesthetic itself.<sup>142</sup> Issues of artistic validity should, he believed, always take precedence over communication of historico-political concerns. Although Marcuse stressed the fact that it is incumbent upon artists to articulate the concerns and emotions of those normally excluded from the aesthetic, he was also at pains to acknowledge that such an articulation can often compromise and denigrate artistic autonomy. Such a concern is also echoed in the views of Nicolás Guillén who believed that aesthetic integrity should be and could be assured even when political concerns were articulated. Guillén believed this was possible only when a certain distance was maintained between the political message and the aesthetic text:

En cuanto a la poesía revolucionaria, siempre he tenido la opinión de que su mensaje debe desprenderse del poema mismo, sin que se vea la propaganda, el sentido político, el cartel, el artículo de fondo. No es lo mismo un buen poema que un buen editorial ... y sobre todo no hay que confundirlos ...<sup>143</sup>

Guillén reiterated this view in an address to the 'First Congress of Writers and Artists of Cuba' in 1962:

... lo importante es estar prevenidos, no ceder a la tentación del camino fácil, donde se han perdido sin remedio muchos creadores verdaderos ... ¿No hay campo para el arte puro? ¿No lo hay para la creación libre? Claro que lo hay.<sup>144</sup>

In this regard, Marcuse concluded that the real potential of a radicalised text lies in a revision of its aesthetic form and language, rather than in any direct communication of the political

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>142</sup> The Aesthetic Dimension - Towards a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics (London: Macmillan Press, 1979), pp. 6-8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>143</sup> 'Conversación con Nicolás Guillén', op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>144</sup> 'Memoria del Primer Congreso de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba' (Havana, 1962), *Prosa de prisa II* (La Habana: Editorial Arte Y Literatura, 1975), p. 432.

reality. The socio-political or historical repercussions, although less direct, could be equally effective:

Art cannot change the world, but it can contribute to changing the consciousness and drives of the men and women who could change the world. <sup>145</sup>

Therefore, in order to establish a more honest homology between issues regarding aesthetics and politics, a complete revision of the nature and form of cultural expression is necessary. In addition, a renovation of the roles of the providers of culture is also required. Artistic responsibilities can no longer be restricted to the aesthetic text, but have been extended to explore a synthesis of issues of aesthetic, social and political import.

The question of historical and political contextualisation was central to the work of Guillén, Neruda and Cardenal. Nonetheless, significance was their shared concern with of equal а transformation of the role of the aesthete. All three poets embraced often contradictory responsibilities of poet and intellectual as well as historian and social commentator. A reformation of society was allied, in their minds, to a clear desire for a reformation of linguistic expression and the writer. Rather than perceiving literature as a transcendent force, communicating universal, human values, each poet perceived a challenge to reassess his relationship with the non-textual world. Neruda, in his Nobel speech, viewed the changing and expanding nature of his lyrical role as part of a natural progression towards an increased sense of solidarity and humanity:

Comprendí, metido en el escenario de las luchas de América, que mi misión humana no era otra sino agregarme a la extensa fuerza del pueblo organizado, agregarme con sangre y alma, con pasión y esperanza, porque sólo de esa henchida torrentera pueden nacer los cambios necesarios a los escritores y a los pueblos.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>145</sup> *The Aesthetic Dimension: op. cit.*, pp. 32-3. <sup>146</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 25.

This reconciliation of public and private concerns requires a refocussing by post-colonial writers on the particulars of historical and political experience, and on the collective nature of the project as a whole.

### Nature & Teleology of Cultural Precedents

A significant corollary to this process of interrogation and investigation of cultural identity is the manner in which many writers in the post-colonial context begin to examine the nature and teleology of the cultural precedents they employ. Colonisation of the cultural discourse ensures a disjoinment from the original culture. Thus, in an effort to re-establish a sense of continuity of tradition, these writers seek out archetypal models of language, culture and society. Also evident in the work of many postcolonial poets and writers is a profound sense of personal disillusionment, prompted by what they view as an increased materialism and commercialism coupled with a decline in spirituality in modern society. This relative absence of values prompts them to resuscitate alternative models of societal and human behaviour to counter the more degenerative contemporary model. This alternative model is more often than not located in the immediate past, or in a more remote historical period.

A striking feature of the work of Guillén, Neruda and Cardenal is their reliance on such cultural precedents. All three poets evoke archetypal models of culture and language to counter the sense of disinheritedness and displacement which has engulfed them. Characteristically these models are viewed as recoupable and are seen, by the poets, as crucial to the redefinition and renaissance of present day society. An example would be the manner in which all three poets cite key concepts, personages or events which connote and re-assert the validity of a now-lost cultural tradition.

The poets' reliance on inherited language and motifs is essentially a restorative and reparative exercise aimed at re-establishing a lost tradition and recuperating a sense of continuity and heredity.

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The process is also instructive, in that by employing such archetypal models of language, society and cultural expression, these artists can rehabilitate perceptions of the pre-colonial or an alternative reality. In addition, they may also seek out contemporary examples within the emerging post-colonial psyche which they believe, mirror or attest to the potential recovery of a lost tradition. In time, the sense of displacement and isolation experienced as a result of colonialism is transposed by a sense of placement and valence.

In her recent study of American fiction, Lois Parkinson Zamora examines this search for cultural origins by American writers, both north and south of the border.<sup>147</sup> Rather than dismissing this practice of employing cultural precedents as imitative and mimetic, Parkinson prefers to view it as a wholly creative and affirming cultural exercise:

I consistently find that an anxiety about origins impels American writers to search <u>for</u> precursors (in the name of community) rather than escape <u>from</u> them (in the name of individuation); to connect <u>to</u> traditions and histories (in the name of a usable past) rather than disassociate <u>from</u> them (in the name of originality).<sup>148</sup>

Parkinson appears to link the question of a search for historical and artistic origins to a corruption of the private idiom by a public poetics. Thereby, the distance between poet and history is lessened and problems of identity, Parkinson suggests, transpose concerns of originality. However, at this juncture, two important issues need to be addressed; firstly whether such an extensive use of historical material in the lyrical text, as viewed in the poetry of Cardenal and Neruda in particular, is valid and secondly, whether the amalgam of models, references and quotations from primary historical or sources. often with limited literary a acknowledgement of original sources, a trait common to all three

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>147</sup> The Usable Past - The Imagination of History in Recent Fiction of the Americas (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997)
 <sup>148</sup> ibid., p. 5.

poets, can be legitimately viewed as an original text, or merely as an example of sustained plagiarism.

I want to begin to address both these issues by examining the use and inclusion of historical material in the literary text. In effect, what we witness - particularly in the poems of Cardenal and Neruda that record heroic past events or personages - is an intermeshing of two completely separate disciplines. In a study of the evolution of historiography and literature, Lionel Gossman examines the changing and often confluent definitions of both these disciplines during the last three centuries.<sup>149</sup> He suggests that in the Western English-speaking tradition at least, the divisions between historiography and literature were not so apparent until the end of the 18th century, whereupon issues of semiotics and epistemology ensured that these divisions became much more pronounced.<sup>150</sup> Consequently, literature became more concerned with issues of style, artistic creativity and originality, whereas history was no longer simply a question of rhetoric, but rather a discipline charged with the truthful reflection and recording of facts.<sup>151</sup> Literature, Gossman suggests, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries at least, evolved into a highly subjective exercise, and rather than being a learned or acquired skill in which anyone could participate, came to be viewed as an innate creative gift and the domain of an elite group of inspired individuals.<sup>152</sup> History, on the other hand, particularly in the early years of the 19th century, persistently steered away from the personal and the subjective towards an apparently more objective realm.153 However, with time, this view of history as an impersonal representation of facts, wherein the role of the historian was overtly denied, would also be challenged, as issues of subjectivity and narrative ideology became a central issue in historiography. Although Gossman concludes that contemporary definitions of history and literature ensure a necessary distancing between the two, he does suggest a certain commonality of views

<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>149</sup> Lionel Gossman, Between History & Literature (Harvard University Press, 1990).
<sup>150</sup> ibid., p. 227.
<sup>151</sup> ibid., pp. 227-9.
<sup>152</sup> ibid., p. 229.

with regard to the objectives of the modern author, either literary or historical:

Modern history and modern literature have both rejected the ideal of representation that dominated them for so long. Both now conceive of their work as exploration, testing, creation of new meanings, rather than as disclosure or revelation of meanings already in some sense 'there', but not immediately perceptible.<sup>154</sup>

In this regard, one could suggest that the focus of much contemporary writing has shifted from the content of a given narrative, to the role of the author in unravelling his/her subjective interpretation of an inherited narrative. With regard to the modern literary writer, Gossman opines:

... writers have sought to emancipate literature from the myth of Literature, and to turn it into a self-conscious tool for exploring language and extending its range ... Instead of simply accepting language, together with the secondary categories of literary norms and genres, as given, and working within the conditions it provides, the modern writer is constantly crossing frontiers and extending outward the limits and possibilities of writing.<sup>155</sup>

In my view, the projects undertaken by Guillén, Neruda and Cardenal with regard to their historical, linguistic and political formation are infused with a similar expectation; to re-inscribe the parameters of literature and of the writer. It is in this context therefore, I believe, that their incorporation of historical and political material and what is conventionally perceived as material and themes extrinsic to the poetic text, can be interpreted as a means of effecting a more inclusive lyrical text. Neruda and Guillén were almost certainly influenced by extrinsic political factors and Cardenal was influenced in this regard by the Imagist movement and by this movement's expressed intention to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>154</sup> *ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>155</sup> *ibid.*, p. 229.

refashion a literature that was more accessible and inclusive. I will examine these influences on each poet's enlargement of the lyrical platform in more detail in each of the relevant chapters.

The second question raised with regard to textual originality is directed chiefly at Guillén and Cardenal. In the chapters devoted to both these poets, I will show how there are clear parallels between their verse and that of their predecessors. Often it is not simply a question of a shared poetic language, but of correlations in lyrical technique, motif and symbolism. One may be of the view that these poets are simply articulating images and ideas common to all writers in Spanish America. One could also examine the nature of this engagement with an inherited or indigenous heritage in the more positive context of an intertextual relationship. Whatever the view, issues such as artistic originality, mimeticism and plagiarism inevitably arise.

As Lois Parkinson Zamora has already suggested, the colonial experience often prompted American writers to engage in a visible search for 'usable historical precursors and precedents' in an effort to locate a sense of communal identity.<sup>156</sup> She also are 'likely to flaunt suggested that such writers their incorporation of previous texts and traditions', obviating artistic preoccupations with origination conventional and novelty.<sup>157</sup> Hence their incorporation of a myriad of inherited motifs and references prompts quite legitimate questions about artistic originality. Cardenal, in particular, proves problematic as he overtly mimics the poetic tradition of his indigenous predecessors, often with little or limited acknowledgement of these sources.

It is true to say that one may question whether a work of art can ever be truly authentic and disregard entirely its cultural and literary precedents. Throughout the course of literary criticism there have been many distinct views on this crucial issue of literary precedents and aesthetic originality. Northrop Frye, as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>156</sup> The Usable Past: op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>157</sup> *ibid.*, p. 128.

quoted by Frank Lentricchia, suggested that no poet or poem could ever be completely disengaged from their precursors and should always be viewed as a component of a universal literary society:

The self is not ideally prior to its society; the individual poem is not isolated from literary tradition.<sup>158</sup>

However, Frye focused primarily on the self-referentiality of literature and authorial intentions, ignoring what he considered to be the extrinsic influences of history, society or biography. Consequently, he never really extended his examination of the writer and literary influences to the broader social context. Later, Harold Bloom, in both The Anxiety of Influence - A Theory of Poetry and A Map of Misreading modelled the transference of literary influences on the father-son relationship. He suggested that such a transgenerational relationship always presumes a certain denial of, or challenge to one's precursors:

You cannot write or teach or think or even read without imitation, and what you imitate is what another person has done, that person's writing or teaching or thinking or reading.<sup>159</sup>

In Bloom's model there is a strong emphasis on the significance of tradition, but his is also quite a limiting thesis in that he suggests that such a transference of influence only occurs between what he defines as 'strong' poets. The result is that a large corpus of work and poets are necessarily excluded from Bloom's theory. In common with Frye, this theory is broadly non-referential, in that it fails to countenance the significance of biographical or historicopolitical circumstances.

In 1969 however, Julia Kristeva initiated an altogether different exploration of the nature of cultural transference and influences. The new term, 'intertextuality', as coined by Kristeva, was a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>158</sup> Frank Lentricchia, After the New Criticism (London: Metheun, 1983), p. 8. <sup>159</sup> A Map of Misreading (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 32.

means by which she could extend and enlarge her own interpretation of Mikhail Bakhtin, by focusing on Bakhtin's perceptions of the ideological potential of the individual utterance:

If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an intertextuality), one then understands that its 'place' of enunciation and its denoted 'object' are never single, complete and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated. In this way polysemy can also be seen as the result of a semiotic polyvalence - an adherence to different sign-systems.<sup>160</sup>

According to Kristeva, if one views polysemy in terms of the historical uniqueness of reader and writer responses, then the potentiality of the text itself is remarkably enhanced the emphasis being on the heterogeneous nature of both text and language. Bakhtin, in her view, focused not on the artist as an inheritor and manipulator of previous traditions but as a cowriter and co-participant in a wholly new text. In this way, Kristeva's model differs radically from Bloom's, in that there is no presumed rejection or denial of traditum. Jorge Luis Borges viewed writing in a similar fashion, as a palimpsest of sorts. He suggested that even though an original text has been effaced to make room for a 'new' piece of writing, inevitably some of the original script seeps through. Therefore, Borges concluded, a complete negation of previous texts and authors is always impossible and indeed undesirable.

What Borges and Kristeva were effectively challenging was the notion of textual originality. Both preferred to view writing as a form of 're-writing' of previous texts and therefore, as Kristeva suggested:

... each word (text) is an intersection of word (text) where at least one other word (text) can be read ... any text is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>160</sup> The Kristeva Reader (Tori Moi, ed.) (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 11.

constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.<sup>161</sup>

Lois Parkinson Zamora suggests that instead of challenging the originality of a text, one should focus on the teleology of the finished text:

The Borgesian call to originate one's origins - in essence, to create and interpret one's cultural meanings - deconstructs mimetic representation by focusing not on <u>what</u> is represented but on how, by whom, and to whom: this process insists upon the reader's complicity in the constitution of cultural authority.<sup>162</sup>

Despite the fact that readers naturally bring their own preconceptions to a text, I believe this can never obviate the ideological and artistic intentions of the author. Throughout the work of Guillén, Neruda and Cardenal, it is evident that all three are engaged in a deliberate and conscious retrieval of cultural precursors. Their perceptions of this past and of their present reality are persistently articulated. Therefore, I believe that in order to arrive at any clear understanding of these poets, the focus must of necessity shift from an exclusive consideration of the nature of the resultant text, to the intentionality of their undertaking.

It is clear that the poets' search for cultural origins and their employment of inherited motifs and language do not imply cultural inadequacy or a dearth of originality. Rather they should be viewed as enabling collective exercises, designed to reaffirm a sense of placement and identification in the post-colonial context. As Harold Bloom suggests, such a 'nostalgia for origins governs every primal tradition'.<sup>163</sup>

Theirs' is an affirmative exercise which is prompted by the devastation of the colonial experience. Many writers and artists

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>161</sup> *ibid.*, p.37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>162</sup> *ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>163</sup> A Map of Misreading: op. cit., p. 47.

engaged in such a deconstruction of their colonised self seek out similar cultural and historical precedents, which pre-date or offer an alternative to the colonial experience, as a reclamation of national and personal origins. These three poets are all clearly seeking to forge and develop such a counter-discourse. Central to their vision of renewed artistic practices and of a renewed cultural identity is this deep awareness of the historical and political implications of their present and past reality. In the following three chapters I will look at the work of Guillén, Neruda and Cardenal during specific periods in their literary careers and examine the nature of their lyrical development. By tracing this development and the manner in which each poet engages with the dynamics of his colonial and pre-colonial past, I hope to illustrate how issues such as those explored here, such as the redefinition of language and lyrical form, and the functionality of culture and of the providers of culture are central to all three poets' construction of a post-colonial cultural identity.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

# Nicolás Guillén - Redefining Race, Language & Form

Issues of language use and the nature of Cuba's cultural identity were two of the primary questions which influenced the evolution of Nicolás Guillén's unique literary praxis. Several key issues surface repeatedly throughout his prose and his verse; firstly, the question of racial identity and race relations in Cuba, issues which clearly were of immense importance to the poet. Secondly, the quest for social and political justice which required Guillén to revolutionise his attitudes to critical and literary forms in order to address issues of ideological and material significance. And thirdly, a renovation and redefinition of Cuba's cultural and literary identity. What I hope to illustrate during the course of this chapter is the manner in which Guillén's re-colonisation of self and nationhood contributed in a practical fashion to a transformation of the cultural, political and linguistic identity of Cuba, by questioning and ultimately subverting inherited perceptions of identity. What I intend to examine in this chapter is the manner in which Guillén articulated an alternative literary discourse. I will explore how the poet engaged with the vestiges of colonialism and the effects of this discourse on his evolving perceptions of self and national identity. I also explore the myriad of literary and extra-literary will influences that shaped this poet.

### Creating a Post-colonial Aesthetic

Nicolás Guillén had suffered discrimination as a young man and was therefore always acutely aware of the prejudices and discrimination inherent in Cuban society.<sup>1</sup> Thus one of his persistent concerns was for a revaluation of the black contribution to Cuban society and an unravelling of the racist positions evident in his native country. Guillén's vision, as we will witness, never implied a separatist or divisive position but rather one which embraced the multi-racial and heterogeneous nature of Cuban

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> 'El camino de Harlem', Prosa de prisa I: op. cit., pp. 4-5.

identity. It was a vision clearly sourced in and sustained by a desire for social justice and equality:

... esa condición de paria que el negro tiene es su más enérgico motor de humanidad, la fuerza que lo proyecta hacia un horizonte más amplio, más universal y más justo, hacia el horizonte por el cual están luchando todos los hombres honrados del mundo.<sup>2</sup>

Significantly, this emphasis on both the historico-political circumstances which informed the racial issue and Guillén's desire to transcend the question of race altogether are two of the crucial distinctions between Afro-Cubanism or 'negrismo' and other contemporaneous expressions of négritude. In 1937, in response to a suggestion that racial segregation in education should be maintained, Guillén rejected such an idea on the basis that Cuban society should nurture and respect the equal contributions of all races.<sup>3</sup> Another distinguishing aspect of Guillén's racial aesthetic is his refusal to view Africa as a mythical alternative to Cuba. He persistently refused to exoticise his African origins but viewed the revolution and ultimately, post-Batista Cuba, as a worthier, more attainable alternative to any nostalgic return to Africa:

... cuando una revolución borra esa lucha y da el poder a la clase obrera sin tener en cuenta el color de la piel, ese concepto de superioridad o de diferenciación racial deja de existir.<sup>4</sup>

This concurs with the view held by many critics that issues of race and politics were inextricably linked in the poet's mind. It is interesting to note the similarities between Guillén's views and those of Jean Paul Sartre, one of the most influential thinkers in Europe during the period of French Négritude, particularly in his introductory essay to Léopold Sédar Senghor's anthology of black

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> 'Discursos en el Congreso Internacional de Escritores en Defensa de la Cultura', *ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> 'Racismo y cubanidad', *ibid.*, pp. 65-67.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> 'Conversación con Nicolás Guillén', Recopilación de textos sobre Nicolás Guillén: op. cit., p. 45.

poetry in the French language, entitled 'Black Orpheus' (1947). On this occasion Sartre employed a similar Hegelian model of societal development to that used by Guillén, wherein négritude was viewed as the antithetical stage of a society *in transitu* towards a (more enviable) classless, non-racial model.<sup>5</sup> As such Sartre envisaged a future time when class structures had been revised and when the need for a separate expression of black identity would be no longer necessary. Sartre, however, was heavily criticised at the time by black intellectuals for what was considered to be a negation of black identity and culture. Guillén appears to have shared Sartre's view to a large degree, but he also believed that pre-revolutionary concerns with négritude did serve an important function:

... se explicaba la negritud o el negrismo porque reivindicaba los valores artísticos, políticos, culturales, humanos, en fin, del negro ante la descriminación o la esclavitud, es decir, su profunda figuración en la cultura nacional.<sup>6</sup>

However, he also believed that issues of racial inequality could only be resolved by a resolution of broader issues pertaining to economic and class politics. For example, he observed the following errors of pre-revolutionary Cuban society:

No se veía entonces en Cuba que un problema de esa naturaleza sólo tenía una solución, la revolucionaria, pues la desaparición de las clases ocasionaría desde luego el derrumbe de la separación de la sociedad cubana por razas.<sup>7</sup>

René Depestre, the Haitian poet and critic, confirms that Guillén's concept of *negrismo* was derived from an initial concern with problems of racism in Cuba but was sustained by the poet's overriding concern with issues of a socio-political nature. Consequently, issues of race would be eventually superseded by what Guillén came to view as the more pressing concerns of social equality and justice:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Julio Finn, Voices of Négritude: op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> 'Conversación con Nicolás Guillén', *op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 43.

En Guillén ... la negritud posee su valor de categoría histórica y nos enseña que la misión del negro no le viene a este del color de su piel, sino de su situación histórica concreta ... Del concepto originalmente étnico la negritud se transformó en búsqueda revolucionaria de la identidad humana.<sup>8</sup>

Ultimately, Guillén aspired to a lyrical discourse which transcended issues of race and class:

*ihombres ya sin colores, sin guerras, sin prejuicios y sin razas!* <sup>9</sup>

Depestre celebrates this unique dynamic between racial politics and aesthetics in Guillén's work and suggests that his reaffirmation of colour was a form of cultural marronage:

En la obra del autor de 'Motivos de son' y 'Sóngoro cosongo', en efecto, la negritud desemboca siempre en la praxis revolucionaria. Guillén ha tomado a su cargo la herencia africana de la cultura cubana y la ha integrado con gracia a las inquietudes del conjunto del pueblo cubano.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout his writing, Guillén always sought to celebrate the syncretism of the Cuban race.<sup>11</sup> Gradually this would evolve into a more revolutionary poetics, forming part of a homogenous expression in the context of the historical and political questions. As he became more aware of, and, more actively involved in the revolutionary movement within Cuba, issues of class politics began to take precedence over those pertaining to racism and ethnicity.

The economic and political situation in Cuba was therefore a decisive influence on Guillén's literary development. Although now

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Depestre, 'Orfeo negro', *ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> 'Discursos en el Congreso Internacional de Escritores en Defensa de la Cultura', *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> For example, see 'Presencia en el Lyceum', *Prosa de prisa I: op. cit.*, p. 36, 'Racismo y cubanidad', *op. cit.*, pp. 65-7, 'Junto a los pueblos africanos, *Prosa de prisa III: op. cit.*, pp. 311-313.

independent from Spain, Cuba was effectively under the control of North America, with the 1899 signing of the Treaty of Paris. In 1902, the new 'pseudo-Republic' was established and the US withdrew, only after the Platt Amendment was inserted in the Cuban Constitution. This allowed for US intervention in Cuba, under a pretext to be decided solely by the US. This era saw the emergence of the latifundios and the establishment of large sugar plantations. Consequently, Cuba's growing wealth was confined to a small, white minority and determined by the economic interests and financial institutions of its US neighbour.

Cuba at the beginning of the 20th century featured high levels of illiteracy, poverty and disease among its black population. Even though slavery had been abolished in 1880, discrimination, of both a racial and economic nature, was rife. The sudden decline in sugar prices in 1921 brought with it a devastating reduction in income for the poorest sectors of society. On a more long-term basis, it contributed to a further erosion of Cuba's independence as corrupt regimes, General Machado's in particular, allowed American banks and multinationals even more control over the national finances and economy.<sup>12</sup>

It was into this era of chaos and change that Nicolás Guillén was born in Camagüey, in 1902, the year in which the new Republic was formed. On a cultural level, as Alejo Carpentier has explained, the primary concerns of the newly established Republic were twofold.<sup>13</sup> Firstly, Cuba was anxious to establish equitable relations with other nations and to erase any suggestions of provincialism or vulgarity. However, it was still enslaved by a palpable sense of inferiority which underpinned its relationships with the United States, and with Europe in particular. The second corollary to independence was the developing desire to establish an autonomous cultural identity. José Martí had already identified the need to reaffirm independent national values over ten years prior to political

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Angel Augier, Prologue to *Obra poética I: op. cit.*, pp. xiii-xiv & Marianne Masferrer & Carmelo Mesa-Lago, 'The Gradual Integration of the Black in Cuba', *Slavery & Race Relations in Latin America* (R. Brent Toplin, ed.) (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1974), pp. 348-84.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Alejo Carpentier, *La música en Cuba* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1972), pp. 273-286.

independence. He had also articulated the necessity to include all Cubans - regardless of race or colour - in this process of national recovery. But in reality Martí's call was to remain largely aspirational.

Nicolás Guillén would have remained relatively untouched by the economic crises of the 1920s, but he did undergo a personal crisis of sorts around this period. He had just completed his first anthology of verse *Cerebro y corazón* (1922) but in 1922, for no apparent reason, Guillén abandoned poetry altogether. He also gave up his legal studies in Havana and returned to Camagüey. Perhaps he shared a sense of disappointment at the obvious failures of the new Republic. Perhaps, as one critic believes, he was unable to reconcile himself to the many changes taking place in the cultural sphere as a wave of new literary expressions and trends swept across the continent and Europe.<sup>14</sup>

Angel Augier suggests that Guillén's decision to abandon poetry was born of the need to recuperate a sense of reality and humanism:

El poeta no ha querido sino recobrar su condición humana y también, de paso, ha ahondado su cubanía.<sup>15</sup>

The 1920s were, by all accounts, a decisive period in Guillén's life and the crises - both personal and economic - were to provoke a highly personal response on the part of the poet. In 1926, Guillén returned to Havana with a heightened awareness of the political nature of Cuba's problems, an awareness that had grown out of his period of reflection in Camagüey. This is evidenced in the growing politicisation of his writing and in his (re)engagement with the material reality. With regard to his poetry however, one has to wait until the 1934 collection *West Indies, Ltd.* to view more effectively the replacement of his racial poetics with a more socio-political aesthetic. Apart from the short poem 'Caña' in *Sóngoro cosongo*, most of the poems in the 1930 and 1931 collections deal with issues of colour and racial identity. Guillén has confirmed, in an

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Augier, op. cit., p. xiii.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Angel Augier, *Nicolás Guillén - Notas para un estudio biográfico - crítico* (Santa Clara/Cuba: Universidad Central de las Villas, 1965), p. 64.

interview with Ciro Bianchi Ross, that although most of his journalistic articles of the period were radically political in content, as a poet he remained essentially aloof from the socio-political reality.<sup>16</sup> However, his prose of this period, in particular his contributions to the newspaper supplement 'Ideales de una raza', which I will look at in greater detail later in this chapter, provide some insight into Guillén's position with regard to both the racial question and the socio-political reality.

As Guillén became more involved - ideologically and politically - he also began to develop the belief that cultural identity played an intrinsic and necessary role in the quest for social and political change. Like Neruda and Cardenal later, Guillén became engaged in an interrogation of inherited perceptions of the role and function of the aesthete. An examination of his journalistic writing from that period and thereafter illustrates how his verse was shaped by the socio-political and historical reality of the time and by this revised perception of the role of the artist in society.

Guillén's transformation of his artistic praxis mirrored a general revision of and politicisation of art engendered by intellectuals throughout the 1920s, which I have already explored in Chapter One. Guillén subscribed to the view that the artist had a crucial role to play in any period of revolution, and asserted - on more than one occasion - that not only were racial and class politics inseparable, but also that it was impossible to disengage literary and artistic practice from the broader revolutionary process.<sup>17</sup> In the poet's mind, aesthetic practice was thus inevitably fused with the challenges of the political reality:

Yo creo que si en Cuba todo ha cambiado, si todo está cambiando bajo el imperio de la Revolución, no puede

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Guillén's interview with Ciro Bianchi Ross is interwoven with others in 'Conversación con Nicolás Guillén' in *Recopilación de textos sobre Nicolás Guillén: op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> See 'Realidad de la poesía', *Prosa de prisa II: op. cit.*, pp. 336-7, 'Acrecentar la obra propia en mensaje artístico, revolucionario y popular', *Prosa de prisa III: op. cit.*, pp. 344-347.

concebirse una literatura ni un arte en desacuerdo con ese proceso ...<sup>18</sup>

The other primary focus for Guillén throughout his life was language and the nature of lyrical expression. During this decisive period of transition (1922-30), the poet appeared to be searching for a new medium of expression, and to be reassessing the teleology of poetry. In May 1929, Guillén wrote to his friend Félix Nápoles, secretary of the Victoria Club which he used to frequent in Camagüey, and, coincidentally also the man who transcribed *Motivos de son:* 

La poesía ... está cambiando ... Se está, desde luego, en un plano de tanteos, de busquedas, de inquietudes.<sup>19</sup>

As I have suggested in Chapter One, language is often employed during the process of colonisation as a means of restricting and limiting alternative modes of expression. Therefore, it follows that during the period of postcolonialism, in the search for a new and independent literary identity, canonical expression is questioned and scrutinised. It is often this revaluation of the existing idiom and the quest for an alternative means of expression which drives many vanguard literary movements. As we have seen in Chapter One, this interrogation of conventional language is frequently articulated through a rehabilitation of the oral vernacular. Orality is radicalised and transformed by many into the locus of an alternative, unique expression.

Guillén repeatedly affirmed popular music and oral poetry as the locales of the authentic idiom of Cuba.<sup>20</sup> In this context, his representation of the 'authentic' speech-patterns of black Cuba and his deliberate oralisation of literary expression in *Motivos de son*, *Sóngoro cosongo* and, to a lesser extent in *West Indies, Ltd.*, are extremely significant. One critic, Vicky Unruh, saw Guillén's project in both *Motivos de son* and *Sóngoro cosongo* as a 'self-conscious

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> 'Conversación con Nicolás Guillén', op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Augier, Prologue to Obra poética I: op. cit., p. xv.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> See 'Rosendo Ruiz' (1930) and 'Cuba, negros, poesía' (1937), Prosa de prisa I: op. cit., pp. 12-13 and p. 97 respectively.

cultivation of autochthonous language'.<sup>21</sup> Angel Augier reiterated the significance of this renovation of the linguistic by Guillén but suggests that it did not lie exclusively in the linguistic exercise. He believes that Guillén's aspirations for linguistic change were always welded to aspirations for social change:

Lo importante era romper con el orden retórico establecido, abrir una brecha y a través de ella encontrar nuevos caminos, los propios de cada poeta. En tanto, la realidad circundante estallaba en contradicciones y presionaba a todos a tomar conciencia y partido en la lucha ya entablada contra injusticias, explotación, pretericiones, terror, miseria.<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless, it is clear that during this period, from the mid to late 1920s, Guillén was searching for a new medium of expression, for a revised idiom which would reflect better the spirit and voice of Cuba. He dismissed the introspective and contrived nature of his earlier verse in a most vitriolic fashion:

... aquella amalgama cursi ... aquella horchatería para señoritas, todos aquellos mantecados para niños.<sup>23</sup>

In 'Elegía moderna del motivo cursi', written sometime between 1927 and 1931, but certainly prior to *Motivos de son*, what is most apparent is that Guillén had identified a need to refashion his verse and disinvest his expression of any of the restrictive rhetorical conventions of the traditional lyric. He was clearly seeking a less hermetic and self-referential format, a format that was more alive to the language and experiences of ordinary Cubans:

No sé lo que tú piensas, hermano, pero creo que hay que educar la Musa desde pequeña en una fobia sincera contra las cosas de la Luna, satélite cornudo, desprestigiado y feo.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Vicky Unruh, Latin American Vanguards (University of California Press, 1994), p. 229.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Augier, Prologue to Obra poética I: op. cit., p. xvi.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Letter to Félix Nápoles, *ibid.*, p. xv.

Edúcala en los parques, respirando aire libre, mojándose en los ríos y secándose al sol; que sude, que boxee, que se exalte, que vibre, que apueste en las carreras y que juegue hand ball.

Tú dirás que el consejo es pura 'pose', ¿no es eso? Pues no, señor, hermano. Lo que ocurre es que aspiro a eliminar el tipo de mujer-suspiro, que está dentro del mundo como un pájaro preso.

Por lo pronto, mi musa ya está hecha a mi modo. Fuma. Baila. Se ríe. Sabe algo de derecho, es múltiple en la triste comunidad del lecho y dulce cuando grito, blasfemo o me incomodo.

Por otra parte, cierro mi jardín de tal suerte que no hay allí manera de extasiarse en la Luna. (Por la noche, el teatro, el caberet, o alguna recepción ...) Y así vivo considerado y fuerte.<sup>24</sup>

As I will illustrate, Guillén's early prose conveys a strong desire to redefine Cuban culture, which he believed was essentially mimetic in nature. By 're-cognising' and reaffirming, not only the black contribution to the formation of the Cuban cultural identity, but also that of working-class Cubans, the poet was effectively challenging the inherited perception of his national identity which had hitherto excluded and negated a large part of his own community.

Central to this process of renaissance is his celebration and rearticulation of the rich repository of culture and meaning within the popular tradition. Guillén had become increasingly conscious of the need to re-appropriate this unspoken and largely forgotten part of Cuban heritage, together with the cultural motifs and references which had been displaced during the process of colonisation. By challenging the existing mode of aesthetic expression, the poet hoped to revolutionise the existing language of artistic practice. The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Obra poética I: ibid., p. 81.

result was a complete transformation and redefinition of the processes of individual and national identity and of the means of lyrical expression. Perhaps the most striking aspect of his early prose and poetry is this expressed wish to develop a cultural tradition that would reflect the complex syncretism of his country's formation and history. In this regard, I believe Guillén was profoundly influenced by his compatriot José Martí, but also by his evolving ideological position.

Thus, in sum, Guillén's primary concerns were the reappraisal of Cuba's racial and literary identity, and the attainment of social justice in Cuba. The destruction of the political and economic autonomy of a colonised country were, Guillén believed, aided by the distortion of that community's cultural and historical tradition. Thus, although conscious of the socio-political repercussions arising out of colonialism, Guillén also recognised the need to unravel colonial manifestations of cultural domination which had distorted the national perception of self. The consequences of the displacement of originary models of culture and meaning had, Guillén believed, resulted in a further erosion of the authentic self and national identity, a process one critic suggests can culminate in an 'internalised colonial domination.'<sup>25</sup> Frantz Fanon has also highlighted the centrality of colonial acculturation and domination within the colonialist project:

Colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country ... By a kind of perverted logic it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, Amilcar Cabral, to whom I alluded in the Introduction, suggested that cultural domination was in fact crucial to the continued success of political or economic control.<sup>27</sup> In 'Cuba, negros, poesía', Guillén also explores some of the effects of colonialism on the cultural perceptions of Cubans in general, but on

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Istvan Meszaros in the introduction to Renato Constantino, *Neo-colonial Identity and Counter-consciousness* (London: Merlin Press, 1978), p. 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth: op. cit., p. 169.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> 'National Liberation and Culture', op. cit., p. 39.

black Cubans in particular.<sup>28</sup> He cites the example of the black Romantic poets who, he suggests, were driven by a fruitless, and, ultimately, self-destructive desire for acceptance. As a result, they assimilated the linguistic and cultural models and motifs of an unfamiliar, and, predominantly white, peninsular tradition, ignoring their own history and identity:

Educado ... en una subestimación de todos sus valores espirituales mediante un concepto estético grecolatino, afrontó la doble tragedia de su servidumbre social y artística, sin poderse reconocer en el espejo que tenía delante y sin más ansia que la de trepar hacia un cielo que le estaba vedado, como quien se destroza las manos arañando en una gran pared sin relieves.<sup>29</sup>

Some Romantics engaged in a contrived indigeneity, which, in Guillén's view, was equally destructive.<sup>30</sup> What Guillén sought was a more honest representation of Cuban life and letters, not a fictionalised academic (re)creation which was equally unfamiliar and irrelevant to the majority of the population. During the course of this chapter, I will explore the manner in which Guillén engages with, and, ultimately subverts, his inherited models of self and nation. Central to this revaluation of culture and to the establishment of an alternative and more affirming model of identity, is an articulation of the many discrete, and apparently, contradictory influences which shaped him.

### **Defining** Influences

One of the most significant influences on Guillén was José Martí. The reappraisal of American culture and identity initiated by the Romantic movement, as I have already suggested, had been virulently dismissed by Guillén. He saw their representations of traditional and local life as largely unrepresentative and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> 'Cuba, negros, poesía', op. cit., pp. 94-101.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 97.

superficial.<sup>31</sup> G. R. Coulthard confirms that representations of black people in 19th century Cuban prose was informed by a combination of idealism and romanticism and by preconceived expectations of barbarity.<sup>32</sup> However, Latin American letters would pursue a radically different course in the final years of the 19th century with the emergence of Modernism.

Most Latin American countries had secured independence from Spain by the mid-19th century. In 1898, Spain ceded control of its last three colonies, Cuba, the Philippines and Puerto Rico, to North America. Any antagonism which had existed towards the former colonial centre was swiftly transposed by the growing realisation that the expansionary policies of North America, and, its potential for moral corruption, posed a far greater threat to the stability and autonomy of Latin America than any perceived pernicious influence from Spain. Thus, what evolved was a genuine sense of continental and ethnic unity in the face of this new threat from its northern neighbour. During the final thrust for political independence, Hispanic America would thus begin to seek a more autonomous cultural identity. The Modernist movement marked the beginning of a golden age in Spanish American letters, and a genuine reassessment of race and origins on the part of Latin American intellectuals. Two of the key figures in this new movement were Rubén Darío and José Martí.

Although Darío would prove to have a greater influence on the verse of Ernesto Cardenal, Guillén always acknowledged the significance of Darío's contribution to the resuscitation of Latin American letters:

... por primera vez en la historia del proceso intercultural de España y América, es ésta la que manda. No es Quintana dando el santo y seña a Olmedo y Heredia, sino un indio chorotega imponiéndose sobre la garrulería literaria de fines

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 94-7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Race and Colour in Caribbean Literature (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 6-27 & S. R. Cudjoe, op. cit., pp. 90-115.

de siglo en la península, ya sacudida por los primeros estremecimientos que desencadenaron el 98.<sup>33</sup>

Darío looked to France primarily for inspiration and was critical generally of the poverty of local cultural expression. However, he did affirm the validity of the indigenous tradition and lauded its artistic potential in several poems, some of which I will examine in more detail in Chapter Four in relation to Darío's influence on Cardenal. What is apparent throughout Darío's verse, is that he was (re)inventing a largely mythical and metaphorical terrain and incorporated the indigenous motif into his work in much the same manner as he used those of classical or European origin. It did however offer him a new lyrical potential although the particulars of his exercise never really amounted to any genuine decolonisation of the text. However, more pertinent to Guillén, was the fact that throughout his work Darío always acknowledged the essential syncretism of his identity and embraced both peninsular and local influences. In reality, he was almost completely removed from the historical and cultural reality of Nicaragua and Latin America, a fact which he readily admitted on more than one occasion:

Si en estos cantos hay política, es porque aparece universal. Y si encontráis versos a un presidente, es porque son un clamor continental ... de todas maneras, mi protesta queda escrita sobre las alas de los inmaculados cisnes, tan ilustres como Júpiter.<sup>34</sup>

Although Guillén never viewed Darío as a militant poet of the calibre of Martí, he did applaud the former's foresight with regard to the imperialist threat posed by North America:

Es el Darío que despierta no sólo a la pesadumbre de la vida consciente, al dolor de estar vivo, sino a la sangrienta y dolorosa realidad americana. No los vizcondes y marqueses, no los abates y dueñas, no los siervos negros problemáticamente armados de alabardas, sino algo más real.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> 'Rubén Darío', (March, 1967), Prosa de prisa III: op. cit., p. 309.
 <sup>34</sup> Rubén Darío Esencial: op. cit., p. 334. Also see pp. 118-24, which further illustrate the aesthetic focus of much of Darío's writing.

La presencia del imperialismo norteamericano como un dragón colosal, como un lebrel que no duerme, carga su verso y le da una densidad reconcentrada y dramática.<sup>35</sup>

However, Darío's primary focus was always on a renovation of the lyric, on issues of language and of the mechanics of verse which for Guillén were highly significant:

Él nos enseña el camino de la perfección técnica que todo creador debe transitar si es honesto consigo mismo en primer término. Con su desdén hacia lo improvisado y mediocre nos dijo que no hay arte genuino sin angustia y dolor.<sup>36</sup>

For Guillén, Darío's most significant contribution would always be this concern for metrical precision and accuracy in the lyric. However, underpinning Guillén's admiration was a lament that Darío's concerns for a renovation of the aesthetic did not spill over into political activism. José Martí, the other central figure of the Modernist movement, however, encapsulated both requirements in Guillén's view:

Martí es expresión muy acusada de su época, intérprete de su momento histórico, esto, en vez de aminorar su estatura, la agranda a los ojos de un observador imparcial. No sólo fue un poderoso poeta por la amplitud del sueño, sino un hombre de acción capaz de convertir ese sueño en realidad.<sup>37</sup>

He was, in Guillén's view, a composite of the disparate qualities necessary for a national poet:

Hombre de acción y poeta, Martí representa mejor que nadie en América el celo por la perfección de la forma tanto como el vigor del concepto; la exigencia implacable del bien decir y del bien pensar, que le llevó a pulir el idioma no con

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> 'Rubén Darío', op. cit., p. 309.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p. 310.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> 'José Martí' (September, 1953), Prosa de prisa II: op. cit., p. 160.

afeites femeniles, sino con los relámpagos que un creador verdadero puede sacar de su trato con la materia estatuaria, digamos granito, bronce, mármol ...<sup>38</sup>

Guillén persistently highlighted the obvious differences between Martí and Darío.<sup>39</sup> Martí was much more nationalistic than Darío and had also identified the need to combine aesthetic and political renovation, two issues which would impact greatly on Guillén and successive vanguard writers within Cuba and Latin America. Like many other modernist writers, Martí perceived North America as a threat to the unique culture of Latin America.<sup>40</sup> However, unlike many of his contemporaries, Martí chose not to limit this concern to issues pertaining to the aesthetic or cultural sphere. Of equal importance to him was the political and economic integrity and autonomy of Latin America threatened by North American imperialism.<sup>41</sup> In this regard, as one critic suggests, Martí was quite unique:

El caso de José Martí tan excepcional en todo, es ejemplar por cómo unió a la renovación estética, con carácter preferente, la actividad cívica y patriótica que le llevó a la muerte, pero a una muerte en combate, lógico final de una vida dedicada a la libertad de su pueblo.<sup>42</sup>

For Martí, and something which becomes increasingly more apparent in the later prose of Guillén, the expansionary aims of North America were of greater import than any internal debate about the nature of the Latin American identity. He repeatedly called for complete political independence from North America,<sup>43</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> 'Martí - 24 de febrero', Prosa de prisa III: op. cit, p. 111.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> 'Rubén Darío', *ibid.*, p. 310 and 'Cuba, negros, poesía', *Prosa de prisa I: op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> María Teresa Martínez Blanco has examined the development of the modernist concept of the superior Latin race in *Identidad cultural de Hispanoamérica: op. cit.*, pp. 51-96.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> José Martí, 'Nuestra América', *Prosa escogida* (Madrid: Editorial Magisterio Español, 1975), pp. 147-8 & pp. 154-5.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Ricardo Gullón, *El modernismo visto por los modernistas* (Barcelona: Guadarrama/Editorial Labor: 1980), p. 9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> See 'La verdad sobre los Estados Unidos' and 'Manifiesto de Montecristo', *Prosa escogida: op. cit.*, pp. 159-64 & pp. 164-73 respectively.

and referred to North America on one occasion as *el peligro* mayor.<sup>44</sup>

Such a political position inevitably influenced Martí's perception of Latin American letters. The North American presence, just as it was for Darío and José Enrique Rodó among others, came to be viewed as a persistently negative and pernicious influence. In reality, what the Modernists lamented was the absence of a distinctly national or regional literary identity. Convinced of the residual influence of colonialism in this regard, Martí repeatedly urged that intellectual and cultural change must come from within and, consequently stressed the superiority of the Americanist tradition. He questioned the appropriateness of Eurocentric models of discourse and taste, and, in their place, urged the resuscitation of the historical and cultural heritage of the region:

La Universidad europea ha de ceder a la Universidad americana. La historia de América, de los incas a acá, ha de enseñarse al dedillo, aunque no se enseñe la de los arcones de Grecia. Nuestra Grecia es preferible a la Grecia que no es nuestra.<sup>45</sup>

As we have already seen, Guillén, many years later, in 'Cuba, negros, poesía', would also criticise the Cuban Romantics's penchant for imported models and motifs. However it is important to stress that neither Martí nor Guillén promoted an essentialist view of culture. In 'Nuestros propósitos', a manifesto detailing the principal aims of the Modernist movement, Martí acknowledged the importance of their inherited idiom and in a position characteristic of the Modernist movement, urged the revision of the Spanish language so that it reflected more accurately the expression and reality of the region:

Trabajar por el brillo de la lengua castellana en América y, al par que por el tesoro de sus riquezas antiguas, por el

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> 'Nuestra América', *ibid.*, pp. 154-5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, p. 149.

engrandecimiento de esas mismas riquezas en vocabulario, rítmica, plasticidad y matiz  $\dots^{46}$ 

In this manifesto, Martí reiterated many Modernist concerns regarding language and formal perfection as well as the development of an independent intelligentsia.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps one of the most significant aspects of this short manifesto is Martí's sense of a new, burgeoning American identity. Although conscious of, and, eager to preserve, the traditions and language of his predecessors, Martí viewed Modernism as a progressive and innovative force which he hoped would unite and foment a greater sense of *americanismo:* 

Ser el vínculo que haga una y fuerte la idea americana en la universal comunión artística ...<sup>48</sup>

In common with his contemporaries, clearly Martí was anxious to assert the cultural and intellectual 'equi-valence' of Latin America, Spain and North America as well as highlighting the essential differences which distinguished them from one another.

The second influential precedent provided by Martí relates to matters of race and race relations within Cuba. Martí was persistently opposed to racism, and, as evidenced in 'Nuestra América', first published in 1891, had identified its inherently destructive nature:

Peca contra la Humanidad el que fomente y propague la oposición y el odio de las razas.<sup>49</sup>

For Martí, the future development of Cuba depended on a position which transcended the issue of race altogether:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> 'Nuestros propósitos', Gullón, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 47-8. Originally published in *Revista de America* (August 19th, 1894).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Prosa escogida: op. cit., p. 155.

En Cuba ... Hombre es más que blanco, más que mulato, más que negro. Cubano es más que blanco, más que mulato, más que negro.<sup>50</sup>

Guillén recorded his indebtedness to Martí on the question of race on numerous occasions.<sup>51</sup> As I will illustrate shortly, the centrality of issues of race, of the relationship between blacks and whites, in Guillén's prose and poetry is clearly apparent. He persistently evoked a positive and affirmative image of the process of transculturation and was, I believe, profoundly influenced in this regard by Martí. I will examine the implications of this perception of ethnicity in more detail later in this chapter.

In several articles, Guillén also acknowledged the precedent set by the Colombian-born writer, Félix Tanco, who in a letter written in 1830, to his friend Domingo del Monte affirmed:

Piénselo bien, los negros en la Isla de Cuba son nuestra poesía, y no hay que pensar en otra cosa, pero no los negros solos, sino los negros con los blancos, todos revueltos, y formar luego los cuadros, las escenas ...<sup>52</sup>

Tanco's position was quite unique at the time because, as I have noted earlier, in the view of Guillén and others, the Romantics idealised the pre-colonial Indian population and ignored the black population as a living vibrant force within society.<sup>53</sup>

The influence of aspects of both the earlier Romantic movement and the Modernists would certainly have propelled a debate regarding national identity, and the inchoate search for a new idiom. Both movements, emerging as they did in periods of great historical and political change, instilled in the writers and artists of the periods, and subsequent periods, a sense of national and continental independence, and of a need to take pride in the local,

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> 'Mi raza' (1893) *ibid.*, pp. 157-8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> 'Informe a los escritores', *Prosa de prisa II: op. cit.*, p. 423 and 'Discurso', *Prosa de prisa III: op. cit.*, p. 17.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> 'Informe a los escritores', *op. cit*, p. 428. Also referred to in 'Nación y mestizaje', *Prosa de prisa III: op. cit.*, pp. 289.
 <sup>53</sup> 'Cuba, negros, poesía', *op. cit.*, pp. 96-7.

regardless of the form of this local expression. By and far the most enduring influence on Nicolás Guillén was José Martí, in whom Guillén identified a crucial and admirable combination of political activism and artistic innovation with a concern for independent economic and political structures. However, yet another group would prove crucial to the developing poetics of this young poet namely, the vanguard movement known as the Minoristas.

In their 1927 manifesto, the Minoristas stated that they came together for the first time in 1923, in the wake of a failed revolution organised by the Association of Veterans and Patriots.<sup>54</sup> From an initial act of rebellion and protest, this group then developed into one which aimed to bridge the artistic and political divide by reshaping attitudes towards the arts and definitions of art, coupled with a desire to influence both domestic and foreign political policies. Vicky Unruh warns against any simplistic equation of aesthetic and political ambitions as she points out that this 'rehumanisation' of the aesthetic or calls for a democratisation of art by many of the Latin American vanguards, the Minoristas included, were not always politically motivated.<sup>55</sup> Rather, she suggests such vanguard activity should be seen simply as a reflection of local artists' need to re-engage artistic practice and expression with experience.

Certainly some of the manifestos written by the Minoristas did call for a dismantling of unrealistic and inaccessible media of expression and for a re-embrace of realism.<sup>56</sup> However an underlying aspiration of many of the Minoristas was also the renovation of the role of the artist, who many proposed should take greater cognisance of their immediate political and historical reality.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> H. Verani, 'Declaración del Grupo Minorista', Las vanguardias literarias en Hispanoamerica - Manifiestos, proclamas y otros escritos (Rome: Bulzoni, 1986), pp. 119-20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Vicky Unruh, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-2. Guillén himself always acknowledged the vastly different political positions of this group in 'Conversación con Nicolás Guillén', *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Martí Casanovas, 'Arte nuevo' (1927), Verani, op. cit., pp. 136-7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Jorge Mañach, 'Vanguardismo', *ibid.*, pp. 123-132.

In their first manifesto, the Minoristas called for the development of popular art-forms and for the introduction in Cuba of a simpler and more accessible form of artistic expression, along with the cultivation of new artistic trends from abroad. Their principal motivation had been to 'constituir el portavoz, la tribuna y el índice de la mayoría del pueblo'.<sup>58</sup> One of their number summed up the long-term objectives of the Minoristas in the following way:

... a libertar el arte literario de las limitaciones de las retóricas y la tiranía de los modelos y a darle mayor libertad, más honda sinceridad, personalidad más marcada.<sup>59</sup>

Guillén was never a member of the Minoristas, nor did he ever contribute to their magazine 'Revista de Avance', but he did acknowledge their importance in the context of an overall transformation of Cuban letters:

... hay que reconocer el mérito de haber 'aireado' no poco el ámbito cultural cubano.<sup>60</sup>

In many ways, it was the impetus for change and their call for an expansion of existing parameters of art articulated by the Minoristas that sustained the evolution of Afrocubanism. Many of these vanguard writers, most notably Jorge Mañach and Juan Marinello, would contribute to the debates on racial identity and race relations in Cuba in 'Ideales de una raza'.

In a letter to his friend, Félix Nápoles, Guillén identified very strongly with the general objectives of the vanguard movement:

... el ansia de encontrar un nuevo modo de expresión que desposeyendo a la poesía de su propio ropaje postizo, lacrimoso como un mendigo con tracoma, pueda dar a conocer el ansia del poeta en una forma más sincera.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> 'Declaración del Grupo Minorista', *ibid.*, pp. 120-1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Francisco Contreras, 'Características de la nueva literatura', *ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>60 &#</sup>x27;Conversación con Nicolás Guillén', op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Cited by Angel Augier in the prologue to Obra poética I: op. cit., p. xv.

And on another occasion, although critical of many of their ultimate political positions, he noted of the Minoristas:

... creo que desempeñó un papel importante en cuanto a la revisión de valores poéticos, literarios y culturales en general.<sup>62</sup>

However, it is worthy of note that the development of Afrocubanism had in fact begun some years earlier with the publication in 1906 and 1916 of two studies of the nature of black people by the Cuban anthropologist, Fernando Ortiz. Although, as several critics have suggested, Ortiz's conclusions about black people were fundamentally flawed, both racist and regressive in tone, his interest in blackness contributed in a very significant fashion to the development of Afrocubanism.<sup>63</sup> Guillén certainly acknowledged this influence on several occasions.<sup>64</sup>

According to Alejo Carpentier, an impetus for change and a reappraisal of the cultural identity of Cuba had already begun within Cuban music some years earlier.<sup>65</sup> This was manifest, Carpentier suggests, in a growing desire evident in the early years of the Republic to incorporate elements of black and popular culture into the 'high art' of white music, a music which was traditionally styled on European models. In the early part of the 19th century, according to Carpentier, music had become the demesne of black people in Cuba and was generally disparaged by the white bourgeoisie as immoral and licentious. The 'ñáñigos', or secret societies which emerged around the middle of the 19th century were not restricted to black people, and contributed in an important fashion to the preservation of both African culture and the popular heritage of Cuba by recording (orally) traditional dances, songs, rhythms and sounds. These societies served many important functions, one of which was to provide a social outlet in

<sup>64</sup> 'Nación y mestizaje', op. cit., pp. 288 & 289.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> 'Conversación con Nicolás Guillén', op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> S. R. Cudjoe, *Resistance and Caribbean Literature: op. cit.*, p. 245 & R. L. Jackson, *Black Literature & Humanism in Latin America* (University of Georgia Press, 1988), pp. 24-5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> La música en Cuba: op. cit., pp. 289-93.

which these traditional compositions could be performed. Although white Cubans did participate in the music and dances, for the most part black music and dance still retained connotations of inferiority and lewdness. With Independence, and, particularly with the establishment of the Republic in 1902, this alternative, and perhaps more authentic musical culture continued to operate in tandem with 'official' culture. However, in the early years of independence, all expressions of African influence were prohibited or deemed provincial, unsophisticated and barbaric. It is worth remembering that the Cuban state was anxious above all else to establish itself as a modern, progressive nation in the eyes of the world and consequently, as Carpentier suggests, this period in the main became a period of imitation, when Cuba was anxious above any other considerations to discard any connotations of provincialism. The result was that Cuban intellectuals and artists simply mirrored European trends in music and in written literature.<sup>66</sup>

However, in time, the African and Creole nature of Cuba's popular musical tradition began to become more apparent. Despite the yearning for acceptance and recognition on the international stage, Carpentier suggests that much of the value of Cuba's musical compositions during these early years of the Republic lay not in its ability to absorb European and North American influences, but rather in this fundamentally nativist expression. He cites the example of an opera 'La esclava' by José Mauri Esteve, performed for the first time in 1921, which dealt with the vicissitudes of a young black slave.<sup>67</sup> According to Carpentier, the text is underscored at all times by an attention to quotidian language and expression. Mauri's opera was in fact merely the beginning of a reengagement on the part of many artists and musicians with a more essential Cuban identity. Carpentier also recounts how, in 1925, the composer Amadeo Roldán, experimented with the corpus of surviving black music, song and dance, by consciously making it the subject of his new composition 'Obertura sobre temas cubanos'.68 It is worthy of note that Roldán's work, like Motivos de son, which was published five years after Roldán's, was also heavily criticised.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 273-4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 284-5.

<sup>68</sup> ibid., pp. 307-9.

Nonetheless, Alejo Carpentier highlights the significance of 'Obertura sobre temas cubanos':

Sin que fuera una obra lograda, puede decirse que el estreno de esta 'Obertura' constituyó el acontecimiento más importante de la historia musical cubana en lo que lleva de corrido el siglo xx, por su proyección e implicaciones.<sup>69</sup>

In many respects this celebration and vindication of the black and popular idioms of Cuba was indicative of the spirit of the period and literary movements like the Minoristas simply reflected a momentum generated initially from within Cuban music. As several critics have suggested, other key events such as the publication in 1924 of Fernando Ortiz's *Glosario de afronegrismos*, a catalogue of words of African origin that had been incorporated into the Cuban idiom, also contributed to the fashionability of blackness in Cuba at this juncture and signalled the emergence of a entirely new focus in Antillean poetry.<sup>70</sup>

The Minoristas were influenced and inspired by the revision of history undertaken by the Mexican muralists and by the socialisation of art and art-forms viewed both in the work of these Mexican artists and in the work of some Peruvian artists. One Minorista writer, Martí Casanovas, recalled the significance of this Mexican initiative:

... han iniciado la marcha, en arte como en todos los órdenes de la cultura, hacia una fórmula superior y genérica de civilización americana.<sup>71</sup>

Of the work of Diego Rivera, Martí Casanovas also observed:

Obras ... de una enorme plasticidad ... que a todos nos obliga y nos alcanza y aún tiene el don maravilloso de conmover las fibras más íntimas del indio mexicano que siente, después de cerca de cinco siglos de vejaminosa postergación,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p. 310.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> G. R. Coulthard, op. cit., pp. 28-31, Julio Finn, op. cit., p. 140.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Martí Casanovas, 'Arte nuevo', op. cit., p. 137.

reanudarse en ellas las voces ancestrales de la cultura aborigen, germen fecundo para toda empresa de amplitud continental.<sup>72</sup>

This general trend towards a democratisation of art forms and an accepted fusion of aesthetic and political aims was bound to impact on Guillén. However, Guillén repeatedly asserted the apoliticism of his position at this time:

Yo vivía al margen de la política cubana ... mi actitud fue de repulsa a la política nacional, hasta el punto de que nunca voté.<sup>73</sup>

On the political front, Gerardo Machado had assumed power in Cuba in 1925, coincidentally also the year in which the Cuban Communist party was founded. Guillén did not join the Party until 1934. Nonetheless, I believe a combination of artistic and political events during this period, as well as his return to Havana at the end of 1926, signalled the initial stages in a period of great transition and change for the poet. The highly-charged climate of Havana would also prove crucial to the formation of an entirely new response from Guillén. Three discrete issues of concern to Guillén appeared to coalesce at this juncture in his life - racial, material and linguistic with the result that the model for a new national literature which he had been seeking, was also conceived.

This quest for change in Guillén's writing is also mirrored in the few poems which he composed during this period. In 'El aeroplano' his concerns are clearly with loss and the fragility of cultural expression. This is also apparent in 'La voz desconocida', where the poet articulates a desire to excavate a part of his heritage and identity which has been displaced and forgotten. 'Futuro' explores some of the economic consequences of colonialism and betrays the pessimism and despair which appear to have engulfed the poet. In 'A la nueva musa', however, he asserts a new lyrical direction:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 137-8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> 'Conversación con Nicolás Guillén', op. cit., pp. 46 & 47.

Antes el poeta era un músico que frente a la orquesta daba saltos e imantaba con su batuta los suspiros de la flauta ... Ahora, el poeta se mete dentro de sí mismo y allá dentro, dirige su orquesta.<sup>74</sup>

One of the most interesting and influential factors which precipitated or accompanied Guillén's new direction was his collaboration on 'Ideales de una raza', from 1928 until its demise in 1930. A Sunday supplement of the Havana newspaper 'Diario de la Marina', these articles provide rich, additional insight into Guillén's views during this period.

The transition from poet to journalist for Guillén was neither dramatic nor unexpected. He trained as a printer, and as the poet revealed on several occasions, the influence of his father was crucial in this regard. Some of his earliest memories were of visits to his father's printing press.<sup>75</sup> In a later article 'Nací en una imprenta' (1972), Guillén also made the following admission:

El periodismo en todas sus facetas ha sido siempre el medio familiar en que he vivido  $\dots^{76}$ 

During the course of his life Guillén collaborated on various publications such as 'Lis' and 'Diario de la Marina', as well as 'Orbe', 'Mediodía' and the Communist party paper 'Hoy'. But it was in 'Ideales de una raza', under the direction of Gustavo E. Urrutia, where Guillén's initial pronouncements on race and identity would appear and significantly where *Motivos de son* was also published for the first time on April 20th, 1930.

Guillén, always acutely conscious of the significance of this forum, summed up the significance of 'Ideales de una raza' in the following way:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Obra poética I: op. cit., p. 72.

<sup>75 &#</sup>x27;Conversación con Nicolás Guillén', op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Prosa de prisa III: op. cit., p.386.

En ella se intentaba una vez más un acercamiento o al menos una elevada discusión sobre la convivencia de negros y blancos en Cuba, demorada y obstaculizada por siglos de prejuicios alentados en el seno de la clase y raza dominante.<sup>77</sup>

For two years, Guillén contributed in an enthusiastic way to 'Ideales de una raza' with his thoughts on racism and social injustice in Cuban society, as well as on more specific cultural issues.

In 'El blanco - He ahí el problema', Guillén responds to some of the criticism levelled at 'Ideales de una raza' at the time:

La dura labor del señor Urrutia pone en su espíritu temblores de pánico y, frente a los que estamos sacando a la luz del sol estas oscuras cuestiones para verlas con mayor claridad, sólo se le ocurre recordarnos patéticamente nuestra insignia y cantarnos la bella marcha de Bayamo.<sup>78</sup>

If we examine the content of some of these articles, it is clear that Guillén's opinions on racial harmony and justice were by then deeply held, as he attempted to discern ways in which change could be brought about. He was critical of the attitudes of both blacks and whites, who turned a blind eye to the existence of racial discrimination and inequality in Cuba. Notwithstanding the safeguards embedded in the new constitution, Guillén articulated the differences between the races, by pointing to the disparity in opportunities for blacks and whites in Cuba. On more than one occasion he made reference to what he viewed as dangerous precedents evident in North American society and urged Cuba not to follow their example of ghettoisation.<sup>79</sup> In 'La conquista del blanco' (1929), he urged blacks and whites to unite, stressing that their similarities were greater than their differences. This is a theme which pervades much of Sóngoro cosongo (1931) and one which I will examine in greater detail when I come to examine the poetry itself. In a 1932 address to the Lyceum Women's Association

<sup>77 &#</sup>x27;Conversación con Nicolás Guillén', op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Prosa de prisa I: op. cit., pp. 10-11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> 'El camino de Harlem', *ibid.*, pp. 4 & 6, 'La conquista del blanco', *ibid.*, p.9.

in Havana, Guillén - curiously disguised as his own secretary - dismissed the issue of race as ultimately divisive and destructive:

Entraña un organizarse para la lucha en frentes definidos; un estar dentro de nosotros mismos para convocar todas nuestras fuerzas a una asamblea rencorosa que no pacte; un ir con el puño en alto para dejarlo caer sobre la cabeza que odiamos y aplastarla.<sup>80</sup>

On that same occasion, he went on to assert that Cubans needed to acknowledge the essential hybridity of their identity:

Aquí todos somos algo mulatos en lo íntimo.<sup>81</sup>

In reality, Guillén was merely reiterating much of what Martí had to say on the question of race and racial identity in Cuba. Guillén's prose and verse reflected a persistent wish on his part to transcend this polemic of racial identity and colour. His vision of what he would later call a 'negrismo mestizo', was sustained by a belief in the positive and affirming nature of Cuba's hybrid identity.<sup>82</sup> Although, an apparent contradiction in terms, what Guillén envisaged was an initial re-evaluation of the black contribution to Cuban society and identity, culminating in the establishment of a socio-cultural position which was characterised by Martí's supraracial view of society:

... la nacionalidad cubana se debe a entrambos elementos y es consecuencia de una vasta, caudalosa, irresistible transculturación afrohispana.<sup>83</sup>

For Guillén, the essential nature of Cuba's identity was always far more complex than the question of skin colour, as suggested by him one year earlier in his prologue to *Sóngoro cosongo*:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> 'Presencia en el Lyceum', *ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> ibidem

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>82</sup> 'Nación y mestizaje', op. cit., p. 290.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, p. 289.

Y las dos razas que en la Isla salen a flor de agua, distantes en lo que se ve, se tienden un garfio submarino, como esos puentes hondos que unen en secreto dos continentes. Por lo tanto, el espíritu de Cuba es mestizo. Y del espíritu hacia la piel nos vendrá el color definitivo. Algún día se dirá 'color cubano'.<sup>84</sup>

These two years spent collaborating on 'Ideales de una raza' were hugely significant for Guillén. It is noteworthy also that it was due to his relationship with Urrutia that Guillén began to explore the area of poetry again, after almost a six year absence.

An interview conducted by Guillén and Urrutia at the end of January 1930 with an important Cuban musician, would, as Keith Ellis has pointed out, have far-reaching repercussions for the young poet and writer and for the future direction of his work.<sup>85</sup> In his conversation with Rosendo Ruiz, Guillén appears to have located a further solution to the twin dilemmas of cultural identity and racial harmony in Cuba. In the 'son' which Ruiz performed for Guillén and Urrutia, in this unique expression of the local and the vernacular, the poet identified a novel and appropriate means of harnessing the demands of his sense of social responsibility with the exigencies of a 'new' poetic form.

In a subsequent article published on January 26th 1930 in 'Diario de la Marina', Guillén's views on the value of the local culture are made abundantly clear. He clearly challenges the underlying *miedo de ser negro* and the sense of cultural inferiority which, he believed, afflicted most black Cubans.<sup>86</sup> It is quite evident, as I have suggested, that the poet had been grappling with the demands of an inchoate social conscience and was persistently frustrated by the limitations of the verse-forms at his disposal. Therefore, the 'son' which Ruiz performed for Guillén and Urrutia would have an important resonance. It is worth bearing in mind that this

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> Prologue to Sóngoro cosongo, Obra poética I: op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> In his article 'Motivos para elegir el son - Claves en la prosa de Guillén', Keith Ellis examines Guillén's adaptation of the 'son' in some detail. (Delivered at a colloquim in Cuba in April, 1997 and forwarded to me by the author)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> 'Rosendo Ruiz', op. cit., pp. 12-15.

interview took place just three months before the publication of *Motivos de son* on April 20th, 1930. In his article, entitled 'Rosendo Ruiz', Guillén extols the beauty and value of what he heard from Ruiz:

Ésa es nuestra música y ésa es nuestra alma. Nos sale a flor de piel, se nos desborda aunque queramos apretarle el cuello bajo la pechera de la camisa, y habrá de perseguirnos y reconocernos, señalándonos en nuestros momentos de apostasía, para decirnos, como en una picaresca reconvención:

Acuérdate bien, chaleco, que te conocí sin mangas ...<sup>87</sup>

It is significant that in later years, in his autobiography *Páginas* vueltas, Guillén recalls how he came to write *Motivos de son*. On a sleepless night in the month of April, 1930, the phrase 'negro bembón' came into his head, 'como si recordara algo sabido alguna vez ...', and he was subsequently inspired to write the eight poems which comprised this new collection.<sup>88</sup>

The similarities between the 'son' performed by Rosendo Ruiz (in January, 1930) and the first poem of *Motivos de son* (published in April, 1930) have also been suggested by Keith Ellis, specifically to highlight the link between Guillén's journalistic writings and his verse.<sup>89</sup> I also believe the juxtapositioning of the 'son' and the first stanza of 'Negro bembón' clearly demonstrates the musical and lexical influence of Ruiz's 'son' on the new verse of Guillén. There are clear similarities in rhythm and lexis; *te pone a juga/te pone tan brabo, bembé/bembón* and in the manner in which Guillén transcribed phonetically the song he heard on that occasion:

¿Po qué te pone tan brabo?

Tú te va a degraciá

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> *ibid*, p. 15. I think it is also of note that Federico García Lorca visited Cuba in 1930. The publication in 1928 of Lorca's *Romancero gitano* and his adaptation of local expression into a poetic medium were also surely influential factors on Guillén.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>88</sup> Páginas vueltas (La Habana: Ediciones Union, 1982), pp. 78-9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> 'Motivos para elegir el son - Claves en la prosa de Guillén', op. cit., p. 9.

cuando te disen negro bembón si tiene la boca santa, negro bembón? si te pone a jugá con Bembé ...

(Negro bembón)

(Te veré)

What is interesting about the poet's recollections of both the Ruiz interview and the composition of these poems, is the suggestion that both he and Ruiz were transfixed and consumed by a powerful, subconscious force. It is also significant that Rosendo Ruiz appears to have experienced something of a revival during May, 1930. The correlations between music and poetry had become central to this poet's vision of poetry and culture and he repeatedly acknowledged the abiding influence of music on his lyrical formation:

La influencia más señalada en los Motivos (al menos para mí) es la del Sexteto Habanero y el Trío Matamoros.<sup>90</sup>

Guillén's adaptation of the 'son' to the lyrical form was perhaps one of his most significant contributions to the revision of the national cultural identity. Fernando Ortiz observed the significance of this vindication of popular traditions and culture:

Su autor es un poeta que ha escrito para la música popular del día esos versos, ajustándolos a uno de los muchos ritmos musicales y espontáneos de la musa afrocubana que retoza entre los hijos del pueblo, dando a nuestro acervo artístico muy legítimos valores, de los cuales ya han pasado algunos al tesoro universal, como la habanera, y otros están penetrando en su conocimiento, como la rumba y el son.<sup>91</sup>

In an article, written shortly after the publication of *Motivos de son* and *Sóngoro cosongo*, Regino E. Boti also explored the significance of this adaptation of the *son* and the *pregón* of the street-sellers in

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> 'Conversación con Nicolás Guillén', *Recopilación de textos sobre Nicolás Guillén: op. cit.*, p. 41. Also see p. 33 of the same collection of interviews.
 <sup>91</sup> 'Otras opiniones', *ibid.*, p. 320.

Guillén's poetry.<sup>92</sup> Boti suggested that by adapting such popular formats, the poet managed to make the lyrical form more accesible:

.... constituyen nuestros medios de expresión popular, nacional: porque en ninguna parte la voz del arroyo llega con tanta premura a los salones, como en Cuba.<sup>93</sup>

Significantly, Guillén also viewed the implications of his aesthetic project in much the same manner, as an essential and novel link between high and popular culture:

De la guitarra del pueblo, el son pasó a los salones de la aristocracia, e influyó no sólo en la naturaleza de nuestra música, sino en la literatura ...<sup>94</sup>

In keeping with a definition suggested by the musicologist Eduardo Sánchez de Fuentes, Regino Boti has outlined the traditional structure of the *son*. Consisting of two parts; the *estrofa* or *motivo* traditionally sung by two voices or by a lead voice, and the *estribillo/sonsonete* or *montuno*, sung in response, there is always, Boti suggests, a correlation and balance in terms of rhythm and metre between the two parts. Guillén also emphasised the significance of this interplay between the *montuno* and the *motivo*:

Es preciso que la estructura de un son no tenga un valor estrófico independiente, como lo tiene, pongamos por caso, un soneto, un serventesio, una décima. Se trata de un problema de ritmo, el cual se resuelve rítmicamente, aunque ello parezca redundante.<sup>95</sup>

Guillén acknowledged that although there was an inevitable repetition of words or ideas, some of which appeared to make little sense, these words were always crucial to the overall rhythm of the *son*. If one examines some of the poems of *Motivos de son* some of these musical techniques are clearly evident. In 'Mulata' we note

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> Regino E. Boti, 'La poesía cubana de Nicolás Guillén', *ibid.*, pp. 81-90.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> *ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> 'Conversación con Nicolás Guillén', op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>95</sup> Páginas vueltas: op. cit., p.87.

the repetition of *tanto tren*, in 'Negro bembón' the phrase *negro bembón* is repeated throughout, in 'Sigue' *sigue* and *camina* are repeated throughout the poem and in 'Búcate plata', *¡qué ba!* All these examples of repetition achieve the same desired effect of creating an almost hypnotic and ancillary rhyme which runs contrary to the main verse of the poems. In 'Si tú supiera', the *motivo* is also followed by the distinct rhythm of the chorus:

Sóngoro cosongo, songo be; sóngoro cosongo; de mamey;

As I have observed, one of Guillén's central preoccupations was the re-inclusion and reaffirmation of this black voice into Cuban culture and consequently, given that this kind of popular music was traditionally associated with the poorer social groups, to which most Cuban black people would have belonged during that historical period, the *son* and *pregón* were thus innovative and effective mediums through which the poet could communicate something of this largely unrecorded black tradition to a wider audience.

In *Páginas Vueltas*, Guillén recalls his relationships with other 'negrista' musicians, in particular with Amadeo Roldán and Alejandro García Caturla.<sup>96</sup> A letter from García Caturla, a renowned musician of the time, ten days after the publication of *Motivos de son* is significant if only for Caturla's views on Afrocubanism:

... tanto en música como en arte nuestro en general, lo considero y seguiré considerando, como la parte más poderosa y rica de las fuentes de producción.<sup>97</sup>

Roldán and Caturla in fact had a hostile relationship arising out of the former's publication of *Motivos de son*. Roldán had begun to put *Motivos de son* to music without any prior consultation with Guillén. García Caturla, in collaboration with Guillén, had only set

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 84-5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> *ibid.*, p. 85.

'Tú no sabe inglés' to music when he found out about Roldán's work and consequently abandoned the project altogether. Another interesting, and infinitely more satisfying phenomenon from the poet's point of view, was the work of two other musicians, known as Los Grenet. They also composed music for the *Motivos de son*, without the knowledge or consent of the poet. However, the songs subsequently became popular among the ordinary inhabitants of Havana, which gave Guillén immense satisfaction.<sup>98</sup> Los Grenet also set the poems of *Sóngoro cosongo* to music. Guillén's concern for a recuperation of the local and, in particular for a revaluation of black culture, was thus aided and undoubtedly influenced by the precedent he had observed in Cuban music. Crucially, and central to Guillén's rehabilitation of the *son*, was the reappraisal of the Afro-Cuban heritage, and his persistent desire to 'rescatar la voz propia'.<sup>99</sup>

Motivos de son thus signals the culmination of an important period of transition for the poet. I have illustrated thus far the series of complex factors which I believe prompted this change and his return to poetry, and subsequently the publication of Motivos de themselves. As a collection, I believe Motivos de son reflects son Guillén's response to this search for both aesthetic and political change. The poems are indicative of a growing frustration on the poet's part with the national socio-political situation, and were the product of a more rigid focus, a focus propelled by his journalistic writing, on issues of racism and racial identity in Cuba. Later I will explore in more detail the relationship between Guillén's initiative in Cuba and other reaffirmations of black culture and expression in Harlem, some parts of the Caribbean and France during the same period. However, at this juncture I will move to begin a closer examination of the three collections by Guillén which I have chosen, beginning now with Motivos de son.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 86-7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> 'Cuba, negros, poesía', op. cit., p. 95.

### Motivos de son

Most of these eight short poems deal with the vicissitudes of ordinary day-to-day life in Cuba in the late 1920s; questions of love and relationships, or the lack of money or work.<sup>100</sup> Some however explore more pressing issues relating to (re)definitions of perceptions of beauty and physical appearance, in particular with regard to black women. It is interesting to note that such a concern appears to underpin much black poetry of the region, an indication of some of the more enduring effects of colonialism.<sup>101</sup> The negation of the physical and the human which often occurred during colonisation, which I have discussed in Chapter One, invariably engendered a sense of shame and inferiority among colonised people which needed to be unravelled.

In order to counter some of these prejudices, Guillén begins by articulating some of the discriminatory views held about black people. By enunciating such symbols of racism, he challenges, and subsequently overturns them, by celebrating the distinct physical beauty of black people. He does so in 'Mi chiquita':

La chiquita que yo tengo tan negra como é, no la cambio po ninguna, po ninguna otra mujé.

Similarly, in 'Mulata', Guillén affirms the blackness of the woman when compared to a 'mulata'. The latter, he implies, not only attempts to disguise her true origins but also makes disparaging remarks about his physical appearance - que tengo la narise/como nudo de cobbata:

Si tú supiera, mulata, la veddá; ¡que yo con mi negra tengo,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>100</sup> Any subsequent quotations from *Motivos de son, Sóngoro cosongo* and *West Indies, Ltd.* are from *Obra poética I: op. cit.* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> See Jorge Luis Morales's anthology of black Caribbean poetry *Poesía* afroantillana y negrista (Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1981)

#### y no te quiero pa na!

In 'Negro Bembón' he invokes the term 'bembón', a term used to describe protruding lips or 'bembe'. As Ian Smart points out, this technique was quite common.<sup>102</sup> Known as a 'mascón', Smart suggests that writers often use an identifiable or controversial word like this for a specific purpose and cites the use of 'nègre' by the French Négritude movement. Clearly Guillén's intentions on this occasion were to reverse the normally negative and racist impact of such a word and to assert, in its place, a suggestion of physical beauty.

The use of such 'mascones' is also a feature of other black poetry, for example, Langston Hughes's poem, 'Share-Croppers'. Hughes's poem is framed within two similar stanzas which also suggest a similar dehumanisation:

Just a herd of Negroes Driven to a field, Plowing, planting, hoeing, To make the cotton yield. <sup>103</sup>

In *Poems from Black Africa*, an anthology compiled by Hughes, there are other examples of this, as in the following excerpt from a poem by the Liberian poet Roland Tombekai:

Is this Africa unfair men once called Continent of Darkness land of baboons, apes and monkeys, cannibals and men with tails only fit to be the servants of other men? <sup>104</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Ian Smart, Central American Writers of West Indian Origin (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1985), pp. 41-2.
<sup>103</sup> Langston Hughes, Selected Poems of Langston Hughes (New York: Vintage Classics, 1990), p. 165.
<sup>104</sup> Langston Hughes, Poems from Black Africa (Indiana University Press, 1966), pp. 79-80.

Similar sentiments are echoed in a poem by Puerto Rican poet, Victorio Llanos Allende:

Por bien que parezca un negro, lo pintan siempre deforme creyendo que en el pellejo conlleva una ofensa enorme.

Los ojos los pintan blancos; la boca bien colorada y la nariz aplastada, para producirlo espanto.<sup>105</sup>

Other poems in *Motivos de son* capture something of the vicissitudes of day-to-day survival and material problems in general. Both 'Hay que tené boluntá' and 'Búcate plata' focus on the poverty of life in Havana which drove people to take drastic measures:

Mira si tú me conose, que ya no tengo que hablá: cuando pongo un ojo así, e que no hay na; pero si lo pongo así, tampoco hay na.

Empeña la plancha elétrica, pa podé sacá mi flú; buca un reá, buca un reá, cómprate un paquete' vela poqque a la noche no hay lu. ('Hay que tené voluntá')

Some other far-reaching effects of colonialism are articulated in 'Tú no sabe inglé' where the poet captures the sense of inferiority and worthlessness which black people often experienced:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>105</sup> Jorge Luis Morales, Poesía afroantillana y negrista: op. cit., p. 73.

No te enamore ma nunca, Bito Manué, si no sabe inglé, si no sabe inglé.

Angel Augier sums up the significance of this collection as follows:

Eran cuadros vibrantes de la vida popular de la capital, presentados escueta, ágil, vigorosamente y con un sentido definido de afirmación racial: se establecía el orgullo de ser negro, frente a la postura vergonzante o deprimente de 'saber darse su lugar' y de tener a menos el color y el origen como una especie de estigma.<sup>106</sup>

For the poet, these poems offered him the opportunity to 'amulatar' and thus transform inherited lyrical models.<sup>107</sup> Clearly the most unique feature of Motivos de son is the manner in which Guillén represented phonetically the speech-patterns, lexis and rhythms of the oral vernacular of Havana. In order to capture something of these 'authentic' speech-patterns, to render, through the medium of the imposed language, the lexical and linguistic characteristics of the submerged culture, Guillén employs several different linguistic techniques. These techniques are similar to those outlined by Humberto López Morales in 'The History of Literary Language'.<sup>108</sup> In this article, López Morales catalogues a series of linguistic devices employed in some Afro-Antillean poetry, which, as he suggests, was used to create an alternative literary discourse and, secondly, to reflect the unique dialectical environment of these writers.<sup>109</sup> Many of these devices, as I have suggested, can be located in Guillén's Motivos de son.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> Nicolás Guillén - Notas para un estudio biográfico-crítico: op. cit., pp. 122-3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>107</sup> 'Conversación con Nicolás Guillén', op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>108</sup> Humberto López Morales, 'The History of Literary Language', A History of Literature in the Caribbean Vol. I (A. J. Arnold, ed.)

<sup>(</sup>Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1994), pp. 9-23. <sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, p.9.

Firstly, Guillén omits end syllables or the final /r/, /l/, /d/ of a verb or noun when preceded by a stressed vowel such as in the following examples:

tiene de to / no hay na / tan adelantá / que hay que tené voluntá /buca un reá.

Often a syllable is vocalised such as in the following example:

y tú le tiene que huí

Or deleted as in the following verses from 'Mi chiquita':

Si la vienen a bucá pa bailá, pa comé, ella me tiene que llebá, o traé.

In 'Hay que tené boluntá' he omits the intervocalic /d/:

pa toa la bida

In other verses he changes the morphology of the verb by omitting the /s/ to capture the aspirated /s/ characteristic of Cuban Spanish:

etoy a arró con galleta / e que no hay na / buca un reá

On other occasions, he omits the /s/ after a stressed vowel:

con tanto inglé que tú sabía/depué dirán que soy mala

He also employs sibillation, interchanging /s/ and /c/ in common verbs such as *conose/dise/cosina*. He also employs metathesis, interchanging /s/ and /z/, as well as /b/ and /v/. Here are some examples:

te bi pasá / si la bienen a bucá /ella laba /con tanto sapato nuebo /cuando te disen

Another technique he employs is that of 'yeísmo', that is, he uses a /y/ instead of the normal /ll/:

no yore, negra lcamina, negra, y no yore

He also transposes the /r/ before the /q/, /b/ and /d/ phonemes such as in the following examples, again with the precise aim of capturing this neutralisation in the local speech-patterns:

# poqque/ cobbata/ acoddadte/ acuéddate

He also employs assonance to great effect:

Sóngoro cosongo, songo be; sóngoro cosongo de mamey;

The main function of Guillén's phonetic representation in these poems is to capture the sounds and patterns of the local vernacular. Both Neruda in the *Canto general* and Cardenal throughout *Homenaje a los indios americanos* articulate a similar wish to retrieve idioms which have been lost or excluded from the aesthetic text. In the next chapter I will examine how Neruda, in the first sequence of the *Canto general* in particular, identifies with primal sources of language and meaning in an attempt to effect a reconnection with more authentic definitions of self and nation. In Chapter Four, I will illustrate how Cardenal in poems such as 'Nele de kantule' also consciously seeks out equivalents in the indigenous languages of the region to explain past and contemporary phenomena.

A corollary to Guillén's revision of poetic language is his reappropriation and inclusion of local words and expressions in his poems: *be p'ayá / te corrite de bachata / ¿po qué te pone tan brabo?* 

It is interesting to note that some of Guillén's contemporaries; Emilio Ballagas, Ignacio Villa and José Antonio Portuondo to name a few, also attempted to capture and recreate the unique features of the Cuban idiom through the use of similar linguistic effects. For example, observe Ballagas's poem, 'Lavandera con negrito':

Eta tarde lo bañé y ya etá otra bé'echo un pueco. ¡Cómo buelba'a comé tierra te ba a cogé la confronta! <sup>110</sup>

Similarly, Ignacio Villa employs similar techniques in his poem 'Drumi, Mobila':

No yora, Mobila, que tu mamá ta la campo, y horita ta bení pa cá.

Si nene drumi cuando mamá sale, e trae regalito pa ti, e trae to lo nunie pa ti.<sup>111</sup>

Clearly, Guillén had come to view the oral vernacular as the repository of the most authentic idiom of Cuba. In an article written in 1931, 'Pregones', he observed the street-sellers of Havana weaving and experimenting with the rhythms and lexis of the language. The most accomplished of them, Guillén suggested, were engaged in an art form.<sup>112</sup> *Motivos de son* is thus propelled by a desire to re-capture and recreate the essential musicality of the speech-patterns of Havana, the timbre and rhythms heard in the spoken language. Throughout, one is conscious of the potential for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>110</sup> Jorge Luis Morales, *Poesía afroantillana y negrista: op. cit.*, p. 385. <sup>111</sup> *ibid.*, p. 348.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>112</sup> 'Pregones', Prosa de prisa I: op. cit., p. 25.

performance of these poems because of the poet's attention to lyrical technique and structure. Performance is aided by his use of alliteration and assonance, together with his repetition of key words or phrases which assume the function of a chorus. Throughout, his use of a familiar lexis and rhythm renders his verse accessible and familiar to a general audience.

This process of 'oralisation' of the written form as viewed in *Motivos de son* has been defined by some critics as 'neo-orality' and dismissed by others as a nostalgic 'idealisation' of speech patterns.<sup>113</sup> However, I believe Guillén was captivated by the participatory and inclusive nature of oral verse-forms and their accessibility and relevance to a local(ised) experience. Although ultimately a variant of writing, the poet's desire to capture the tone and content of the regional oral lexicon and his adaptation of a popular musical form such as the *son* are always suggestive of the potential for a collective experience sourced in the popular oral tradition.

In a broader context, what Guillén was proposing was a counterdiscourse, which displaced canonical expectations of the form and language of poetic expression. His vindication of orality and popular verse-forms and their identification by him as the locale of the authentic expression of Cuba, signified a genuine desire on his part for a renovation of the lyrical discourse. His conscious reappropriation of the local idiom, and assimilation of vernacular forms of expression by canonical literary forms, was influenced by the need to counter the sense of inferiority which still undermined national confidence. This overriding sense of cultural inferiority was, Guillén believed, a very real consequence of the colonial experience:

... rechazamos lo vernáculo con una ingenuidad conmovedora. Nada que no haya venido de París, o por lo menos de Nueva York, de donde, desdichadamente, nos

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> Chantal Zabus, 'Language, Orality, and Literature', New National and Post-Colonial Literatures: op. cit., pp. 30-31.

viene todo, desde los zapatos hasta el frío, tiene para nosotros interés.<sup>114</sup>

As I have suggested in Chapter One, during the process of colonisation, alternative or 'non-canonical' forms of cultural expression are inevitably suppressed or assimilated into the hegemonic definitions of culture and meaning. Thus, Guillén's transformation of lyrical expression could be interpreted as a challenge to one of the central weapons of colonialism - the language. His 'abrogation' of the normative aesthetic position of the language of centre, and the simultaneous 'appropriation' of this idiom, so that it reflected local expression more accurately, are indicative of two of the central components of the process of decolonisation.<sup>115</sup> Firstly, it illustrates an underlying frustration with the linguistic and aesthetic tools at hand and, secondly, a perceived need to interrogate and ultimately dismantle the relationship between the colonised community and the colonial centre.

The critical response to *Motivos de son* in 1930 was phenomenal.<sup>116</sup> In an article first published in 'El país' on June 6th, 1930, two months after the publication of *Motivos de son*, Ramón Vasconcelos criticised Guillén most severely for this valorisation of popular expression:

... Guillén, poeta de numen bien enfrenado, no como los caballos de circo, sino como el 'pur sang' de carrera, capaz de esfuerzos serios, no debe darle el brazo a la musa callejera, fácil, vulgar y descoyuntada ... Hay motivos para son, pero no hay motivo para tanto, ni para tan poco. <sup>117</sup>

Although he did acknowledge the validity of the vernacular, Vasconcelos was critical of its inappropriateness as a medium of poetic expression:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>114</sup> 'Rosendo Ruiz', op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>115</sup> Bill Ashcroft *et al, The Empire Writes Back - Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures: op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>116</sup> See 'Otras opiniones', op. cit., pp. 319-323.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> *ibid.*, p. 243.

... debe universalizar su verso y su idea en vez de meterlos en el solar para que brinquen al son del bongó.<sup>118</sup>

Gustavo E. Urrutia, Guillén's mentor on 'Ideales de una raza', dismissed Vasconcelos's criticism and suggested that Vasconcelos's disapproval was motivated by a desire to confine expressions of Afrocubanism to popular culture, as a kind of folkloric curiosity:

... en realidad lo único que Vasconcelos pide es que no le civilicen el son, porque lo prefiere a la rústica, como lo produce el pueblo.<sup>119</sup>

Urrutia went on to affirm that Guillén's intellectual use of this popular medium, undermined such a critical position. Guillén responded himself to Ramón Vasconcelos's criticism a week later, on June 15th, 1930 in 'Diario de la Marina'. In common with Urrutia, Guillén concluded that Vasconcelos's denunciation of *Motivos de son* stemmed more from a sense of cultural inferiority rather than from any genuine concern about inappropriateness of style or frivolity of content:

Entre nosotros, donde a menudo no pensamos más que con cabezas de importación, precisa cierto heroísmo para aparecerse con unos versos primarios escritos en la forma en que todavía hablan - piensan - muchos de nuestros negros (y no pocos blancos también) y en los que se retratan tipos que a diario vemos moverse a nuestro lado.<sup>120</sup>

In the same article, he stressed that this experimentation with the 'son' and the lexicon and vernacular of the working-class inhabitants of Havana, constituted one small part of a much greater project of cultural renovation. Two years later, in February 1932, Guillén summarised the significance of *Motivos de son* in the following way:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>118</sup> *ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>119</sup> Páginas vueltas: op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>120</sup> 'Sones y soneros', Prosa de prisa I: op. cit., p. 21.

Estos pequeños poemas recogen los menudos conflictos de la masa, y cada uno trata de ser un cuadro breve, enérgico y veraz del alma negra, enraizada profundamente en el alma de Cuba.<sup>121</sup>

However, the initial response from black intellectuals was generally negative, as they viewed this collection of poetry as derisive and, ultimately, divisive.<sup>122</sup> In *Páginas vueltas*, Guillén again suggests this response was a direct consequence of the inferiority engendered by colonialism:

... tratábase de un problema bien simple: un evidente complejo de inferioridad, determinado por la trasmisión de la cultura europea (en este caso traída por los españoles) a la masa de esclavos africanos que reemplazaron en Cuba al indio original.<sup>123</sup>

Despite the many objections to the lexicon and format of *Motivos de* son there were also several positive critical responses at the time of its publication. Regino E. Boti, for example, applauded Guillén for his realistic and uncontrived recreation of the oral vernacular:

Los 'Motivos de son' recogen las palpitaciones líricas del sector menos comprendido del pueblo cubano, y más explotado por cierta literatura teatral que sirve caricatura por retrato. En esa poesía - verosimilitud y gracia - se expone a los conceptos de la crítica una facies del agregado racial negro, aquella que todavía permanece apartada de las corrientes de la cultura, pero que posee su expresión peculiar, a la que Nicolás Guillén le ha dado forma actualista sin mondarle la hojazón demosófica, sino fijándola de tal manera que el filósofo puede recoger en ella la verdadera grafía que corresponde a una prosodia repetida en clichés que, sobre averiados, no revelan la verdad.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> 'Presencia en el Lyceum', *ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>122</sup> 'Conversación con Nicolás Guillén', op. cit., pp. 45-6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>123</sup> op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>124</sup> Regino Boti, 'El verdadero son' (21-IX- 1930), Recopilación de textos sobre Nicolás Guillén: op. cit., p. 247.

Fernando Ortiz, one of the most important students of Afrocubanism, gave the following appraisal:

Los versos de Guillén no son folklóricos en el sentido de su originalidad, pero lo son en cuanto traducen perfectamente el espíritu, el ritmo, la picaresca y la sensualidad de las producciones anónimas. Pronto esos versos pasarán al repertorio popular y se olvidará quizá quién sea su autor.<sup>125</sup>

### Sóngoro cosongo

Sóngoro cosongo, published one year after Motivos de son in 1931, was conceived in tandem with the 1930 collection.<sup>126</sup> The title is taken from a line in the poem 'Si tú supiera' from Motivos de son. Although Sóngoro cosongo shares many of the same themes and poetic concerns of Motivos de son, Guillén did not repeat the phonetic experimentation of Motivos de son. As a collection it is, in the opinion of some, of a much more superior quality.<sup>127</sup>

In his prologue to *Sóngoro cosongo*, Guillén remarked on the complexities of the task facing any student of Cuba's complex national identity:

La inyección africana en esta tierra es tan profunda, y se cruzan y entrecruzan en nuestra bien regada hidrografía social tantas corrientes capilares, que sería trabajo de miniaturista desenredar el jeroglífico.<sup>128</sup>

Guillén was very aware of the layered complexities of the Cuban identity and of the manner in which discrete beliefs and traditions had become intermeshed over successive generations as a consequence of the colonial experience:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>125</sup> 'Otras opiniones', *ibid.*, p. 320.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>126</sup> See 'Presencia en el Lyceum', op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> Regino Boti, 'La poesía cubana de Nicolás Guillén', op. cit, p. 84.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>128</sup> Obra poética I: op. cit., p. 96.

En contacto perenne con la raza dominante y explotadora, va produciéndose así una lenta fusión, que abarca creencias religiosas, costumbres, alimentos, música, sexo, desde lo banal e inmediato hasta las más complejas y misteriosas implicaciones de la vida espiritual.<sup>129</sup>

However, he was acutely conscious of the undervaluing of the black contribution to Cuban society and was thus eager to redress the sense of inferiority and worthlessness experienced by many black Cubans. As a collection, in many ways it is an extension of his journalistic writing of the period and of many of the themes evident in *Motivos de son*. However, clearly the emphasis is more focused on issues of racial and class identity, rather than with an articulation of the popular. Guillén himself described *Sóngoro cosongo* in the following manner:

Es el acento puramente negro, que descubre, exalta y propaga la belleza oscura, arrinconada en el espíritu de gran parte de esa raza por los cánones de una educación clásica.<sup>130</sup>

Once again, the poet sources this sense of cultural and ethnic inferiority and inadequacy in the colonial experience. Having been uprooted as slaves and separated from their originary models of taste and behaviour, black Cubans were, Guillén believed, more susceptible to the influence of models imposed by a more dominant white European culture:

Así llegó a repugnarse de sí mismo, porque al través de generaciones numerosas asimiló la estética de sus antiguos amos y aprendió de éstos que la Belleza tenía su patrón en la Grecia antigua y no en el Africa ...<sup>131</sup>

*Sóngoro cosongo* centres on several key issues; perceptions of colour and racial identity, class politics, and attitudes towards religion, music and language. In the two madrigals in *Sóngoro cosongo*, Guillén again employs a popular musical form to focus on

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>129</sup> 'Nación y mestizaje', op. cit., p. 288.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>130</sup> 'Presencia en el Lyceum', op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> ibidem

definitions of beauty and on the sensuality of black women. They are two sexually-charged poems in which the poet celebrates the physical grace and beauty of black women. Both poems radiate sexuality and sexual expectation. We note Guillén's deliberate exploitation of colour in the second poem; how he allows the woman's nakedness to contrast so provocatively with her *collares rojos* and *brazaletas de oro*. Music and dance, women and the sensual all appear to be inextricably linked in the mind of the poet.

In 'Mujer nueva' woman is hailed as the source of renewal and inspiration for the poet. He also explores something of the duality of opinion with regard to black women, who were viewed either as a temptress and sexual icon, or conversely as a symbol of innocence and perfection. For this poet however, women are always earthy and energetic beings, at the centre of any process of renewal and change:

ella trae la palabra inédita, el anca fuerte, la voz, el diente, la mañana y el salto.

Throughout this selection of poems, as in *Motivos de son*, one gets a real sense of the significance of music both for Guillén and within Cuban society. In both 'Rumba' and 'Secuestro de la mujer de Antonio' the poet captures the implicit sensuality of the dance in progress, as well as the unabashed sexuality of the dancer. 'Rumba' in particular captures this sensuality in the build-up in the musical score, as it comes to mirror the sexual expectation of the poetic voice:

En el agua de tu bata todas mis ansias navegan: rumbera buena, rumbera mala.

Anhelo el de naufragar en ese mar tibio y hondo: ¡fondo

#### del mar!

Guillén focuses in particular on the physical particulars of the dancer, her cadera dura y sudada, pie, vientre, carne trigueña, boca seca. Throughout he employs a series of carefully balanced phrases and words to reflect the counterpointing of the musical score rumbera buena/rumbera mala, vayas/vengas and one can trace the easy rhythm of the early verses as it develops and reaches its crescendo in the urgency and exhilaration of the final quatrain:

¡Ultimo trago! Quítate, córrete, vámonos ... ¡Vamos!

'Pequeña oda a un negro boxeador cubano' was originally published in 1929, in honour of the Cuban boxer Eligio Sardiñas, also known as Kid Chocolate, who won two world titles in the US. In this poem Guillén celebrates the vitality and import of the Cuban boxer and yet, in dehumanising him, (he refers to him as a *mono* and *ardilla*) conveys something of the inhumanity of the sport and the avaricious intentions of the people who promote it. The poet is anxious to convey the manner in which Sardiñas was exploited and manipulated. What is also worthy of note is how Guillén's verse has assumed a much more actively political tone. There are echoes of Martí's admonitions about the US in the verse:

El norte es fiero y rudo, boxeador.

His criticism of the exploitative nature of boxing, and ultimately of North American society, is sustained throughout the poem and becomes increasingly more explicit:

ese mismo Broadway, es el que estira su hocico con una enorme lengua húmeda, para lamer glotonamente toda la sangre de nuestro cañaveral. The poet freely admits that Sardiñas would have been unaware of the fashionability of things black in North America and in Europe at that time, but the pride and self-conviction which he views in Kid Chocolate's sporting efforts should, he believes, be an example to all Cubans. Again Guillén's intentions are clear, to restore a sense of pride and self-belief to an otherwise humiliated and colonised people:

Y ahora que Europa se desnuda para tostar su carne al sol y busca en Harlem y en La Habana jazz y son, lucirse negro mientras aplaude el bulevar, y frente a la envidia de los blancos hablar en negro de verdad.

In 'Llegada' Guillén conveys a sense of the originary experiences of the first settlers in Cuba. So much of the language is imbued with this sense of incipience; *una gota de oro virgen, el espíritu limpio* and in his choice of verbs; *amanecer, madrugar* and *nacer*. He recreates the perceptions held by the early colonisers of an untamed and uncivilised landscape, inhabited by *pieles bárbaras* who, they believed, would respect and honour them:

Los hombres antiguos nos darán leche y miel y nos coronarán de hojas verdes.

Perhaps the overriding sense is of the smug self-satisfaction of the colonisers and the ease with which they subdued and became masters in this new land. But of particular note are the poet's repeated references to language; *la palabra, el grito, nuestro canto* and his awareness of the linguistic legacy bequeathed by the Spanish colonisers:

Traemos nuestro rasgo al perfil definitivo de América. 'Llegada' is, I believe, primarily concerned with the linguistic ontogenesis of the poet. In this poem the poet asserts the importance of language in the development of the individual or a nation by naming numerous parts of the body (*las venas, el puño, el ojo, nuestro pie, un músculo, la piel del alma, el cinturón, el espíritu*) while simultaneously discussing the emergence of the national idiom. Throughout the poem the physical is intermeshed with the linguistic, reaching its apogee in the following verses:

Nuestro canto es como un músculo bajo la piel del alma, nuestro sencillo canto.

There is repeated emphasis on the uniqueness of the Cuban language:

La palabra nos viene húmeda de los bosques ... El grito se nos sale como una gota de oro virgen.

Guillén however does not view this linguistic 'deviation' as something which has been imposed, or a fetter hindering the development of the language. Rather it is viewed by him, as it is by Neruda, as a unique form of expression, which originated in Cuba out of both colonial and pre-colonial influences. The resultant hybridised idiom is viewed as having made a major contribution to the linguistic diversity of Spanish.

In 'La canción del bongó' the poet examines other aspects of this cultural syncretism, the fusion of races and traditions, the amalgam of influences - linguistic and otherwise. By repeated counterpointing of black and white, of darkness and light, of Christianity and *Santería*, even of subjects and pronouns, Guillén looks repeatedly to the similarities which unite the opposing traditions - black and white, Spanish and African, coloniser and slave - instead of the differences which separate:

Pero mi repique bronco, pero mi profunda voz, convoca al negro y al blanco, que bailan el mismo son ...

Of this particular poem, Guillén once observed:

Es un poema satírico, cuyos elementos son bien conocidos en Cuba, como que nacen justamente de nuestro conflicto racial, de nuestra mulatez. Es el bongó, que preside nuestra querella, que sabe nuestro origen y que habla por fin con su voz grave de abuelo, para desgarrar de un tirón la cortina con que apenas podemos esconder nuestro pasado.<sup>132</sup>

For Guillén, the bongo, also an important instrument in Cuban music, was a powerful and evocative emblem of his African origins. However, instead of employing it to evoke an essentialist and nostalgic vision of Africa and blackness, the poet transforms the bongo into an enriching and affirming symbol of Cuba's *negrismo mestizo*.

Guillén's insistence on the syncretism of Cuban history and identity is articulated in this poem through a repeated emphasis on the commonality of language, culture and spirituality:

En esta tierra, mulata de africano y español (Santa Bárbara de un lado, del otro lado, Changó), siempre falta algún abuelo, cuando no sobra algún Don y hay títulos de Castilla con parientes en Bondó.

Music is repeatedly lauded as a cohesive element. Throughout 'La canción del bongó' one is acutely aware of the poet's attempts to recreate the rhythms of the drum. We witness it in his technique of repeating verses or words, designed to reflect the simple, repetitive beat of the drum. For example, the couplet:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>132</sup> *ibid.*, p. 38.

Aquí el que más fino sea, responde, si llamo yo.

This is repeated on three occasions and a variation closes the poem. In each case it is designed to signal the end of a particular section, much like the division of the *son* into the *motivo* and the *montuno*, the collective and individual parts respectively. He also makes great use of assonance as well as end-rhyme. In addition, he employs counterpoint; *unos/otros*, *sol/noche*, *por fuera/por dentro*, *falta/sobra*, *en público/a solas*. Equally the effect of the extended final enumeration of verbs in the future indicative again reflects the expected crescendo of the closing verses in a musical performance. All these techniques combine to reaffirm not only the poet's fascination with the musical tradition but also of the assimilation of both crafts - poetry and music - by Guillén.

'Canto negro' is another good example of the poet's infatuation with language and music. He rejoices in the diversity and musicality of the sounds. His extensive use of onomatopoeia, assonance and endrhyme, together with a deliberate positioning and counterpointing of vowels and consonants, all combine to create a richly layered, yet highly-entertaining poem:

!Yambambó, yambambé! Repica el congo solongo, repica el negro bien negro; congo solongo del Songo baila yambó sobre un pie.

Throughout this series of poems, one important underlying theme has been that of the cohesive commonality of music and language. However, a more serious intention also underpins the entire collection. It is clear that in celebrating the music and language of the Afro-Cuban heritage, Guillén, as he explained on several occasions, was also seeking to vindicate the black identity in general: ... porque reivindicaba los valores artísticos, políticos, culturales, humanos, en fin, el negro ante la discriminación o la esclavitud, es decir, su profunda figuración en la cultura nacional.<sup>133</sup>

## West Indies, Ltd. - From Racial to Social Poetics

From 1930 to 1933, Guillén's verse had become increasingly more politicised. Issues of socio-political significance had begun to assume more prominence and were central to his next collection, *West Indies, Ltd.* (1934). Concerns with racial poetics and with an assertion of the syncretic nature of Cuba's identity, as viewed in *Motivos de son* and *Sóngoro cosongo*, would be transformed into an ancillary component of the fight for social equality and justice. In this regard, the influence of Martí is highly significant. Martí, as I have illustrated previously, persistently highlighted the need to transcend issues of racial identity and division.<sup>134</sup> Social injustice, poverty and deprivation were viewed by him as common to all Cubans, both black and white. These issues, together with the imperialist intentions of North America, were repeatedly identified by Martí as an infinitely more dangerous threat to the Cuban nation and identity than the question of race.

Guillén's concern for social justice was not entirely new. Not only is it evident in his prose of the period preceding the publication of *West Indies, Ltd.* but it was also apparent in some earlier poems such as 'Pequeña oda a un negro boxeador cubano' and 'Llegada'. Another good example is the short poem 'Caña', from *Sóngoro cosongo* which comprises four simple statements illustrating the stark socio-economic reality of the Caribbean; the hierarchical structures imposed and the apparently endless chain of economic exploitation which resulted:

El negro junto al cañaveral.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>133</sup> 'Conversación con Nicolás Guillén', op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>134</sup> 'Nuestra América', op. cit., pp.155-6 and 'Mi raza', op. cit., pp. 156-9.

El yanqui sobre el cañaveral.

La tierra bajo el cañaveral.

;Sangre que se nos va!

There are clear thematic parallels between this poem and 'Adivinanzas' and 'Guadalupe W.I.' in West Indies, Ltd. By 1934, Guillén was affiliated to the Cuban Communist Party and, although not yet a full member, was actively involved in a number of campaigns of solidarity, in particular with Republican Spain. This transposition of issues pertaining to racial identity by questions of social justice and national sovereignty were, as Angel Augier has suggested, highly innovative and radical for the period.<sup>135</sup> Guillén's 'de-racialisation' of the socio-political question was, as I have suggested, influenced to a great extent by Martí who believed that such questions of ethnicity and racial discrimination would become redundant when obstacles of class had been overcome. Guillén was also profoundly effected in this regard by the fall of General Machado in 1933, a period that for many Cubans represented a real potential for revolution and change. West Indies, Ltd. thus marks another radical change in the poet's focus which Guillén himself acknowledged:

Es en este momento, creo yo, cuando cambia de rumbo mi obra, que se ve tocada por los problemas de carácter social, político o simplemente humano que afligen a Cuba en aquellos días.<sup>136</sup>

As a collection, it is a powerful indictment of colonialism, its structures and inherent injustice. The title, like Neruda's 'La Anaconda Copper Mining Co.' and 'La United Fruit Co.', betrays the poet's anger at the economic domination and exploitation of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>135</sup> Prologue to Obra poética I: op. cit., p. xviii.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>136</sup> Páginas vueltas: op. cit., p. 94.

region by European and North American interests, and the reduction of the entire continent to an economic unit, devoid of people, language and heritage. The collection comprises a series of poems which address this socio-economic situation. It also includes other poems which, like the two previous collections, aim to counteract the negative primitivist image of the region by celebrating the rich spiritual beliefs of the Caribbean.

The long sequence of poems from which the title of the collection is derived 'West Indies, Ltd.' is a masterful and varied expression of Guillén's powers of criticism and his hopes for the Antilles as a whole. In the first sequence of 'West Indies, Ltd.' Guillén castigates in a caustic fashion many different categories of people within Cuban society. As he conveys something of the diversity of race and class in Cuba, he is always anxious to highlight the historical circumstances which contributed to such diversity:

Aquí hay blancos y negros y chinos y mulatos. Desde luego, se trata de colores baratos, pues a través de tratos y contratos se han corrido los tintes y no hay un tono estable.

The poet is clearly critical of the willingness of Cubans to conform to touristic stereotypes; of ever-smiling natives, of a place where the rum and cigars are in plentiful supply. The reality, Guillén asserts, is very different:

donde a veces corre mucho dinero, pero donde siempre se vive muy mal.

He is also critical of those who attempt to negate or disguise their origins, of the rich and the poor who go to great lengths to portray an image of sophistication and borrowed style:

Bajo el relampagueante traje de dril andamos todavía con taparrabos; gente sencilla y tierna, descendiente de esclavos y de aquella chusma incivil de variadísima calaña que en el nombre de España cedió Colón a Indias con ademán gentil.

Yet the poet reserves particular contempt for the 'co-oppressors', those fellow blacks who even go so far as to deny their racial origins. This self-denial syndrome was, in his view, an important corollary of colonialism, and a concern already addressed by him in both *Motivos de son* and *Sóngoro cosongo*, and a reflection of a true sense of racial inferiority. Such denial was a matter of deep concern for this poet:

¡Me río de ti, negro imitamicos, que abres los ojos ante el auto de los ricos, y que te avergüenzas de mirarte el pellejo oscuro cuando tienes el puñal tan duro!

The other sequences in 'West Indies, Ltd.' deal with a variety of related subjects, such as the endemic poverty and the poor working conditions of most Cubans and the role of foreign multinationals. It is punctuated on three occasions by a *son*. These sequences are highly rhythmic. The first comprises four quatrains with an *abcb* rhyme scheme; a *motivo* sung by the main singer in which the poet conveys the essential political message, followed by the *montuno*, or refrain - *¡Que siga el son!* 

The second *son* sequence also comprises a series of quatrains, which initially follow an *abab* rhyme scheme, and a couplet linked to the *motivo* by extensive use of assonance. Guillén also employs anaphora to great effect and as the *son* develops, so too do the pace and rhythm of the verses, culminating in the shorter final verses which taper off into a four-syllable verse. The third *son* sequence also relies on anaphora and assonance to achieve its rhythm. As with the other two sequences, the underlying political message of social injustice never compromises the artistic intentions of the poet. All three are painstakingly crafted and resonate with the pace and content of this popular musical form.

The other sequences of 'West Indies, Ltd.' vary from a kind of work-song, in which Guillén recreates the communal rhythm and effort of the cutting of the sugar-cane, to apparently more prosaic pieces which convey the poet's venom and anger. The sixth sequence, like the opening one, is a powerful and angry indictment of Caribbean life; of the inequality and exploitation, of the slavish obsequiousness of the Caribbean people towards their North American neighbours, and of the way in which the area has been scarred and demoralised by this unequal relationship. This unpleasant reality is reflected in the harshness of the language employed by the poet - *repta, cuarteado, atados, grotesca.* Hope, however, is invested in revolutionary change, in:

los que codo con codo todo lo arriesgan; todo lo dan con generosas manos.

Having committed himself to the revolution, the poet then urges people to support such efforts for change:

Los que encienden la chispa roja, sobre el campo reseco.

For Guillén, hope now lies in social change and in those who effect it:

Ésos son los que sueñan despiertos, los que en el fondo de la mina luchan, y allí la voz escuchan con que gritan los vivos y los muertos.

The alternative is almost too horrible to contemplate - hunger, poverty, prostitution, drugs - a complete disintegration of the fabric of society and a further devaluation of national identity:

Noches pobladas de prostitutas, bares poblados de marineros; encrucijada de cien rutas

### para bandidos y bucaneros.

Throughout, one detects the poet's empathy for these victims of social injustice. Once again the poems, although highly political in content, are carefully crafted. In fact it is precisely in his attention to verse and rhythm, in his enumeration of the victims, in his conscious inclusion of English words and brand-names, in his recreation of conversational language, that Guillén intercalates the poetic and the political. We detect throughout this long sequence of poems an obvious sympathy for society's victims, a sympathy and empathy which underpin much of the collection.

Another good example is the poem 'Sabás' in which he paints an evocative image of a poor, crazy beggar. The portrait is even more poignant in that there is an inevitable distance between the poetic voice and this pathetic figure of isolation. The descriptions of Sabás are punctuated with other people's assessments of him in parenthesis. However, the tone changes quite dramatically and unexpectedly in the fourth and final stanzas when the poet shifts from his former position of casual and dispassionate observer, to one of solidarity. He urges the eponymous victim, through the repeated use of the imperative, to assert his rightful place in society and to seize what is rightfully his:

Coge tu pan, pero no lo pidas; coge tu luz, coge tu esperanza cierta como a un caballo por las bridas. Plántate en medio de la puerta, pero no con la mano abierta, ni con tu cordura de loco: aunque te den el pan, el pan es poco, y menos ese pan de puerta en puerta.

In 'Canción de los hombres perdidos' Guillén catalogues the experiences of yet another series of figures, ravaged by hunger and malnutrition. They, like Sabás, have been dehumanised by their poverty, and lose their identity, and are now only known as 'Caimán' and 'Perro viudo'. Again Guillén's sympathy with these social outcasts is clearly apparent, but it is not a paternalistic expression of sympathy or charity. Rather he consciously aligns himself with them by employing the first person plural throughout. Such a synthesis of the individual and the collective is also a feature of the verse of both Neruda and Cardenal.

'Canción de los hombres perdidos' is very tightly structured, arranged in a series of tercets, all of which employ assonance:

La tripa impertinente hipa, puntual lo mismo que un casero, pero nada hay para la tripa.

Guillén also employs internal rhyme in other stanzas:

Secos estamos como piedra. Largos y flacos, como cañas. Mano-pezuña, barba-hiedra.

Repetition is used throughout the poem to highlight the unrelenting nature of this poverty:

Así andamos por la ciudad, como perros abandonados en medio de una tempestad.

Another technique in evidence is enumeration:

Somos asmáticos, diabéticos. herpéticos y paralíticos, mas sin regímenes dietéticos.

All these techniques combine to create an easy rhythm, and convey a simple but effective message. Guillén utilises many similar rhyme-schemes throughout 'Nocturno en los muelles', along with assonance and internal rhyme, to create an almost surreal picture of poverty and desperation. Through his use of alternate rhyming verses in the second verse of each stanza - *aba bcb cdc ded efe fgf* - he effects a link with the stanza that follows. The poet also makes good use of enjambment: *las tremendas/horas de muchos hombres musculosos/y débiles, sujetos por las riendas/como potros.* 

The poem is enclosed within the recurring image of the desolate harbour, of a revolving, directionless beacon:

las tremendas horas de muchos hombres musculosos

y débiles, sujetos por las riendas como potros. Voluntades en freno, y las heridas pálidas sin vendas.

'Dos niños' is another poem in which the poet explores further some of the ramifications of poverty and social injustice. Throughout he 'de-racialises' the experience and strives to assert the equalising forces of poverty and social deprivation. The question of race is persistently superseded by that of social justice:

Dos niños, ramas de un mismo árbol de miseria, juntos en un portal bajo la noche calurosa, dos niños pordioseros llenos de pústulas, comen de un mismo plato como perros hambrientos la comida lanzada por la pleamar de los manteles. Dos niños: uno negro, otro blanco.

Throughout, he emphasises the children's conjoinment:

Sus cabezas unidas están sembradas de piojos; sus pies muy juntos y descalzos; las bocas incansables en un mismo frenesí de mandíbulas, y sobre la comida grasienta y agria, dos manos: una negra, otra blanca.

They are, Guillén asserts, inextricably linked by their shared struggle for survival:

Están sujetos por los estómagos y por las noches foscas ... ... Están unidos como dos buenos perros ...

This is also the subject of a later poem 'No sé por qué piensas tú' from *Cantos para soldados* (1937). On this occasion, the poet again addresses the issue of deprivation and poverty and outlines the unifying nature of poverty:

No sé por qué piensas tú, soldado, que te odio yo, si somos la misma cosa yo, tú.

Tú eres pobre, lo soy yo; soy de abajo, lo eres tú; ¿de dónde has sacado tú, soldado, que te odio yo?

There are many parallels between the poems of *West Indies, Ltd.* and Neruda's sequence of poems, 'La arena traicionada' which I will examine in greater detail in the next chapter. Clearly both Guillén and Neruda were anxious to articulate the sense of betrayal and anger felt at the economic exploitation which has characterised Latin America since colonisation. In addition, both poets were seeking to retrieve the victims of this exploitation from anonymity by reaffirming their essential humanity.

In spite of persistent attempts to move away from issues of race, and to stress the material causes of discrimination and exploitation, Guillén still experienced occasions when issues of racism needed to be confronted. In an article written in 'Mediodía' (15-1-1937), three years after the publication of *West Indies, Ltd.*, in response to a vitriolic article by Ramiro Cabrera about the need for continued racial segregation in Cuba, Guillén asserted that the question of national unity should always supersede that of racial difference. He reiterated his belief that racial segregation merely hindered and undermined that which had been achieved by Cubans of all racial origins:

Desde 1512 ó 1514, fecha en que posiblemente llegaron los primeros negros a Cuba, hasta nuestros días, ha estado integrándose todo un vasto y profundo proceso de unificación racial, de soldadura que ... está en vías de formar la <u>verdadera alma nacional</u>, hecha por explotados y explotadores, por esclavos y libres, por africanos y españoles, por negros y blancos, pero todo ello mezclado en las sutiles proporciones de un verdadero jeroglífico, en el que ya es tarea harto enfadosa desentrañar, no ya en un artículo, pero ni en un libro, los elementos primordiales.<sup>137</sup>

The opening poem of *West Indies, Ltd.*, 'Palabras en el trópico', a poem published initially in 1932, is a celebration of this amalgam of influences and cultures out of which the poet had emerged:

Te debo el cuerpo oscuro, las piernas ágiles y la cabeza crespa, mi amor hacia las hembras elementales, y esta sangre imborrable.

This acknowledgement of origins in turn prompts a celebration of the rich syncretism of religious practice evident in Afro-Cuban culture. Guillén was always cognisant of the trans-relational nature of religious expression in the Caribbean, of the assemblage of influences - both of the *orishas* and Christianity - which had evolved from a process of religious convergence. Although never especially religious, Guillén saw these spiritual traditions and practices as a necessary component of Cuba's ethnic and racial identity. In an interview with Francisco Garzón Céspedes, he stated:

La influencia yoruba es fundamental en el conjunto de sobrevivencias culturales africanas en nuestra gran mezcla nacional.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>137</sup> 'Racismo y cubanidad', *Prosa de prisa I: op. cit.*, p. 66. [My emphasis]
<sup>138</sup> 'Conversación con Nicolás Guillén', *op. cit.*, p. 54.

In Chapter Four, I will illustrate how Ernesto Cardenal also persistently seeks out correspondences and parallels between Catholicism and the beliefs of the autochthonous peoples as a means of strengthening the links between past and present meaning and between himself and his ancestors.

In 'Balada del güije' Guillén records instances of local superstition and relates the history of the güije, whose appearance traditionally preceded a calamity of some sort, and who, it was believed, spirited disobedient children away from their families. He also makes mention of the *ñeque*, which was also viewed as a source of bad luck. It is important to note that most of these poems are also influenced by the musical tradition of the island, in that we can observe an extensive use of anaphora, of repetition of key phrases, of simple choruses and the chants and hypnotic rhythms, all of which are reminiscent of a drum-beat. Guillén begins with a chantlike opening:

¡Ñeque, que se vaya el ñeque! ¡Güije, que se vaya el güije!

As the poem develops, we become aware of its simple melody, a melody that reflects the oral traditions that sustained these myths and superstitions. The tone throughout is akin to that of a children's story or folk-tale, and the language and imagery he employs reflect this, both in terms of its simplicity and its tone:

Enanos de ombligo enorme pueblan las aguas inquietas; sus cortas piernas, torcidas; sus largas orejas, rectas

Another good example of this is 'Sensemayá', which compares with Alejo Carpentier's descriptions of the 'comparsas' performed by the náñigos.<sup>139</sup> Often based on older ritualistic or religious ceremonies, many of which would have been recalled by African slaves, these

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>139</sup> La música en Cuba: op. cit., pp. 291-2.

performances were always structured around the tension between an individual and the collective responses of a chorus, or group of people.

Throughout, the poet makes great use of onomatopoeia to recreate the sense of monotony appropriate to such a ritual. The language is simple and almost inconsequential, as the attentions of the poet focus on the pace and rhythm of the poem. It adheres to the following basic rhyme schemes: *abba cddc efef ghhg hghg*.

Again the poet draws attention to the tools of communication, to the *ojos/lengua/boca* of the snake. We also become aware of the simple, but effective use of anaphora such as the repetition of *Sensemayá*, *la culebra muerta no puede comer/la culebra muerta no puede silbar* or *no puede caminar/no puede correr*, all of which contribute to the sense of simplicity and monotony inherent in such a chant or ritualistic song. Perhaps more significant is the fact that here Guillén is articulating and celebrating that which would have been conventionally excluded from literary culture.

Although he accepted, and indeed celebrated, the inevitable 'mestizaje' of a mixed-race society, Guillén was always conscious of the complexities engendered by such an experience. In 'Balada de los dos abuelos' he explores the resultant condition of duality as well as the ambivalent attitudes towards one's origins and history. Again, as in those poems which explore class division, the poet articulates the disparate traditions which shaped Cuba, and seeks to uncover the similarities which unite the Cuban people, rather than dwell on the differences which separate them.

Throughout this poem the poet employs a series of parallel images, to expose the brutality and barbarity of the black experience, while reinforcing what he sees as the need to reconcile and comprehend both aspects of this national and cultural identity. Guillén never attempts to deny history. Imported as slaves, brutalised and repressed by their Spanish owners, the black Africans are the quintessential victims and the Spanish, the perpetrators of this terror: Pie desnudo, torso pétreo los de mi negro; pupilas de vidrio antártico las de mi blanco!

He contrasts the attitudes of both traditions towards their colonial history; one interprets its potential while for the other it represents a threat to their very survival. However, Guillén reconciles the opposing traditions by seeking out their essential humanity and stressing the commonality of human experiences. The result is a tightly structured poem, comprising a careful balance of the contrasts which constitute Cuban identity. Many of the lyrical techniques in evidence are similar to those used in previous poems we have discussed, such as deliberate counterpointing of images and phrases as well as close attention to the balance and variation in metrical impact. Note for example the second stanza, with the repetition of two octo-syllabic verses and an alternate shorter verse, the rhyming of madera/guerrera. He employs other techniques, also already discussed, such as the repetition and enumeration of similar verses throughout other stanzas, for example:

¡Me muero! ¡Me canso!

¡Qué de barcos, qué de barcos! ¡Qué de negros, qué de negros!

He even contrasts diurnal cycles:

¡Oh puro sol repujado, preso en el aro del trópico; oh luna redonda y limpia sobre el sueño de los monos!

... y madrugadas vacías, y atardeceres de ingenio. He repeatedly counterposes black and white, just as he did in 'Dos niños':

mi abuelo negro/mi abuelo blanco los de mi negro/los de mi blanco.

He also contrasts the apparently irreconcilable nature of experiences and appearances:

Don Federico me grita y Taita Facundo calla;

All contribute to the expected climax in the final stanza where the poet finally reconciles the two disparate traditions by asserting their shared humanity:

... Los dos se abrazan. Los dos suspiran. Los dos las fuertes cabezas alzan; los dos del mismo tamaño, bajo las estrellas altas; los dos del mismo tamaño, ansia negra y ansia blanca; los dos del mismo tamaño, gritan, sueñan, lloran, cantan. Sueñan, lloran, cantan. Lloran cantan. ¡Cantan!

Los dos del mismo tamaño resonates throughout this poem and is indicative of the poet's view that both the Spanish and the African traditions contributed equally to the formation of the Cuban identity and culture. A desire to celebrate and acknowledge these binary influences underpins all three anthologies.

In many ways *West Indies, Ltd.* is a mature articulation of the discrete themes and concerns which have shaped this poet; issues of political and racial significance, the history of compliance and

exploitation which had evolved out of colonialism, the denial, demonisation and negation of black culture and identity and the sense of shame and inferiority which, Guillén believed, continued to beset the black community in Cuba. In another respect these three collections also form part of a broader response to the colonial discourse. I believe it would be useful at this juncture to explore some of the similarities and differences between some other expressions of négritude and Guillén's own definition of Cuban *negrismo*.

### Contemporaneous Expressions of Négritude

Much has been written about the many contemporaneous articulations of negritude during the 1920s; in the Antilles, France and Harlem. I want to explore two of these now in more depth, namely the Harlem and French movements.

Blackness was traditionally equated with sin or lasciviousness. As I have suggested in Chapter One, the continent of Africa was viewed alternatively as monstrous or exotic in the European imagination and if the supposed animality or lack of rational faculties of its inhabitants were not stressed, then Africans were perceived as mysterious and exotic. As Christopher Miller concludes:

Africa has been made to bear a double burden, of monstrousness and nobility, all imposed by a deeper condition of difference and instability.<sup>140</sup>

Joseph de Gobineau's now-famous essay 'Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines', undoubtedly contributed to a belief that the supposed animality of blacks had become an accepted and undisputed fact by the end of the 19th century. Throughout history, primitive, black society continued to be associated with the uncivilised and underdeveloped side of humanity. However, as I have also suggested in Chapter One, towards the end of the 19th century, European artists had begun to view Africa as an exotic

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>140</sup> Christopher Miller, Blank Darkness - Africanist Discourse in French: op. cit., p. 5.

alternative to the decadence of Europe. Spurious science and more significantly a fear of the margins, it appears, had given birth to an artistic licence which further reinforced existing stereotypes.

According to several critics, the outbreak of World War I fomented this change in European society and politics, and in turn unleashed new ideas and artistic influences which spurred a reassessment of existing definitions of national and class consciousness. For Europe this was a period of great confusion and uncertainty that would in turn have important repercussions for how the rest of the world viewed this apparent bastion of progress and modernity.<sup>141</sup> James de Jongh has observed the disintegration of the myth of European superiority in the following manner:

The exposure of Europe's high culture as a 'grand illusion' by the barbarism of World War 1 seemed to discredit the traditional ideals of manliness, privilege, and personal honour of the aristocratic and hereditary warrior class.<sup>142</sup>

Julio Finn suggests that in the aftermath of World War I, artists and writers sought out representations of truth and authenticity in the pristine myths of Africa and indigenous Latin America. A conflation of artistic events and anthropological publications in the 1920s and 1930s in Europe were also significant in fomenting an alternative image to that of a Europe in decline and disarray, thereby creating a fashionable interest in primitive societies.<sup>143</sup>

According to Julio Finn, World War I had other significant repercussions for black people. Firstly, he claims, black people

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>141</sup> Finn, *ibid.*, pp.33-5 and James de Jongh, *Vicious Modernism - Black Harlem and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 58-9. Also see Juan José Arrom who has also explored the devastating effects of World War I and its impact upon the relationship, in particular the artistic relationship, between Europe and Latin America in María Teresa Martínez Blanco's *Identidad cultural de Hispanoamérica: op. cit.*, pp. 174-5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>142</sup> de Jongh, *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>143</sup> See A. J. Arnold, Modernism & Negritude - The Poetry & Poetics of Aimé Césaire (Harvard University Press, 1981), Julio Finn, Voices of Négritude: op. cit. and Eshleman & Smith's introduction to The Collected Poetry of Aimé Césaire (University of California Press, 1983) for further insight into Europe's developing interest in so-called 'primitive' societies.

became aware of their unique contribution during the Great War and secondly, for the first time ever, they were afforded the opportunity to commune with fellow blacks from Africa, the Americas and the West Indies.<sup>144</sup> The effects of such a strengthening of ethnic and racial links, of a perceived commonality of experience, and a dilution of traditional feelings of racial inferiority would contribute in no small measure to the development of a more unified and enriched black consciousness. Many years later, when asked about the significance of these black movements, Aimé Césaire pointed to the significance of this period between the two World Wars:

I believe that at that time in the history of the world there was a coming to consciousness among Negroes, and this manifested itself in movements that had no relationship to each other.<sup>145</sup>

This crisis of faith in Europe and the break-up of old hierarchies and structures, combined with a general post-War depression throughout the world, thus prompted many different aesthetic responses. I want to examine the genesis and nature of two of these responses in more detail; firstly, that of the Harlem group during the late 1920s and secondly, that of the French 'Négritude' movement of the 1930s.

African-Americans grappled with a general post-War depression that swept across America. Harlem, with its abundance of musichalls, was perceived by many as an antidote to the restraint and propriety of 1920s America. The establishment of many different jazz and ragtime music-halls also signalled a revival of black music and dance. This assertion of black identity and culture became known as the Harlem Renaissance.<sup>146</sup> In reality, white perceptions of black people had not changed and the socio-economic conditions of most African-Americans failed to improve in any noticeable way. However, African-Americans had begun to grapple with other

<sup>144</sup> Finn, *ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>145</sup> Interview with René Depestre reprinted in *Discourse on Colonialism: op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>146</sup> See Finn, *ibid.*, pp. 29-33 & de Jongh, *op cit.*, pp. 10-11.

concerns; such as the nature of their identity, their sense of disengagement from white America and the barbarity of their historical experiences at the hands of fellow Americans. They also questioned their links with Africa and the feelings of dislocation these apparent links engendered in a people separated from their place of origin. Some sought to celebrate the syncretism of black culture in the United States, and the many distinct expressions of cross-pollination to which it had given rise. This was weighed alongside a desire by others to return to Africa and locate the authentic primeval source. This was an issue which divided the Harlem group and one which reached its apogee in 1916 with the arrival in Harlem of the Jamaican, Marcus Garvey.

Garvey was a separatist who believed African-Americans should assert their rightful yet *distinct* role within American society. He established a black church which would later evolve into Rastafarianism and an all-black shipping company which was to take all those of African origin back to their spiritual and physical home.<sup>147</sup> However, issues of assimilation or disengagement from the central culture began to cause dissent among the Harlem group. Inspired by Garvey's essentialist posture, some writers in the Harlem group sought to recreate a pre-colonial model which would help to ameliorate the colonial experience. This desired reacculturation could, some believed, only take place by means of regression to a more pristine, pre-colonial model. Others embraced a more multi-cultural dialectic, such as Langston Hughes, one of the principal exponents of the Harlem Renaissance.

Hughes, like Guillén, would prefer to focus more on the economic and racial consequences of colonialism, and because of the underlying similarities with Guillén's verse, I would like to examine his poetry in a little more detail.

Hughes, like Guillén, consistently stressed the commonality of the colonial experience as a point of unity among black people. Poverty, discrimination and social exclusion are the predominant themes which surface in Hughes's verse. In 'Negro' (1926) Hughes

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>147</sup> Finn, *ibid.*, p. 31.

articulated the experiences of exploitation and cruelty which had been endured by black people throughout history:

I've been a slave:

Caesar told me to keep his door-steps clean. I brushed the boots of Washington.

I've been a worker:

Under my hand the pyramids arose. I made mortar for the Woolworth Building.

I've been a singer:

All the way from Africa to Georgia I carried my sorrow songs. I made ragtime.

I've been a victim: The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo. They lynch me still in Mississippi.<sup>148</sup>

Many of Hughes's poems convey the sense of dislocation experienced by black Americans and their growing need to locate the source of a communal black identity such as is viewed in the following excerpt from 'Afro-American Fragment':

Subdued and time-lost Are the drums - and yet Through some vast mist of race There comes this song I do not understand, This song of atavistic land, Of bitter yearnings lost Without a place -So long, So far away

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>148</sup> Selected Poems of Langston Hughes: op. cit., p. 8.

Is Africa's Dark face.<sup>149</sup>

Hughes also addressed the pain of discrimination and economic exploitation as illustrated in the poem 'Share-croppers':

When the cotton's picked And the work is done Boss man takes the money And we get none,

Leaves us hungry, ragged As we were before. Year by year goes by And we are nothing more

Than a herd of Negroes Driven to the field -Plowing life away To make the cotton yield.<sup>150</sup>

In an interview with Guillén in Havana in March 1930, one month before the publication of *Motivos de son*, Hughes cited the experience of his travels in Africa as the source and inspiration of much of his later work, asserting that it had strengthened his sense of racial unity and ethnic origin:

Por aquellas tierras se me fortaleció el alma en el sentimiento de amor a los negros, que ya no habrá de abandonarme.<sup>151</sup>

These experiences in Africa not only offered an explanation for the poor social conditions of black people in North America, but also reinforced Hughes's desire to preserve the true nature of black culture and identity rather than succumbing to a folkloric or contrived idealisation of this identity:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>149</sup> *ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>150</sup> *ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>151</sup> 'Conversación con Langston Hughes', Prosa de prisa I: op. cit., p. 17.

- Yo solo aspiro a conservarle al negro su frescura, a que no olvide nunca lo que es suyo. Me parece que la civilización blanca puede acabar lo primitivo que hay en el negro, vistiéndolo con un ropaje que no será de él jamás.<sup>152</sup>

The parallels with Guillén's views are hugely significant as both poets were anxious to resuscitate an honest representation of the black experience and avoid a contrived indigeneity. I believe Keith Ellis has demonstrated quite clearly how Guillén arrived at a similar position independently of Hughes, despite the claims of some critics and some of Hughes's biographers to the contrary.<sup>153</sup>

As I have already suggested, Guillén, both in 'Pequeña oda a un negro boxeador cubano' and in his article 'Rosendo Ruiz', was very conscious of the fact that black culture was then fashionable. Hughes saw the interest in ragtime and negro spirituals and the abundance of music halls during the 1920s as indicative of a similar trend in the United States. In many respects both poets recognised that it was simply this, a trend, a form of cultural tokenism which was emblematic of the desperate need of white society to reassess its white, western assumptions and standards. Undoubtedly, Guillén was also aware of García Lorca's contributions to this trend. *Poeta en Nueva York*, written between 1929 and 1930, while Lorca was a student at Columbia University, also explored issues relating to black culture. In 'El rey de Harlem' for example, Lorca captures something of the passion represented by the black New Yorker, oppressed and restrained by economic and racial discrimination:

¡Ay, Harlem! ¡Ay Harlem! ¡Ay Harlem! No hay angustia comparable a tus rojos oprimidos, a tu sangre estremecida dentro del eclipse oscuro, a tu violencia granate sordomudo en la penumbra, a tu gran rey prisionero, con un traje de conserje.<sup>154</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>152</sup> *ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>153</sup> 'Motivos para elegir el son - Claves en la prosa de Guillén', *op. cit.*, pp. 1-18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>154</sup> Libro de poemas (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1991), p. 110.

The reassertion of colour, the reclaiming of blackness, viewed in so many of the poems of *Motivos de son* and *Sóngoro cosongo*, is repeatedly articulated by Hughes:

I am a Negro: Black as the night is black, Black like the depths of my Africa.<sup>155</sup>

According to Aimé Césaire, one of the central figures of the French Négritude movement, it was the honesty and directness of the Harlem group which was to prove its most innovative and effective weapon:

From this poetry, which might seem like the sort Valery called 'loose', 'defenseless', written only to the rhythm of a juvenile spontaneity, at the exact point of intersection between the ego and the world, a drop of blood oozes. A drop. But it is blood ... There is its value: to be open to man in his wholeness.<sup>156</sup>

In Europe the first expressions of Négritude came from a group of young men from various French colonies then living in Paris. They were manifest initially in a magazine entitled *Légitime Défense* which was published on June 1st, 1932. Although the magazine would not run to a second issue it proved to be the foundation stone of the Négritude movement in France. Described by one critic as a 'manifesto against colonialism', the authors rallied against cultural, literary and linguistic assimilation by Afro-French intellectuals.<sup>157</sup> Above all, it provided the first forum for a debate about the important issues facing African writers, writing and speaking in French. The name of this new movement - négritude - as coined by Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire and Léon-Gontran Damas, was, as one of their number later remarked, hugely significant:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>155</sup> Selected Poems of Langston Hughes: op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>156</sup> Clayton Eshleman & Annette Smith, *The Collected Poetry of Aimé Césaire:* op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>157</sup> Finn, op. cit., p. 34.

In order to establish an effective revolution, we first had to divest ourselves of our borrowed attire - that of assimilation- to assert our being, that is to say our négritude.<sup>158</sup>

In many respects it was an ironic response to the climate of racism experienced by many of these writers and poets in their respective countries, and the term 'nègre' would have been as offensive as 'nigger' is to our sensibilities. Two years later, two of the chief proponents of the French movement, Senghor and Léon Gontran Damas, from Senegal and French Guyana respectively, started another publication, *L'Etudiant noir*. As A. J. Arnold explains, the underlying thesis of this publication was that of the unique individuality and the independence of the black voice.<sup>159</sup> Its acknowledged influence was Leo Frobenius's *Histoire de la civilisation africaine* and its main focus was opposition to any attempt to assimilate black identity into an homogenous French culture.

Senghor and Césaire, in the 1930s at least, believed that the uniqueness of the black spirit and intellect was derived from and determined by biological factors. Césaire would later come to reassess his position and focus more on the experiential factors which contributed to this *difference*. But, as the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* suggest, this initial stance on the part of the French Négritude writers clearly damaged and undermined the overall project of négritude as it simply reinforced white colonial stereotypes of black culture and identity. As Ashcroft *et al* go on to say, the inability of these early proponents of négritude to separate themselves fully from the colonial centre meant that as an expression of post-coloniality it was not all that significant.<sup>160</sup>

Aside from the huge difference of opinions and objectives between the Négritude writers themselves, there was also a great sense of ambivalence towards this new literary movement from within French society. As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>158</sup> Senghor, quoted by Julio Finn, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>159</sup> A. J. Arnold, Modernism & Negritude: op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>160</sup> The Empire Writes Back: op. cit., pp. 20-21.

Sartre's analysis of the movement in 'Black Orpheus' attempted to explain away the discrete nature of the original movement by examining it in tandem with other social issues. The significance of issues like ethnicity and identity still appeared to elude the major critics of the period. The movement was in effect hindered by another form of assimilation or integration.

However, although Césaire dismissed any parallels between the French négritude movement and those in Harlem, Haiti and Cuba, the overall aims of the French movement were similar to those articulated by 'negrismo'; namely to counter the underlying sense of inferiority felt by most black people and to reassess the valuable contribution of black culture to human progress.<sup>161</sup> As Césaire observed:

We lived in an atmosphere of rejection, and we developed an inferiority complex. ... At the time we began to write people could write a history of world civilisation without devoting a single chapter to Africa, as if Africa had made no contributions to the world ... we asserted that our Negro heritage was worthy of respect, and that this heritage was not relegated to the past, that its values were values that could still make an important contribution to the world.<sup>162</sup>

As a movement, these French writers envisaged cultural advancement developing in tandem with social and racial equality for black people of all geographic origins. Cultural advancement was never seen by them as separate to that of socio-political advancement, although the magazine which subsequently developed out of the ashes of 'Légitime Défense', 'L'Etudiant Noir', did tend to focus rather more on cultural issues than on matters of historico-political or economic importance.

Césaire's *Cahier d'un Retour au pays natal*, first published in 1939, is underpinned by the author's awareness of the extreme poverty and social inequality experienced by black people. The *Cahier* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>161</sup> In the interview with René Depestre in *Discourse on Colonialism: op. cit.*,
p. 70.
<sup>162</sup> *ibid.*, p. 76.

merits further study because of the obvious parallels with Guillén, in particular in his use of language and the manner in which Césaire questions conventional perceptions and prejudices inherent in French society. Some of these prejudices about black people were articulated by Césaire in a highly ironic tone:

je déclare mes crimes et il n'y a rien à dire pour ma défense. Danses. Idoles. relaps. Moi aussi

J'ai assassiné Dieu de ma paresse de mes paroles de mes gestes de mes chansons obscènes

J'ai porté des plumes de perroquet des dépouilles de chat musqué J'ai lassé la patience des missionnaires insulté les bienfaiteurs de l'humanité. Défiér Tyr. Défié Sidon. Adoré le Zambèze. L'étendue de ma perversité me confond! <sup>163</sup>

Césaire even employed some of the racist language pertaining to these prejudices and stereotypical image of black people:

(les nègres-sont-tous-les-mêmes, je-vous-le-dis les vicestous-les -vices, c'est-moi-qui-vous-le-dis l'odeur-du-nègre, ça-fait-pousser-la-canne rappelez-vous-le-vieux-dicton: battre-un-nègre, c'est le nourrir.)<sup>164</sup>

And yet underlying this refutation of racism and reaffirmation of the black identity, Césaire was at pains to convey the ambivalence of his own position; a black Martinican, fully assimilated into French society and into the French intelligentsia.<sup>165</sup> Ultimately, like Guillén, Césaire believed the future was not based around a denial of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>163</sup> Eshleman & Smith, op. cit., pp. 50-52.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>164</sup> *ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>165</sup> *ibid.*, p. 62.

colonial experience, nor on an idealisation of the black identity (although he did stress the uniqueness of the black spirit and compared the white spirit unfavourably with it).<sup>166</sup> Rather he aspired to a more universal spirit, one which created a unifying and equalising bond between other black people and ultimately other races and cultures.

Regardless of the accusations of ineffectiveness levelled against this expression of négritude, it is nevertheless impossible to disregard its significance. Nor can we overlook the election of two of its principal proponents to the French parliament after World War II. From that time onwards the issue of black identity and that of the colonised margins, would be a underlying feature of Francophone literature.

Although there appear to be several interesting coincidences between the French and Harlem movements and Guillén's concept of *negrismo* in terms of overall objectives, there are several issues which distinguish these different expressions of black selfhood. One of these crucial differences between the French and North American models of negritude and Cuban 'negrismo' lies in the latter's vision of blackness, in particular in the manner in which *negrismo*, from the outset, acknowledged the inter-relatedness of issues of colour and socio-economic issues. Many years later, Guillén would distinguish between the French movement, and Cuban 'negrismo' in the following way:

Mientras la negritud de los poetas francófonos es un arma contra el colonialismo, un medio de lucha por la independencia del poderío metropolitano, el negrismo es expresión de unidad histórica, conmistión de dos fuerzas sin ninguna de las cuales podría existir Cuba como existe hoy, lucha contra el racismo, en fin. Un negrismo mestizo ...<sup>167</sup>

Guillén's vision of *un negrismo mestizo* reiterates the view that Afrocubanism was always non-divisive and integrationist in nature.

<sup>166</sup> *ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>167</sup> Guillén, 'Nación y mestizaje', Prosa de prisa: op. cit. p. 290.

For Guillén, the hybridity of his identity, 'ese oleaje negriblanco' shaped equally by Spanish and African traditions, was never viewed as a limiting or restrictive factor.<sup>168</sup> Rather he viewed this amalgamation of cultures, this confluence of influences as a provocative and stimulating exercise through which he hoped to unite the discrete identities of his country. Thus, the Creole experience and the continual process of 'creolisation' was transformed by Guillén into a creative force which afforded him additional possibilities as a writer. The corollary of this insight was that his colonised condition was never perceived by him as a form of compensation for something which had been denied or diminished by the process of colonisation.

What is also of note is that most of the writers involved in Afrocubanism were actually white, which was clearly not the case in France or North America. This would suggest to me that such an interest in black identity was part of a genuine attempt by the national intelligentsia of Cuba to establish unique and a independent cultural identity in tandem with political and economic independence. However, for many, the inability of the 'negrista' (or non-black writers) enthusiasts to capture the true spirit and essence of black culture simply confirmed that it was simply another part of the international trend of négritude. For Guillén however, 'la moda de lo negro' which had been imported or influenced by Europe and elsewhere was transformed into an alternative 'modo' of defining the essential syncretism at the heart of Cuban society:

... no se trataba de una aventura, de un conato ... sino de fijar la aportación seria de una cultura a otra, en un intercambio incesante y vital.<sup>169</sup>

Thus, the true originality of Afrocubanism lies in its articulation of this fusion of traditions and idioms which constitutes the Cuban identity. As early as 1937, in 'Cuba, negros, poesía', we note how Guillén's vision of a *poesía negriblanca* was truly revolutionary:

<sup>168</sup> *ibid.*, p. 288.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>169</sup> 'Conversación con Nicolás Guillén', op. cit., p. 42.

Es poesía que quiere ser de una y otra sangre, mezcladas, hechas una sola, hechas la sangre de Cuba, cuyo caudal se nutre por dos caños nítidamente definidos.<sup>170</sup>

When this idiom was shaped, he continued:

... habrá surgido al mismo tiempo la más honda vertebración lírica cubana, crepuscular entre dos luces, mestiza de dos voces, única voz de dos gargantas.<sup>171</sup>

Guillén's position was always consciously assimilative. Issues of national unity and autonomy always superseded those of racial distinction. In this regard, the influence of Martí was acutely significant. There are clear echoes of Martí's negation of race in both 'Nuestra América' and 'Mi raza' in Guillén's pronouncement at a conference in Madrid in 1937:

*¡Hombres ya sin colores, sin guerras, sin prejuicios y sin razas!*<sup>172</sup>

Like his predecessor's, Guillén's vision was always nurtured by the ultimate ideal of a new Cuban voice, which would be distinguishable from, but nevertheless sourced in, that of the peninsula:

... ello dará pie a una poesía nacional, liberada al fin, dueña de sí misma, en la que no sea aventura fácil separar las esencias que la integran.<sup>173</sup>

Clearly Guillén had come to recognise that the creation of any (new) independent literary and linguistic identity necessarily involves such a process of disjunction from hegemonic canons combined with the imaginative and inventive development of a new idiom. His

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>170</sup> op. cit., p. 101.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>171</sup> ibidem

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>172</sup> 'Discursos en el Congreso Internacional de Escritores en Defensa de la Cultura', *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>173</sup> 'Cuba, negros, poesía', *op. cit.*, p. 101.

desire to transform the language and lyrical tradition of Cuba was, I believe, borne out of a genuine desire to democratise the poetic forum and to transform his readers into participants in a tradition which he believed was theirs to begin with.

I believe what we are witnessing in Motivos de son, Sóngoro cosongo and West Indies, Ltd. is a re-appropriation of the poetic form which was subsequently transformed by Guillén into an empowering poetics which traversed ideological, racial and linguistic barriers. By transforming the lexical and linguistic nature of his inherited idiom, Guillén's new-found expression became an articulation of a true idiom of post-coloniality and ultimately an assertion of the unique diglossic lexicon of Cuba. Like Neruda and Cardenal, Guillén persistently looked to the potentiality of his hybrid linguistic and cultural tradition. Rather than continuing to view his culture and language as a deviation from, or derivation of, a supposed superior model, Guillén was anxious to celebrate its latent possibilities as an alternative lyrical voice. The result is a verse which reflects both the oral vernacular and other discrete traditions which shaped its evolution.

This affirmation of both local and black cultural expressions, belied the poet's ongoing dissatisfaction with the conventional language and mechanisms of the lyrical form. As I have illustrated, as early as 1922, it was clear Guillén had been searching for a more appropriate means of expression. The simplicity and directness of the musical form enabled him to further socialise and popularise artistic expression. His subsequent appropriation of the popular idiom of the streets of Havana and his foregrounding of Afro-Cuban mythology ensured a further popularisation of the aesthetic.

What is most significant about Guillén's verse is the manner in which he redefines the role of the artist in society. This project both evolved from and was developed in conjunction with the poet's deep and persistent concern for social and political justice. Throughout his writing, in particular in the poetry and journalism from 1930 onwards, one is conscious of the deeply interpolated and dialectical nature of the relationship which exists, in his mind, between politics and poetics. This is yet another parallel between Guillén and the other two poets, which I will explore in more depth in the following two chapters. Poetics and politics are never separate in Guillén's work, but rather the former is a (re)affirming tool which helps to transform the field of politics and history. It is in this reconciliation of the public and the private, in Guillén's true synthesis of the political and the artistic that his genius and originality is revealed. In doing so, he contributed to a further dismantling of more conventional perceptions of the poet, suggesting in their place a much more protean and dynamic figure. In both *Sóngoro cosongo* and *West Indies, Ltd.* Guillén's articulation of themes and concerns conventionally excluded from lyrical discourse, mirror the subversion of conventional and canonical forms already viewed in *Motivos de son*.

Guillén's quest for an alternative cultural and linguistic vision is interwoven with the historical specificity of the colonial experience. Unlike Cardenal, who, as I will illustrate in Chapter Four, ultimately was seeking to uncover a pristine mythical alternative to the present, Guillén's project was firmly rooted in the historical reality of contemporary Cuba. The strong presence of Cuba in his writing its people, its language, music and geography - all attest to the genuine sense of placement and belonging which this poet felt with regard to his native country. Clearly, he was a critical figure in the development of a radicalised national cultural tradition in Cuba in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

In the following chapter, I will examine the *Canto general* of Pablo Neruda, and Neruda's contributions to an equivalent decolonisation of identity such as that undertaken by Guillén. Although composed ten years and more after the three collections of Guillén which I have examined, I am seeking to illustrate how Guillén's contribution to a decolonisation of Cuba's literary identity also forms part of a broader regional artistic continuum which sought to dismantle and challenge perceptions and structures imposed at the moment of colonisation.

#### **CHAPTER THREE**

# Pablo Neruda - Reconstructing History & the Lyrical Narrative

Pablo Neruda's often tortuous journey in Canto general is propelled by many distinct, yet overlapping concerns. It is a braided journey which comprises a concern for self and his own mortality, the question of personal and cultural heredity, the nature of identity and the fluidity of traditions which span generations and geographical divides. We can trace a very real transition from the exclusive hermeticism of *Residencia en la* tierra I and II and Tercera Residencia, where Neruda attempts to unravel the vicissitudes of his own life, culminating in the more inclusive public arena of *Canto general*.<sup>1</sup> *Canto general* embodies this dynamic, and, through the use of enabling archetypal and mythic symbols, the poet explores the diverse directions of his particular history. The natural world is always present and the assuming many diverse guises - anthropologist, poet, archaeologist, historian and craftsman - resolves to chronicle the particulars of this largely unspoken history. Throughout, Neruda grapples with the attendant responsibilities foisted upon him as the national poet, and in the fifteen sections or 'capítulos', endeavours to arrive at a clearer understanding of the synthesis of these artistic and political commitments.

*Canto general* is an extensive collection of personal and public reminiscences, comprising fifteen sequences through which Neruda explores the genesis and evolution of his personal and national identity. The themes are varied and complex, comprising beautiful, lyrical expressions and conversely sequences which deal with the brutal historical reality. The latter are unashamedly political in content. For Neruda these two aspects of his work were, as I have illustrated in Chapter One, inseparable. In *Confieso* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Pablo Neruda, *Obras completas I* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1967). All subsequent poetic references are to this edition unless otherwise stated.

*que he vivido* he reiterated this desire to compose a verse that was both lyrical and relevant:

Y todas las alternativas, desde el llanto hasta los besos, desde la soledad hasta el pueblo, perviven en mi poesía, actúan en ella, porque he vivido para mi poesía, y mi poesía ha sustentado mis luchas.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, he viewed the *Canto general* as a chronicle which was unavoidably diverse and expansive in its aspirations, and one which would record not only the more memorable aspects of the region's history but also the poet's own lyrical triumphs and failures. In 'Algunas reflexiones improvisadas sobre mis trabajos' Neruda made the following observations on the *Canto general*:

Este libro fue la coronación de mi tentativa ambiciosa. Es extenso como un buen fragmento del tiempo y en él hay sombra y luz a la vez, porque yo me proponía que abarcara el espacio mayor en que se mueven, crean, trabajan y perecen las vidas y los pueblos.<sup>3</sup>

As such this anthology also reflects a multifaceted internal debate on the part of the poet. We see Neruda's determination to retain something of the lyrical hermeticism of his earlier verse, coupled with a growing desire to make his work both accessible and relevant. As a collection it signals a developing maturity in Neruda's poetic career. What we witness of Neruda throughout is similar in many ways to the projects undertaken by both Nicolás Guillén and Ernesto Cardenal. Namely, he is attempting to locate the historical and personal sources of his emerging identity, and endeavouring to refocus his personal position vis-a-vis these political and historical issues. His verse gradually begins to assume the role of a testament to his life and work. It is, as Robert Pring-Mill suggests, a record of the vital and somewhat difficult transition for the poet from feeling and sentiment to action and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> op. cit., p. 241-2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> 'Algunas reflexiones improvisadas sobre mis trabajos', Obras completas II (Buenos Aires, Editorial Losada, 1967), p. 1120.

solidarity.<sup>4</sup> Canto general signals a willingness on the part of the poet to combine a concern for selfhood and individual freedom with the concerns of nationhood and community. Tim Brennan in 'The National Longing for Form' recognises the complex interconnectedness of issues of nationhood and selfhood and suggests a dialectic of cultural, political and personal issues which combine to engender such a sense of mutual identification:

The idea of nationhood is not only a political plea, but a formal binding together of disparate elements. And out of the multiplicities of culture, race, and political structures, grows also a repeated dialectic of uniformity and specificity: of world culture and national culture, of family and of people.<sup>5</sup>

Clearly the Canto general is an attempt by Neruda to unravel some of the complexities of this dialectic. In his own struggles, he common humanity which embraced, located but also a transcended, that of his fellow Chileans. Individual suffering is transformed by him into a collective expression of the pain, exploitation and barbarism experienced by all victims of colonialism. This transition from self to mass, this re-alliance of self and community, enabled him to redefine his own role in this vast project of decolonisation. Like Walt Whitman in 'Song of Myself' Neruda assumes the mantle of a spokesman for the nation and its past history, in particular of the marginalised and anonymous victims of history, but also of a future that was yet to come:

# I am an acme of things accomplished, and I am an encloser of things to be.<sup>6</sup>

*Canto general* is also significant in that it was published in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War and carries within it the poet's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> A Poet for all Seasons (Oxford: Parchment, 1993), pp. 3-5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Timothy Brennan, 'The National Longing for Form', *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader: op. cit.*, p. 173.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> The Portable Walt Whitman (Mark Van Doren & Malcolm Cowley, eds.) (New York, Viking, 1973), p. 57.

strong sense of despondency and anger at the outcome of that conflict.

The question of language is perhaps one of the key issues in this project of self-definition, insofar as Neruda meets the challenge of uncovering the determining, originary values of the idiom. Like Guillén and Cardenal, Neruda confronts the necessity to reappropriate and redefine both his own linguistic identity and that of the broader community, always acknowledging the specific syncretism of this colonised community.

Before moving on to look at the *Canto general* proper I think it would be useful to examine in closer detail the evolving and changing nature of Neruda's aesthetic and some of the discrete factors which contributed to such a change.

## Creating a Post-colonial Aesthetic

Composed between 1943 and 1950, during which time Neruda was either in hiding or in exile, the *Canto general* began as a much less ambitious project. Initially he had begun to write a *Canto* general de Chile but this was subsequently augmented to comprise a much broader project. As a result, *Canto general* explored the continent and its people in their totality. In *Confieso* que he vivido, he recalls the impetus for this work:

La idea de un poema central que agrupara las incidencias históricas, las condiciones geográficas, la vida y las luchas de nuestros pueblos, se me presentaba como una tarea urgente.<sup>7</sup>

The poet began his diplomatic career in 1927 and for the next six years was based in various countries in Asia, before returning to Chile in 1932. In 1934 he was posted to Barcelona and in many ways this posting was to prove the most influential of his life. In 1936 he was stripped of his diplomatic post because of his political involvement in the Spanish Civil War. His diplomatic

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Pablo Neruda, Confieso que he vivido: op. cit., p. 197.

status was not reinstated until 1939. From 1940-43 he was based in Mexico, but also travelled to Guatemala. This period was also hugely influential, as he established strong friendships with some of the Mexican muralists and also met Miguel Angel Asturias. At the end of 1943, Neruda resigned his diplomatic post but before returning to Chile, stopped off in Peru to visit the Inca ruins at Macchu Picchu.<sup>8</sup> Upon his return to Santiago he recalls how he began to view his country in a completely different light:

Busqué de nuevo la hermosura de mi patria, la fuerte belleza de la naturaleza, el encanto de las mujeres, el trabajo de mis compañeros, la inteligencia de mis compatriotas.<sup>9</sup>

In March 1945 he was elected to the Senate and his experiences with the isolated rural communities of the Pampas who elected him brought about a further transformation in his life and in his work. He joined the Chilean Communist Party in July 1945 and his involvement in Chilean political life and his subsequent criticism of González Videla, the new president, were to compound the evolving changes in both his aesthetic and in his life.<sup>10</sup>

Alain Sicard suggests the significance of this formative period between 1936 and 1946 was determined by three notable experiences for Neruda; namely his re-engagement with history, his experiences in Spain and an increased exposure to the lives and experiences of ordinary Chileans.<sup>11</sup>

Many critics have linked the reality of Neruda's life in Asia with the bleak landscape of *Residencia en la tierra I* and *II*. However, in *Confieso que he vivido* the poet refuted this suggestion, preferring to attribute this palpable sense of confusion and disorientation to the rise of global capitalism.<sup>12</sup> Whether this is merely a retrospective appraisal of his feelings at the time

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> The mountain is actually spelt 'Machu Picchu' but I will retain Neruda's spelling throughout unless quoting directly from other sources.
<sup>9</sup> Confieso que he vivido: op. cit., p. 236.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 242-4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Alain Sicard, *El pensamiento poético de Pablo Neruda* (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1981), p. 235.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> op. cit., p. 120.

(bearing in mind that he was then not a member of the Communist Party, nor had he expressed any specific socialist sympathies to date) or whether the colonial structures of Asia really did contribute to this sense of ennui, it is apparent that the poet was at a very low ebb during his six years in the region. In *Confieso que he vivido* Neruda summarises his feelings at the time in the following way:

No creo, pues, que mi poesía de entonces haya reflejado otra cosa que la soledad de un forastero trasplantado a un mundo violento y extraño.<sup>13</sup>

Certainly letters written by Neruda at the time would concur with this view. In a letter to the Argentinian writer Héctor A. Eandi (1928), he outlines very clearly his lyrical objectives at that time:

No le hablo de dudas o de pensamientos desorientados, no, sino de una aspiración que no se satisface, una conciencia exasperada. Mis libros son ese hacinamiento de ansiedades sin salida.<sup>14</sup>

For the poet this artistic exercise, written in the oppressive humidity of Asia, was not an expression of a deeper personal psychosis nor of his sense of alienation from the world around him, but rather became *una noble materia para mí*.<sup>15</sup> As Emir Rodríguez Monegal suggests:

Él aspira a una poesía del rito. Poco a poco se va formando esa visión del poeta como vate, que llevará al reconocimento de la visión profética.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 120-1.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Luis Rosales, 'La poesía de Neruda', Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos,
 <sup>15</sup> ibidem

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> 'El sistema del poeta', *Pablo Neruda* (Emir Rodríguez Monegal & Enrico Mario Santi, eds.) (Madrid: Taurus, 1980), p. 72. [First published in *Revista Iberoamericana*, 39 (January-June, 1973), pp. 41-71].

He preferred to view it as a learning process, as an opportunity to refine and restructure his artistic expression and technique. In the same letter to this Argentinian friend, he concludes:

... ya verá usted cómo consigo aislar mi expresión, haciéndola vacilar continuamente entre peligros, y con qué sustancia sólida y uniforme hago aparecer irresistiblemente una misma fuerza ...<sup>17</sup>

In common with Guillén and Cardenal, Neruda was propelled by a desire to redefine language and to unearth a new idiom of artistic expression. According to Luis Rosales's essentially structuralist critique of *Residencia en la tierra*, this collection only appears chaotic and disintegrated when it is compared to the real world. Rosales prefers to celebrate the autonomy of the text and its technical innovation.<sup>18</sup>

Both *Residencia en la tierra I* and *II* do record earlier concerns of the poet, such as those of personal suffering and isolation, abandonment in love and Neruda's experience of acute alienation in a new urban setting when he moved to Santiago in the early 1920s. It is not dissimilar to Guillén's experiences of disorientation and displacement when he returned to Havana in 1929.

On the surface the lyrical voice of *Residencia en la tierra I* and *II* does appear to be disorientated and isolated. In 'Galope muerto' the overriding impression is of the poet's genuine confusion and lack of direction:

Es que de dónde, por dónde, en qué orilla?<sup>19</sup>

An unrelenting series of images of decay and self-destruction, of disruption to the natural cycle, combine to create an atmosphere of terror and confusion. The unripened and rotting fruit, the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Luis Rosales, 'La poesía de Neruda', *op. cit.*, p. 36. <sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Keith Ellis describes this poem as anunciador de la poética nerudiana, un arte poética, 'Lo épico en la lírica de Pablo Neruda', Hispanic Review, 53, 3 (Summer, 1990), p. 312.

haunting chimes of the bell, the apparent futility of life itself (when everything culminates in *haciéndose polvo/en el mismo molino de las formas demasiado lejos*) reinforce the intangible and difficult new landscape which the poet envisages. He evokes often conflicting and paradoxical images, such as that of the constrained wheels of the pulley, which although in constant motion never really go anywhere:

Aquello todo tan rápido, tan viviente, inmóvil sin embargo, como la polea loca en sí misma, esas ruedas de los motores, en fin.

There is the sense of constant movement, without any obvious destination, with the unrelenting passage of time leading to an inevitable demise. To mirror this unchanging and immutable process Neruda employs the analogy of an ox. Similarly, the course of his life appears to be beyond his control, something which he also views in the unyielding passage of the sea merging into an undefined vastness. Neruda articulates this sense of vastness, of being subject to a power beyond his control in several different ways; in the aforementioned image of the ocean, in the swelling impact of the noise from the first stanza:

Ese sonido ya tan largo que cae listando de piedras los caminos, más bien, cuando sólo una hora crece de improviso, extendiéndose sin tregua.

The language and imagery are also ambiguous and complex. For example, note the apparent paradox of the following lines:

esfuerzos humanos, tormentas, acciones negras descubiertas de repente como hielos, desorden vasto ...

Here he is trying to enunciate the intangible depths of his own feelings. Given that it is a grave and difficult challenge for the poet it leads him unavoidably into an unreal, apparently surreal landscape. His emotional involvement is clearly apparent; in the appositional use of *ay*, in his *corazón pálido*, even in the tears which fail to appear.

Although in *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* Neruda comes to see man as the corrupting presence, the poet's current despair is mirrored in the natural world around him. His repeated attempts at selfdefinition lead only to an increased ambivalence towards his role as poet, and force him to descend even deeper into his subconscious. This internal decline exacerbates an already palpable, gnawing sense of separation and alienation:

Existiendo como las puntadas secas en las costuras del árbol, callado, por alrededor, de tal modo, mezclando todos los limbos sus colas.

His points of reference are clearly sourced in a rural landscape and in the natural world. The only images of urbanity he employs (the incessant and apparently futile movement of the pulley and the crowds amongst whom he feels so isolated) reflect his lack of synchrony with the modern world.

Death is a continuous and insidious presence on both a symbolic and physical level. The predominant colours, sounds and smells which he evokes are, in many ways, conventional symbols of death and of the passing of time. There is a noticeable absence of hope and optimism in this bleak but highly personal poem, which is indicative of a realisation of his own mortality. We are made constantly aware of his distress at his own mortality. In 'Unidad' he attempts to unravel some of the complexities of this dilemma, but is left cold and alienated instead. It is a persistent, unrelenting presence in his life, echoed in the monotony and the threatening nature of the images he employs:

repitiendo su número/su señal idéntica/un solo movimiento/se unen en torno a mí como paredes.

It is as if he is powerless in the face of such an inscrutable power:

Pienso, aislado en lo extremo de las estaciones, central, rodeado de geografía silenciosa: una temperatura parcial cae del cielo, un extremo imperio de confusas unidades se reúne rodeándome.

This unrelenting denigration of self and the destruction of selfalso a prevalent feature of both Guillén's and esteem are Cardenal's verse. Guillén persistently attempted to subvert the legacy of inferiority and denial of origins which he has inherited, while Cardenal repeatedly depicts man at odds with his society, and humiliated by modernity. Fernando Alegría displaced suggests that this sense of despair evident in Residencia en la tierra emanates from Neruda's experiences of colonialism and, in particular, from the dismantling of the traditional indigenous structures engendered by this framework of beliefs and experience. Bereft of such supports, Alegría suggests the poet is left disorientated and in search of something more tangible.<sup>20</sup> This concurs with what I have suggested in Chapter One, that often the mechanisms that aid the colonialist project seek to dislodge indigenous models of culture, language and spirituality, and the result is a complete sense of physical and cultural displacement.

The only apparent certainty which remains at this point for Neruda is that of his own death. In 'Sólo la muerte' he explores the harshness of death. The language, style and images are bare and minimalist. Technically it is quite typical of Neruda's style during this period. Once again he employs simple techniques of repetition to reinforce his message. If we examine the opening stanza closely we see how he uses a series of similes, two of which are quite conventional images of death:

como un naufragio hacia adentro nos morimos,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Fernando Alegría, 'La evolución poética de Pablo Neruda', *Aproximaciones a Pablo Neruda* (Angel Flores, ed.) (Barcelona: Colección Ocnos, 1974), p. 13. This is also the view of Jean Franco in her article 'Orfeo en utopía - El poeta y la colectividad en el *Canto general', Simposio Pablo Neruda (1974)* (Issac Jack Lévy & Juan Loveluck, eds.) (University of South Carolina, 1975), p. 269.

como ahogarnos en el corazón, como irnos cayendo desde la piel al alma.

He begins by highlighting the isolation and solitude of the cemetery, inhabited by lifeless and noiseless bones. The stanza gradually builds up to a crescendo with the repetition of *oscuro* in the fourth verse. Similarly in the second stanza, he begins the first three verses with the same word. This is then followed by two eerie similes and ends with the parallel use of gerund forms and the repetition of *ciertas*.

It is only in the third stanza that the lyrical voice emerges. Here the poem assumes an even more macabre and nightmarish tone:

Yo veo, solo, a veces, ataúdes a vela zarpar con difuntos pálidos, con mujeres de trenzas muertas con panaderos blancos como ángeles, con niñas pensativas casadas con notarios.

The one enduring constancy is that death is always an individual experience. The poet is clearly at a very low ebb, stripped of everything; *sin pie/sin hombre/sin dedo*, shaken of every belief and certainty: *Yo no sé, yo conozco poco, yo apenas veo* ...

In 'Arte poética' he articulates the pressures of his position. He acknowledges the inherently solitary nature of his task and the persistent lack of fulfilment which accompanies it:

... para cada agua invisible que bebo soñolientamente y de todo sonido que acojo temblando, tengo la misma sed ausente y la misma fiebre fría un oído que nace, una angustia indirecta.

We witness an accumulation of images of emptiness and desolation; an abandoned house devoid of life, perfume or colour, a bell which is no longer of use, a biting, searing wind, all of which remind him of his own demise. This lack of vitality mirrors his inability to find satisfaction either in his work or in love. In addition, there are the inescapable constraints of his profession:

me piden lo profético que hay en mí.

In 'Walking Around' the physical and metaphysical exhaustion which the poet suffers is acute:

Sucede que me canso de mis pies y mis uñas y mi pelo y mi sombra. Sucede que me canso de ser hombre.

It is compounded by the rigidity and conformity of urban life:

El olor de las peluquerías me hace llorar a gritos. Sólo quiero un descanso de piedras o de lana, sólo quiero no ver establecimientos ni jardines, ni mercaderías, ni anteojos, ni ascensores.

Everything appears to have been distorted: the birds, the false teeth, the mirrors, all evidence of the manufactured artificiality the poet sees in urban life.<sup>21</sup> However there is a palpable change taking place in his subconscious. He appears to be no longer willing to accept or endure the rigours of his previous life, and as a result is decidedly calmer towards the end of the poem.

In 'Caballo de los sueños' we again witness the apparent confusion and disorientation which the poet feels as he announces; *Vago de un punto a otro*. Paradoxically, he also appears to be celebrating a truly liberating episode in his life, as evidenced in his choice of affirming and affirmative verbs: *con un gusto/establezco/absorbo ilusiones/converso/sueño/amo*.

The new conceptual and metaphorical vista which has opened up to him is truly rewarding. He has clearly uncovered a new and vibrant world of the imagination. Always conscious of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> According to Fernando Alegría, the chaos and confusion reflected in the poet's use of surreal language and imagery, is the result of a personal crisis, *ibid.*, p. 12.

historicity of this lyrical journey, the poet is anxious to acknowledge and realign himself with his predecessors and, in quasi-Adamic fashion, he recreates an originary vista from which he excavates a new meaning:

Paso entre documentos disfrutados, entre orígenes, vestido como un ser original y abatido.

His expression is now completely unrestrained. Having managed to *aislar* his expression, he is able to subvert conventional expression, and in its place, assert a wholly new, revised idiom:

Yo destruyo la rosa que silba y la ansiedad raptora: yo rompo extremos queridos: y aún más, aguardo el tiempo uniforme, sin medidas: un sabor que tengo en el alma me deprime.

As one critic observes, there is a clear metamorphosis of the lyrical voice:

... que permite a Neruda ver en lo oscuro, encontrar su camino confuso a través del don de la profecía.<sup>22</sup>

### From Private to Public Poetics

This rather extensive preamble which examines the themes and lyrical techniques of *Residencia en la tierra I & II* serves an important function - to illustrate how the often bleak and chaotic landscape of these two collections is gradually replaced by a radically different kind of poetry as we progress towards *Tercera residencia*. Most of *Tercera residencia* was written between 1935 and 1945. It comprises five distinct sections, two of which contain only one long poem - 'Las furias y las penas' and 'Reunión bajo las nuevas banderas'. In the preface to *Las furias y las penas* (written in 1939, although the poem itself was composed five years earlier, in 1934) Neruda made the following observation:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Emir Rodríguez Monegal, 'El sistema del poeta', op. cit., p. 70.

El mundo ha cambiado y mi poesía ha cambiado. Una gota de sangre caída en estas líneas quedará viviendo sobre ellas, indeleble como el amor.

Prior to his experience in Spain, Neruda, as we have seen, confined much of his literary output to his own personal concerns; of love, of nature, of life in the city, of issues relating to his own mortality. However, as Mario Rodríguez Fernández asserts, this transformation of the lyrical voice is not wholly unexpected.<sup>23</sup> Rodríguez suggests that the cohesive value which links these two distinct periods is Neruda's humanism, even though his relationship with the world has altered quite dramatically.

The debate about the politicisation of artistic expression was not confined to the situation in Spain, but was, and, continues to be, an issue which divides intellectuals and writers. It is most significantly an issue that is pertinent to all three poets examined here. Neruda's growing politicisation and his later avowal of socialist and communist ideology ensured that the debate concerning the validity of political verse would have a major bearing on his future work.

This transition from an essentially private individual is really quite remarkable. The human suffering which Neruda witnessed in Spain and his subsequent efforts to assist Republican refugees combined to make a profound impression on him. Later he would recall:

A las primeras balas que atravesaron las guitarras de España, cuando en vez de sonidos salieron de ellas borbotones de sangre, mi poesía se detiene como un fantasma en medio de las calles de la angustia humana y comienza a subir por ella una corriente de raíces y de sangre. Desde entonces mi camino se junta con el camino de todos.<sup>24</sup>

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> 'Reunión bajo las nuevas banderas o de la conversión poética de Pablo Neruda', Aproximaciones a Pablo Neruda: op. cit., p. 155.
 <sup>24</sup> Confieso que he vivido: op. cit., p. 209.

The assassination of García Lorca no doubt propelled this realliance of self and community. But it was the impact of the Spanish war itself and the overwhelming sense of loss and selfdestruction which effected him most profoundly. In 'La guerra' (Yo soy) written some ten years after the Civil War, Neruda evokes some of his lasting impressions of the conflict. As in previous discourse about colonialism, for example, Guillén's West Indies, Ltd., the brutalised country is compared to a loved one, savaged and brutalised by duplicitous and evil forces:

Entonces vi tu cuerpo desprendido de matorrales, roto sobre la arena encarnizada, abierto, sin mundo, aguijoneado en la agonía. (Poem X)

Despite his wistful remarks (in the preface to *Las furias y las penas*) about the possible redemptive nature of poetry, the reality Neruda had come to experience and understand in Spain convinced him that this was not possible.<sup>25</sup> As he elaborated in an article written in 1935, his perception of poetry had altered irrevocably:

Así sea la poesía que buscamos, gastada como por un ácido por los deberes de la mano, penetrada por el sudor y el humo, oliente a orina y a azucena salpicada por las diversas profesiones que se ejercen dentro y fuera de la ley.<sup>26</sup>

In addition, given that Neruda had been living in Spain since 1934, he was undoubtedly aware of the local intellectual climate of the period, with regard to the war and the participation of the intelligentsia.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> ¡Ay! si con sólo una gota de poesía o de amor pudiéramos aplacar la ira del mundo, pero eso sólo lo pueden la lucha y el corazón resuelto. (Preface to 'Las furias y las penas', Obras completas I, p. 264)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> 'Sobre una poesía sin pureza', Para nacer he nacido: op. cit., p. 140.s

The intelligentsia was in fact divided over the issue of involvement in the war effort. The apparently partisan position of most left-wing intellectuals clashed quite severely with that of more traditional literary criticism, which postulated that the role of the aesthete was, and, should remain, removed from the political. The latter emphasised the autonomy of literary discourse. In their view, literary production and content were compromised by casual or conscious references to the sociohistorical reality. As René de Costa has observed:

The brutal terminology of war was in fact more disturbing to many in 1937 than the scatological vocabulary so exquisitely employed in the first two 'Residencias'.<sup>27</sup>

However, much of the discourse of the period endorsed an expansion of conventional parameters of art and artistic expression. Left-wing intellectuals opined that capitalism, given its essential hostility to art, only contributed further to the bourgeois compartmentalisation of the material reality and containing and aesthetics. thus repressing artistic experimentation. Therefore, they preferred to stress the intertextual nature of life itself, emphasising the interrelatedness of all experiences. By extension, they claimed, this precipitated a broadening of conventional aesthetic boundaries and a rightful reinclusion of subjects and themes which hitherto would have been considered anti-literary, in this case the brutalising experiences and horror of the Civil War.

Nigel Dennis has categorised Spanish poetry of the period in the following way.<sup>28</sup> He divides it into two distinct phases. Firstly, a combative phase from 1930 to 1937, when, Dennis suggests, the intrinsic value of the poem was largely overlooked in favour of the sincerity and efficacy of the intended message. In other words, the ideology of the poem took precedence over concerns of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> The Poetry of Pablo Neruda (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 99.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Nigel Dennis: 'Creación y compromiso en la poesía de la guerra civil española', *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, Vol. XV, 3 (Spring, 1991), pp. 579-82.

aesthetic significance. He suggests this phase was then followed by a second, more reflective phase, which comprised the poetry written in or after 1937, specifically after the Madrid offensive.

According to Dennis, this later verse signalled a conscious distancing on the part of some poets from the earlier propagandist and utilitarian approach to poetry. He quotes Sánchez Barbudo who, in July 1937, urged writers to retrieve art from propaganda and from the demands of the political situation engulfing Spain at the time.<sup>29</sup> Many writers, including Antonio Machado, acknowledged that this was impossible and, as Dennis suggests, even Machado's poetry of that period assumed quite a distinct purpose and shape:

Como otros poetas del campo republicano, Machado acepta que el desbordamiento de emoción que nace de una experiencia tan excepcional y dramática afecta negativamente la práctica de la poesía entendida en su función convencional. La poesía llega a ser para algunos, por consiguiente, algo que se pospone.<sup>30</sup>

Neruda wrote much of the *Tercera residencia* in the first of these phases outlined by Dennis. In 'Las furias y las penas' he begins by exploring the nature of human relationships. But this is quite a superficial relationship, self-serving and indifferent in nature. We sense his persistent ambivalence towards his partner. It is also a relationship persistently underscored by explicit suggestions of violence, evidenced in the many references to blood and in *las flores negras, agrias iglesias a medio destruir, rompes a cuchilladas, asustar, fósforo, acecho, vidrio, hiedra negra, el odio, la batalla*.

The poet is filled with self-revulsion. Removed from the relationship, he is consumed by the bitterness and recrimination which exists between them. This brings him to a realisation of the futility and fleeting nature of these experiences:

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, pp.581-2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 583.

y no queda en la boca sino un sabor de pelo y de dorada lengua que con sed se alimenta.

Exposed as selfish and worthless, he compares his partner to both a snake and an animal *oliendo a cacería*. In many ways this analogy of a relationship based on the selfish and dispassionate intentions of the two parties reiterates, for the poet, the futility of life itself. Sexual pleasure is viewed in its basest form, in sordid anonymous unions, in an almost animalistic drive for sexual satisfaction:

la batalla de agonizantes bestias que cuidan el olvido .... yo quebrantándola como quien golpea una campana.

Life appears to offer no respite, and the belief that somehow he could postpone his inevitable demise through love is dramatically shattered:

Es una sola hora larga como una vena, y entre el ácido y la paciencia del tiempo arrugado transcurrimos, apartando las sílabas del miedo y la ternura, interminablemente exterminados.

The inexorable passage of time, along with the sense of his own encroaching death are omnipresent and all-consuming:

... es posible que el amor haya caído al polvo y no haya sino carne y huesos velozmente adorados mientras el fuego se consume y los caballos vestidos de rojo galopan al infierno?

The discourse of this relationship is enmeshed with the political reality of Spain, with the poet's realisation that he can no longer immerse himself solely in concerns of love. The brutality he had witnessed in Spain had precipitated a major change in Neruda's life. Through these experiences, and his subsequent participation in the evacuation efforts after the Spanish Civil War, Neruda had come to recognise a need to write a more inclusive type of poetry, one which was more realistic in content and tone. However this was coupled with the persistent challenge of how to preserve the essential lyricism of his earlier work.

'Las furias y las penas' hinges around a series of paradoxes, and a conscious clash between the artificial and the natural. The poet seeks out symbols of permanence and eternality in his own life, which he has already viewed in the natural world:

Yo quiero para mí la avena y el relámpago a fondo de epidermis, y el devorante pétalo desarrollado en furia, y el corazón labial del cerezo de Junio ...

In 'Alianza (Sonata)', as if to herald the more political verse to come, the poet elaborates on the impossibility of finding complete fulfilment in love, in the fleeting sexual pleasure it brings and in the isolation of relationships:

Ya no es posible, a veces, ganar sino cayendo, ya no es posible, entre dos seres temblar, tocar la flor del río ...

Again Neruda locates an alternative vision, seeing the power of the collective effort in the natural world around him:

hebras de hombres vienen como agujas, tramitaciones, trozos, familias de coral repulsivo, tormentas y pasos duros por alfombras de invierno.

He himself continues to excavate in search of this eternal essence which will enable him to transcend the frustrations and limitations of his hermetic life. Again we sense his complete disillusion and uncertainty, epitomised in the acute feeling of dislocation in the following verses:

No soy, no sirvo, no conozco a nadie, no tengo armas de mar ni de madera, no vivo en esta casa.

These changing concerns are also evident in 'Reunión bajo las nuevas banderas'. Again he recognises the irrelevance of much of his earlier writing and declares himself incapable of continuing in such a vein. Here he asserts the indivisible nature of his experiences and of those who are suffering in Spain:

Yo de los hombres tengo la misma mano herida, yo sostengo la misma copa roja e igual asombro enfurecido ....

In this coalescence of the poetic self and society, Neruda articulates many of the sentiments that he will come to explore in the *Canto general*. Significantly, this transformation also mirrors that viewed in Guillén, in particular in his verse written between 1926 and 1930.

*España en el corazón* is unashamedly political in its sentiments. Written *en plena guerra* the collection assumes an almost prosaic tone. It possesses a simple, accessible style and idiom, as befits the political reality of the time. Neruda explains the stylistic shift quite succinctly in 'Explico algunas cosas'. It becomes clear that he felt compelled to comment on the events happening around him and felt unable to ignore the immediate political reality. Addressing himself in the third person he imagines the critical response to this collection:

Preguntaréis por qué su poesía no nos habla del sueño, de las hojas, de los grandes volcanes de su país natal?

Venid a ver la sangre por las calles.

venid a ver la sangre por las calles, venid a ver la sangre por las calles!

Although there is repetition of the same line, Neruda alternates the first words in each subsequent line, thus forcing us to focus on different aspects of the tragedy. In 'Madrid' he depicts a scene of utter devastation, of a city shrouded permanently in gloom and despair:

Ciudad de luto, socavada, herida, rota, golpeada, agujereada, llena de sangre y vidrios rotos, ciudad sin noche, toda noche y silencio y estampido y héroes.

In these verses, and throughout the entire poem, the poet employs enjambment to great effect, focusing our attention on the immediate suffering and destruction of the city. Again the abundance of past participles reinforces the plight of the victims and the poet's obvious empathy with them. His anger at the betrayal perpetrated by Franco's Nationalist forces is palpable:

el general en cuya mano suenan treinta dineros: están contra tus muros un cinturón de lluviosas beatas, un escuadrón de embajadores pútridos y un triste hipo de perros militares.

The poet aligns himself firmly with the Republican cause and by naming hitherto anonymous victims both reasserts their identity and retrieves the poem from the detachment of much political verse. We have noted this definite change in Neruda's verse and the issue of the politicisation of the aesthetic was clearly something that the poet reflected upon in great depth. Many years later, in *Confieso que he vivido*, Neruda would suggest similarities between his time in Spain and other quite distinct crises in his life: Como en la crisis de nacimiento, como en el comienzo alarmante y alarmado del terror metafísico de donde brota el manantial de mis primeros versos, como en un nuevo crepúsculo que mi propia creación ha provocado, entro en una agonía y en la segunda soledad. Hacia dónde ir? Hacia dónde regresar, conducir, callar o palpitar?<sup>31</sup>

Although completely demoralised by his experiences in Spain, the poet chastises himself for not focusing earlier on the collective plights of other men and women, on the specificity of their suffering and exploitation. His conversion to a more socialised and public vision was sustained by the realisation that much of his earlier poetry was limited and self-referential. Through this realliance with the community, the poet has uncovered additional lyrical possibilities:

Mi poesía comienza a ser parte material de un ambiente infinitamente espacial, de un ambiente a la vez submarino y subterráneo, a entrar por galerías de vegetación extraordinaria, a conversar a pleno día con fantasmas solares, a explorar la cavidad del mineral escondido en el secreto de la tierra, a determinar las relaciones olvidadas del otoño y del hombre.<sup>32</sup>

Much later, Neruda's relationship with the Mexican muralists, Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros would also prove crucially formative to this evolving dialectic. (He had been appointed Consul to Mexico in 1940 and remained there for three years). His relationship with these painters reinforced a developing need in Neruda's mind to socialise artistic expression and make it accessible to all. The attitude of these artists to history and, in particular, to their pre-Columbian heritage introduced him to a much more combative and cyclical vision of the past. Their work instilled in the poet a broader historical and geographical framework and urged a recovery and re-examination of the nature of his historical origins

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Confieso que he vivido: op. cit., p. 209.  $\frac{32}{2}$  ibid. p. 210

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p. 210.

and of an originary idiom. In two poems in 'Yo soy', Neruda records his debt to Mexico and its artists, indicative, I believe, of the importance he attached to this period in his life:

Y así de tierra a tierra fui tocando el barro americano, mi estatura, y subió por mis venas el olvido recostado en el tiempo, hasta que un día estremeció mi boca su lenguaje. (Poem XII)

The other significant formative experience for Neruda was his visit to the Inca ruins at Macchu Picchu in 1943, which helped consolidate this emerging artistic voice. In his memoirs, the poet acknowledged that the visit *agregaría un nuevo estrato al desarrollo de mi poesía.*<sup>33</sup> His identification with the people who constructed Macchu Picchu was to mould a new vision of his own American identity. Here, not only did he recognise the commonality of the history, experience and lineage shared by each and every citizen of the Americas, but he was at last able to identify their defining resonance in his own artistic work:

Sentía que mis propias manos habían trabajado allí en alguna etapa lejana, cavando surcos, alisando peñascos.<sup>34</sup>

The isolation and despair so evident throughout both *Residencia* en la tierra and to a lesser degree in parts of *Tercera residencia* have been replaced by a renewed sense of heredity and belonging, which Luis Rosales suggests was akin to a reawakening for the poet.<sup>35</sup>

Neruda himself, in *Confieso que he vivido*, conveyed this sense of exhileration and placement in the following manner:

Me sentí chileno, peruano, americano. Había encontrado en aquellas alturas difíciles, entre aquellas ruinas gloriosas y

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> ibidem

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> 'La poesía de Neruda', op. cit., p. 42.

dispersas, una profesión de fe para la continuación de mi canto.<sup>36</sup>

This nascent sense of a broader Pan-American identity enabled Neruda to transcend the barriers of separate national identities, and brought him to the point of identifying a common people, history and culture. This perceived commonality of experience and history underpins much of the Canto general and allows the poet to delve into a broader vision of humanity, thereby creating a more enduring legacy. Such an evocation of history is also apparent in Guillén's West Indies, Ltd. but is especially evident throughout Homenaje a los indios americanos, where Cardenal resuscitated the Mayan and Toltec heritages as emblematic of indigenous America. The past and the excavation of its particulars are transformed by all three poets into an enabling tool which engenders a revised sense of self in relation to present and future time. The synthesis of individual and collective voices which occurs subsequently enables a transformation of the literary voice and of inherited perceptions of the national identity. As René de Costa observes:

His new faith is in man, in mankind. The voice of the poet is no longer singular, that of an individual alone and adrift in an alien world; rather he is a part of society. He presumes to speak now not only for himself but also for others.<sup>37</sup>

I believe it is also precisely because of the overwhelming sense of displacement and alienation which had engulfed Neruda, that the poet is ultimately empowered to begin this reappraisal of self and nationhood. Heretofore, the true significance of his individual and collective identities had eluded him. Paradoxically, like Cardenal and Guillén, Neruda appears to be propelled towards a more honest engagement with this originary meaning because of this sense of marginality and displacement.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> op. cit., p. 235.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> The Poetry of Pablo Neruda: op. cit., p. 92.

# **Defining** Influences

Inevitably comparisons could be suggested between Neruda's reaffirmation of his Americanism and the sentiments of the Modernist movement. What we witness in Neruda however is a combination of this modernist concern for language and for the recovery of a unique Latin American idiom, as well as a genuine wish to objectify his expression. Thus, linguistic renovation for Neruda is combined with a deeper sense of commitment and the articulation of a common heredity which links all Americans. This results in a broadening of the conceptual canvas and a very clear transition from the often difficult and apparently desolate surrealism of *Residencia en la tierra I & II* and the often strident political verse of *España en el corazón*.

In this regard, the influence of Walt Whitman on Neruda needs to be acknowledged. In a lecture to the Pen Club in New York in 1971, Neruda cited Whitman as an abiding influence on his work:

Por mi parte, yo que estoy muy cerca de los setenta años, cuando apenas cumplí quince, descubría a Walt Whitman, mi más grande acreedor. Y estoy aquí entre ustedes, acompañado por esta maravillosa deuda que me ha ayudado a existir.<sup>38</sup>

On the same occasion, he also remarked:

Hay muchas formas de grandeza, pero a mí, poeta del idioma castellano, Walt Whitman me enseña más que Cervantes: en su obra no queda humillado el ignorante ni es ofendida la condición humana.<sup>39</sup>

It would appear that it was Whitman's humanism and his ability to capture the lives and experiences of ordinary people which attracted Neruda to his work. We note how in 'Que despierte el leñador' Neruda transcends the traditional animosity between

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Neruda, Para nacer he nacido: op. cit., p. 419.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p. 420.

Latin America and North America to celebrate the commonality of expression and experience which link the two parts of the continent:

Mi hermano Juan vende zapatos como tu hermano John. mi hermana Juana pela papas, como tu prima Jane. y mi sangre es minera y marinera como tu sangre, Peter.

In a tone similar to that of Guillén in 'No sé por qué piensas tú' or 'Dos niños', Neruda seeks to highlight their shared experiences and humanity. Throughout he delights in the landscape and language of America as evoked by the North American poet, and articulates the legacy of Whitman in his own lyrical formation:

Dame tu voz y el peso de tu pecho enterrado, Walt Whitman, y las graves raíces de tu rostro para cantar estas reconstrucciones.

Neruda's work reflects this Whitmanian influence in many ways. Firstly, as we have just viewed in 'Que despierte el leñador', there is a shared identification on the part of both poets with the common man. Whitman, in the Preface to Leaves of Grass, suggested that the genius of man was not to be found in the intellectual or in the politician but in the language and experiences of the common citizen.40 Declaring himself 'the caresser of life', Whitman sets out in 'Song of Myself' to catalogue the lives of many ordinary people, observing the young men swimming, the fishermen, the black stableman, the butcher-boy and the blacksmith, the machinist to name but a few.41 He captures the beauty and simplicity of their lives, their physical presence enthrals him:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> The Portable Walt Whitman: op. cit., p. 6. <sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 41-8.

I am enamoured of growing outdoors, Of men that live among cattle or taste of the ocean or woods, Of the builders and steerers of ships, of the wielders of axes and mauls, of the drivers of horses, I can eat and sleep with them week in and week out.<sup>42</sup>

Whitman is in awe of the exemplary nature of their existence and, although he depicts inhabitants of the cities and towns with equal attention to detail, he clearly admired the eternality identified in the links with the natural world evident in the lives of rural workers.

Similarly Neruda, in the *Canto general* set out to re-capture the lives of ordinary people. By re-populating his poetry with the experiences of real people, Neruda retrieved them from anonymity and exclusion. Thus there is a noticeable coincidence of purpose in 'La tierra se llama Juan' and in Whitman's 'Song of Myself', specifically with regard to this re-inclusion of ordinary people.

Each portrait of *La tierra se llama Juan* becomes a testament to the individuals depicted. But they are also a record of the brutality and impoverishing nature of the different professions, as all are ultimately defined by their occupation - the boatman, the fisherman, the cobbler, the miner working at the coal-face. In many ways they are archetypal, emblematic figures, but Neruda retrieves them from archetype by capturing something of their individual horrors and by celebrating their collective resilience.

Neruda's approach is somewhat distinct to that of Whitman, in that the Chilean allows most of the individuals to enunciate their experiences in the first person, while Whitman remains at some remove, always as an observer. In Neruda's portraits we can empathise with the brutal paradox of the lame cobbler and share in the poignancy of Margarita Naranjo's situation, in her grief at the loss of her husband and her own subsequent death:

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, p. 44.

no hay más que soledad en torno a mí, que ya no existo, que ya existiré sin él, nunca más, sin él.

Neruda captures the interjections of everyday speech and the eponymous subject's candid assessment of his life. 'La tierra se llama Juan' embodies the spirit of the entire sequence. In this poem, Neruda identifies an Everyman figure who comes to represent each and every victim of injustice. Juan is identified with the earth, and, in common with many of Cardenal's poems in Homenaje a los indios americanos, his individual rebirth is transformed into a more general symbol of hope and resurrection. The complicity between man and nature ensures that an individual renaissance through the land acquires a collective significance. I will return to this theme at a later stage as I believe Neruda, like Cardenal, identified an elemental potentiality in the cyclical eternality of the natural world which was hugely significant.

What is evident in both Whitman and Neruda is that their admiration for the nobility of spirit and character of ordinary people has strengthened a re-alliance for these poets with their community. This realignment of individual and collective concerns is evident on many occasions in 'Song of Myself', where Whitman observed:

In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barleycorn less, And the good or bad I say of myself I say of them.<sup>43</sup>

And later, when he remarks:

I do not ask the wounded person how he feels ... I myself become the wounded person, My hurt turns livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p. 72.

Equally, Neruda, in 'América', asserts:

cuando en tu vientre existo, en tu almenada tarde, en tu descanso, en el útero de tus nacimientos, en el terremoto, en el diablo de los campesinos, en la ceniza que cae de los ventisqueros ... todo es mi noche, todo es mi día, todo es mi aire, todo es lo que vivo, sufro, levanto y agonizo.

Both poets view this re-alliance of self and the masses as a platform from which a revision of the conventional teleology of poetry and the poet can be launched. It enables both poets to subvert conventional expectations of the bard and excavate an even greater meaning within a new revitalised context. Whitman persistently sought out humanity and asserted that the role of the bard was to respond to and interpret this humanity:

His spirit responds to his country's spirit ... he incarnates its geography and natural life and rivers and lakes ... he sees eternity in men and women ... he does not see men and women as dreams or dots.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout much of the *Canto general*, Neruda, through a reappraisal of existing perceptions of self and of verse, envisages a new, more pragmatic potential in his verse:

No escribo para que otros libros me aprisionen ni para encarnizados aprendices de lirio, sino para sencillos habitantes que piden agua y luna, elementos del orden inmutable, escuelas, pan y vino, guitarras y herramientas.

Whitman also had a vision of the qualities an ideal poet should possess:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Preface to Leaves of Grass, ibid., pp. 9 & 10.

He swears to his art, I will not be meddlesome, I will not have in my writing any elegance or effect or originality to hang in the way between me and the rest like curtains. I will have nothing hang in the way, not the richest curtains. What I tell I tell for precisely what it is.<sup>46</sup>

In Alturas de Macchu Picchu Neruda identifies the enriching possibilities offered by the collective sacrifice made at Macchu Picchu and offers himself as spokesman for all victims of oppression and exclusion:

Dadme el silencio, el agua, la esperanza. Dadme la lucha, el hierro, los volcanes. Apegadme los cuerpos como imanes. Acudid a mis venas y a mi boca. Hablad por mis palabras y mi sangre.

Whitman also envisages such a link between himself and his community:

Listener up there! Here you ... what have you to confide to me? Look into my face while I snuff the sidle of evening, Talk honestly, for no one else hears you, and I stay only a minute longer.<sup>47</sup>

There is a clear similarity between the sentiments expressed by Neruda in the final 'cantos' of *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* and those of Whitman in 'Song of Myself'. Both are concerned with reincluding the voices of the marginalised:

Through me many long dumb voices, Voices of the interminable generations of slaves, Voices of the prostitutes and of deformed persons, Voices of the diseased and despairing, and of thieves

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> 'Song of Myself', *ibid.*, pp. 95-6.

### and dwarfs,

Voices of cycles of preparation and accretion, And of the threads that connect the stars - and of wombs, and of the fatherstuff, And of the rights of them the others are down upon, Of the trivial and flat and foolish and despised, Of fog in the air and beetles rolling balls of dungs.<sup>48</sup>

Elsewhere, in 'Song of Myself', he remarks:

I am the man ... I suffered ... I was there.<sup>49</sup>

In Alturas de Macchu Picchu Neruda also comes to identify completely with the individual and collective sufferings of others. In effect, he assumes their pain:

Miro las vestiduras y las manos, el vestigio del agua en la oquedad sonora, la pared suavizada por el tacto de un rostro que miró con mis ojos las lámparas terrestres, que aceitó con mis manos las desaparecidas maderas ...

While, to some extent, Whitman remains aloof as an observer of the everyday and the excluded, Neruda envisages a much more participative role:

Yo vengo a hablar por vuestra boca muerta. A través de la tierra juntad todos los silenciosos labios derramados y desde el fondo habladme toda esta larga noche como si yo estuviera con vosotros anclado, contadme todo, cadena a cadena, eslabón a eslabón, y paso a paso.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 71.

Both poets also came to identify the redemptive and prophetic potential of poetry. In addition, Whitman identified a link which could be forged in poetry between past, present and future, between the archival nature of poetry and its prophetic capacity to provoke change, sentiments which are also central to Neruda's lyrical vision:

The past and present wilt ... I have filled them and emptied them, And proceed to fill my next fold of the future.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, in the preface to Leaves of Grass, Whitman opines:

Past and present and future are not disjoined but joined. The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be from what has been and is.<sup>51</sup>

Stylistically there are also many similarities between the two poets, in particular their shared love of catalogue and enumeration, which I will explore in more depth when I examine some of the individual poems of the *Canto general*.

#### Canto general

What evolves out of this amalgam of socio-political and literary influences and experiences, is a much more socialised form of artistic expression in the *Canto general* than any which had preceded it. Described by one critic as *una épica de conversión personal*, as a collection the *Canto general* retains much of the lyrical dexterity and complexity of Neruda's earlier collections.<sup>52</sup> However, it is also clearly couched in a more radicalised vision of the artistic role and in a more emphatic sense of humanity. According to Alain Sicard, herein lies the central, enduring

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> María Luisa Fischer, 'El *Canto general* de Neruda y el canto particular de Enrique Lihn - Una lectura', *Revista Iberoamericana*, 155-6, Vol. LVII (April-September, 1991), p. 573.

contradiction in Neruda's work.<sup>53</sup> Neruda appears to have recognised a new potentiality in the lyrical exercise and in his function as a poet. Manuel Durán and Margery Safir suggest:

The poet is here as chronicler, observer, participant, and actor, and above all, as the voice of a collectivity, a voice possessing all the special powers of evocation and creation of drama that form part of the magic of the classical epic bard. <sup>54</sup>

Fuelled by an abiding sense of humanism, he nonetheless retained a fascination for the uninhabited, uncontaminated landscape evidenced in the enduring presence of the ocean, in the Pampas and in the mountains. His evocation of the past can also assume many forms; an unreal or recognisable past, one which is paradisical or uninhabited. These conflicting voices nourish each other, with the natural world providing and sustaining the metaphorical, conceptual and linguistic base necessary to create a totally novel counter-discourse.

The initial locus of Neruda's process of recuperation and rehabilitation is an unspoiled and as yet unnamed continent. Like Whitman in 'To Think of Time', he re-imagines the continent of America *ab origine*, as a primeval paradise which pre-dates the arrival of the Spanish and in which he hopes to locate an authentic model of identity. This implied return to origins, evident in *La lámpara en la tierra*, is vital to the poet's future development. Although these initial poems are of ontological and cosmogonical significance, they never really suggest a pristine model of behaviour. Rather they are persistently underscored by suggestions of violence and barbarity, an indication, I believe, of Neruda's determination to engage fully with the world of history, as well as the world of myth.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Alain Sicard, 'Poesía y política en la obra de Pablo Neruda', *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, Vol. XV, 3 (Spring, 1991), p. 558.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Manuel Durán & Margery Safir, *Earth Tones* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), p. 83.

According to both Mircea Eliade and B. Malinowski, myth presents us with fables of ontology and cosmogony which are regarded as being part of a sacred history, populated by superhuman and supernatural beings. These stories have a specific paradigmatic function, because as archetypal models they not only depict the genesis of being and the universe but more significantly, they are regarded as a true history, a testimony to previous great events. Eliade suggests:

The return to origins gives the hope of a rebirth.<sup>55</sup>

Given that this original is often a perfected, idyllic model, it nevertheless offers some possibility for future change because it serves as a record of a more illustrious past. Eliade suggests that although this mythological canvas is often the focus of unequal comparison with contemporary reality, it is also the means whereby the present actuality is transcended and the more glorious past is partly recoverable.<sup>56</sup>

Like fairy stories, the mythological canvas demands a suspension of belief, and an alternative belief in the ambiguous nature of temporality. For Neruda this initial flight into the world of myth enables him to explore the sources and genesis of creation. He locates these archetypal models in the natural world and they do serve a specific purpose for the poet. B. Malinowski believes that:

These stories ... are to the natives a statement of a primeval, greater, and more relevant reality, by which the present life, fates and activities of mankind are determined, the knowledge of which supplies man with the motive for ritual and moral actions, as well as with indications as to how to perform them.<sup>57</sup>

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1964), p. 30.
 <sup>56</sup> ibid., p. 145.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Malinowski and the Work of Myth (Ivan Strenski, ed.) (Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 87.

This is the paradigmatic and instructive model to which the poet resorts during his journey of self-discovery and auto-definition. It also imbues an essentially personal odyssey with archetypal significance, and as such transforms it into a journey for all of humanity.

Therefore to summarise, the primary functions of myth are the following. Firstly to activate in the collective memory a more glorious and prestigious past with which the present cannot compare. However the reactivated communal memory is propelled and sustained by the hope of a possible renaissance, or return of the now-lost past. Secondly, myth reinforces the sense of kinship evident in past times and of a community closely dependent on the natural world. The contemporary community comes to acknowledge the link between past and present and, as Malinowski suggests, it assumes a 'warrant of antiquity' as evidenced in this mythical past.58 Finally the link between past and present itself is reinforced, as apocalyptic images of the demise and disintegration of self and society are dispensed with, in favour of a more cyclical, optimistic vision of time.

In many ways Neruda's journey into this mythical landscape mirrors the evolutionary process of decolonisation as suggested by Frantz Fanon. Fanon suggested the process begins with an act of retrogression and recuperation, culminating in the reassertion and rehabilitation of pre-colonial models or models of the hybrid self that have evolved.

Neruda repeatedly seeks out these mythical and archetypal symbols in the natural world. In *La lámpara en la tierra* he uncovers powerful elemental forces beyond the immediate abysmal history, thus creating an optimism regarding the recoupable nature of these defining, originary constituents. The human world and the world of history are, by comparison, finite and pessimistic. In order to stress the materiality of modern urban life in particular, Neruda resorts to demonic images to convey the sense of decline and alienation. In some poems, as we

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, p. 86.

will see, his excursion into myth is blended with the world of history that surrounds him to create a truly original poetic locus. This enables the poet to explore the history of self and nation, with all its material and symbolic connotations. It is clear that initially Neruda privileges the idyllic, paradisical nature of the natural world over the world of history as a means of magnifying the cruel way in which this idyll has been violated and subverted during the course of Latin America's history. In this regard, Neruda's discourse is akin to that articulated by Cardenal.

Saúl Yurkievich suggests Neruda offers us two separate, yet cohesive visions. Firstly, there is the permanent world of nature, which is sustained by Neruda's mythical vision of a primeval and aboriginal world. Secondly, there is the historical world which is imbedded in recent history and chronicles the development of Latin American society, with all its political and historical vicissitudes.<sup>59</sup> According to Juan Villegas, Neruda's use of myth serves a purely lyrical function; to assert the authenticity and uniqueness of the American identity:

... le sirve como fuente para emerger del fondo de las cosmologías americanas con una flor arraigada profundamente, con color local y fragancia histórica completa.<sup>60</sup>

In my view Neruda embarks on this mythical journey - a *regressus ad uterum* - in order to source the authentic definition of both nation and self. Although he initially recreates an original, quasi-utopian landscape, the historical reality is never far away. As he moves through the different historical chapters of Latin American history, from pre-conquest to conquest, from the colonial to the contemporary, a clear linear pattern emerges. Furthermore, I would suggest the poet appears to need this initial mythical flight in order to reinforce the sense of initiation and originality. Throughout, Neruda successfully blends the two

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Saúl Yurkievich, 'Mito e historia - Dos generadores del Canto general', Pablo Neruda: op. cit., p. 199.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Juan Villegas, Estructuras míticas y arquetipos en el Canto general de Pablo Neruda (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1976), pp. 26-7.

temporal visions; the mythical and the historical. He uses the mythical landscape, in much the same fashion as Cardenal does, as an enabling canvas to suggest rebirth and the possibility of a collective renaissance for Chile and for the continent as a whole, whereas the historical vision harnesses the present reality to this reinvented idyll. As we progress through the Canto general, the transmutation of the lyrical voice becomes more apparent. His journey is thus one which transports him from a palpable sense of alienation and displacement to one of identification and belonging. The overwhelming sense of pessimism and dislocation has been replaced by a more creative, and, ultimately more satisfying, voice rooted in the collective experience. In common with both Guillén and Cardenal, I believe the sense of dislocation and disruption experienced as a result of colonisation has prompted this poet to seek out an alternative sense of heredity, language and meaning. As with the other two poets, Neruda's voyage is both a collective and individual pilgrimage, shaped and moulded by alternate feelings of loss and of the recoupable. It oscillates between these two distinct worlds, and paradoxically, between a sense of alienation and a sense of communal filiation.

The world of history often represents something immutable and terminal for Neruda. But propelled by this search for a permanent and collective testimony, the mythic adventure allows him to transcend the limitations of his human condition and re-imagine the continent ab origine. His discourse on colonialism demands this initial suspension of historical time, as it enables him to transcend historical and temporal limitations and thus recuperate now-forgotten models of meaning and identity. What Neruda uncovers are archetypal exemplars which record the uniqueness of the Latin American landscape and people and which have remained untainted by the progression of time or by the colonial experience. Significantly, Neruda never negates or obfuscates this historical reality but engages with it, with the renewed hope that there is a possibility of recovery and change. This aspiration for change has been sourced by him in the world of myth and in particular in its cyclical temporal vision. The notion that a

decadent universe can re-emerge in a more pristine fashion is the philosophy which sustains Neruda throughout the *Canto general*.

Alturas de Macchu Picchu, the second sequence of the Canto general, is possibly one of the pivotal sequences of the entire collection, and as such merits quite extensive discussion. It is an ode to the Inca citadel at Macchu Picchu but in many ways it is a composite of the trajectory and concerns of the entire Canto general and many of the lyrical techniques identified in this poem are present throughout the Canto general.

Neruda's 1943 visit to Macchu Picchu became an enabling prism through which the poet was able to re-examine the vicissitudes of his own life and work. In many ways it represents the journey of a conventional mythical hero; his trial and fall, followed by a subsequent period of redemption. Neruda's mythical journey however is intensified and concentrated because, as I have suggested, I believe this voyage also represents the process of decolonisation undertaken by a marginalised and colonised society.

In Alturas de Macchu Picchu the poet chronicles the history of this ancient citadel but, on a broader level, also traces his own progression from isolation and introspection, to a position of greater empathy and solidarity with his fellow man. René de Costa suggests:

... 'Canto general' moves from the most remote moment of time to the most actual, from the most general historical event to the most particular and personal, from the poet as seer to the poet as comrade.<sup>61</sup>

Reading the poem we become aware of his developing ambivalence towards temporal considerations. On the one hand, he is persistently reminded of his own mortality and, on the other hand, there is a nascent confidence which draws strength from the cyclical vision with which this ancient citadel is imbued. By

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> The Poetry of Pablo Neruda: op. cit., p. 112.

blurring the temporal guidelines, Neruda not only establishes a continuum between himself and his ancestors, but also between the imagined and the real.

In Confieso que he vivido, Neruda recalls his initial impressions of Macchu Picchu:

... me sentí infinitamente pequeño en el centro de aquel ombligo de piedra ... sentí que mis propias manos habían trabajado allí en alguna etapa ... Me sentí chileno, peruano, americano ... una profesión de fe para la continuación de mi canto.<sup>62</sup>

This renewed sense of solidarity, of a national and continental identity was to propel him through the darker stages of this odyssey. In the initial stages of Alturas de Macchu Picchu Neruda engages with the world of history, acutely aware at all times of the fragility of human life and specifically of his personal existence. History, in these opening 'cantos' is repeatedly a symbol of the finite and the destructive. As he looks around him, the immediate vision is abysmal and terrifying. Man's condition is assessed in relation to that prevailing in the natural world, and is found to be comparably impoverished and bereft of meaning. Conventional symbols of growth and rejuvenation, such as spring, are negated and destroyed by man - converted into a gastada primavera humana. The figurative landscape in which he exists is both unproductive and self-defeating and he appears to be persistently at odds with his environs. His search for meaning and permanence appears only to have intensified the deeply superficial and brutalising nature of his own colonised condition. As a result, he becomes increasingly envious of the productive constancy of the natural world and although he searches it out in physical love it continues to elude him. The backdrop to the opening five cantos reinforces this sense of displacement and isolation. To achieve this, Neruda employs successive images of emptiness and disorientation to reiterate the sense of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> op. cit., p. 235.

displacement. *Como un ciego*, the poet stumbles onwards, on an apparently fruitless journey:

#### como una red vacía,

iba yo entre las calles y la atmósfera, llegando y despidiendo

The brutality of this life also forces him to move away from natural imagery, to employ the lexicon of metallurgy and thus imbue his verse with a caustic and antiseptic tone rarely seen in the *Canto general* - the exception being the poem 'Minerales' where the destructive presence of man is also articulated through a similarly brutalised idiom (*sol malvado/ola de cruel espuma/mariposas de aguijón ácido*). Similarly the language of co-operation and productivity which he locates in nature (*entrega, mantiene, deja, campana*) is replaced in the second canto of *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* by the lexis of descent and destruction. The suggested imminence of autumn reinforces the finiteness of his human condition.<sup>63</sup>

In the second canto the poet extrapolates upon this dialectic between man and nature, drawing comparisons and making distinctions. The natural world combines with other elements to reproduce, to procreate, to enhance life around it, whereas man by contrast is still apparently destructive and violent. We note the stark contrast between humanity and nature in the following verses:

Si la flor a la flor entrega el alto germen y la roca mantiene su flor diseminada en su golpeado traje de diamante y arena, el hombre arruga el pétalo de la luz que recoge en los determinados manantiales marinos y taladra el metal palpitante en sus manos.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the language and structure of *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*, see Gastón Carrillo Herrera's excellent article 'La lengua poética de Pablo Neruda - Análisis de 'Alturas de Macchu Picchu', *Boletín del Instituto de Filología de la Universidad de Chile*, Vol. 21 (1970), pp. 293-332.

The corrosive and destructive nature of man is in stark contrast to the uninterrupted fecundity of nature. We notice the abundance of verbs suggesting violence or self-destruction associated with the lyrical voice: arrugar, taladrar, matar, agonizar, sumergir, desgarrar. The ensuing disruption is persistently challenged by the gentility and eternality exhibited in nature. The permanent and primal forces which enable the corn and the flowers to propagate, despite the odds, year after year, season after season, continue to elude the poet. He searches for the equivalent of this constancy in love and physical relationships, but this only succeeds in alienating him further. Thus, although surrounded by people on a 'noche de fiesta', he experiences the soledad más espesa. As a result, the trappings of his existence are easily dismissed as vacuous and superficial; oro vacío, ropas dispersas.

This series of deliberate contrarieties between man and nature is aided by several simple techniques, many of which will emerge as we progress through the *Canto general*. The natural world, for example, is invariably poised at a higher and more ethereal level than that of man. Compare, for example the *alto germen* and *la altura del ciruelo* with the limiting and inferior position of man *la triste mercancía del vendedor de seres, hundida, vacío, rabioso, miserable*. In addition, the facile and covetous nature of the human condition stands in stark contrast to the uninterrupted and ineluctable simplicity of the natural cycle:

el rocío desde mil años deja su carta transparente sobre la misma rama que lo espera.

The use of colour and shade is another device which allows Neruda to distinguish between these two worlds; the human world is invariably one of *sombras* and *pétalos de luz*, or *calles de invierno* and *noches*. These images contrast quite poignantly with the *historia amarilla* of the corn, the simple purity of the marble, and the *carta transparente* of the dew. The dialectic between man and nature is further intensified by corporeal images of despair; his mano turbulenta, the lágrimas, the frío de mi mano extendida. Nature, by contrast, is persistently ebullient and fertile, beautifully captured in pequeños pechos preñados of the corn. He also uses images of confinement and treachery to further contrast the human condition with the fluidity and constancy of the natural cycle.

Although the poet is searching for a similar kind of constancy and vitality, he is still clearly at odds with the world around him in these initial cantos. Persistently reminded of the uninterrupted fluidity and productivity of the natural world, he is optimistic that it can be recovered. He appears to have identified a more fruitful period, which predates the present abominable landscape, and he hopes, through this journey, that he can again share in the *lo indestructible, lo imperecedero, la vida.* 

The *eterna veta insondable*, the very essence of meaning, for which he searches is almost palpable. However, in order to grasp it, he must descend to an even lower ebb before, in truly mythical fashion, he is able to achieve some form of personal renaissance.

The poet's despair is also impelled by the deadening and destructive effects of routine on his life, and by the envy and jealousy which beset him. There is a conscious emphasis on the destructiveness of the material world and on the mundanity of his life, as suggested by the *papel* and *alfombra cotidiana*. This continues to beset him in the third canto. Yet here, the poem has acquired an agonising and insistent tone, as evidenced in the repeated references to death:

no una muerte, sino muchas muertes llegaba a cada uno: cada día una muerte pequeña, polvo, gusano, lámpara que se apaga en el lodo del suburbio.

The senseless enumeration of *los acontecimientos miserables, del uno al siete, al ocho* not only compounds his vision of the hollow, inconsequential concerns of modern life, but also the unrelenting

inevitability of his own death. His vision continues to be apocalyptic, and he is still acutely conscious of the paucity and inevitable demise of his existence. As Alain Sicard observes:

El poeta multiplica las imágenes de lo ínfimo, de lo sutil, de la nada.<sup>64</sup>

In Canto iv this apocalyptic presence strikes an even more imposing tone. Here Neruda introduces a more powerful, all-consuming image of death, similar to that of the omnipresent threat already viewed in an earlier poem 'Sólo la muerte'.<sup>65</sup>

La poderosa muerte me invitó muchas veces: era como la sal invisible en las olas, y lo que en su invisible sabor diseminaba era como mitades de hundimientos y altura o vastas construcciones de viento y ventisquero.

The brevity of his life-span and his imminent death is not now something gradual or progressive, but an overwhelming and finite certainty.

Canto vi marks a moment of defining change, both in the tempo of the poem and in the demeanour of the lyrical voice. The poet, like an archaeologist, begins his ascent to the ancient city. In his search for this ancient monument he appears to have finally stumbled across the key to this civilisation.

Entonces en la escala de la tierra he subido en la atroz maraña de las selvas perdidas hasta ti, Macchu Picchu.

The poet's own rebirth appears to be tied in with a more collective renaissance. Gastón Carrillo Herrera divides the poem into two distinct parts, a divide he argues that is also mirrored in the metaphorical and symbolic structure of the poem itself:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> El pensamiento poético de Pablo Neruda: op. cit., p. 239.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Residencia en la tierra II: op. cit., p. 212.

En 'Alturas de Macchu Picchu' no sólo se enfrentan dos concepciones distintas de la vida, dos actitudes vitales diferentes, dos distintos temples de ánimo, sino también, y esencialmente, dos tipos lingüísticos, dos tipos de lengua radicalmente diversos, que se contraponen (pero se unen) a través del demostrativo entonces de carácter fuertemente ilativo.<sup>66</sup>

The illative tone which Carrillo alludes to is immediately evident in Canto vi, both in the assured voice of the poet and in the language of ascent which he employs to create this sense of epiphany; *he subido ... hasta ti, Macchu Picchu/ Ésta fue la morada, éste es el sitio/aquí los anchos granos del maíz ascendieron.* In addition there is a noticeable change of tense; a clear transition from the use of imperfect and preterite forms in the first five sequences, to the use of present, imperative and present perfect indicative forms. This verbal transition has two clear effects; firstly it conveys something of the poet's immediate impressions of the Inca ruins,<sup>67</sup> and secondly, it reinforces an already suggested nexus which this ancient citadel embodies, between past and present generations, and between himself and his predecessors:

la pared suavizada por el tacto de un rostro que miró con mis ojos las lámparas terrestres, que aceitó con mis manos las desaparecidas maderas ...

Neruda's arrival at Macchu Picchu is the beginning of the end of a long and arduous search for his true identity. It is at this precise juncture that we begin to sense his renewed feeling of heredity. We now witness how the solitude of his previous life has been replaced gradually by a sense of location and belonging. Mario Rodríguez Fernández suggests:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> 'La lengua poética de Pablo Neruda - Análisis de 'Alturas de Macchu Picchu', *op. cit.*, p. 295.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Although Neruda visited Macchu Picchu in October 1943, he did not complete the poem until September 1945.

El yo se siente vinculado de un modo total al hombre enterrado en Macchu Picchu. A aquel hombre muerto y vuelto tierra hace mil años.<sup>68</sup>

The physical perspective is also radically different. Whereas in the initial five cantos the poet included abundant references to what he saw as the unilluminating symbols of urbanity, the language and symbolism suddenly acquire a radiance and stature hitherto unseen in his references to the human world. Here, in this ancient monument, nature and man appear to operate in harmony. Nonetheless, it is important to note that Neruda - even at this moment of elation - does not lose sight of the barbarity and savagery that was such a crucial component of this ancient civilisation:

En ti, como dos líneas paralelas, la cuna del relámpago y del hombre se mecían en un viento de espinas.

Thus, he identifies the essential drudgery of the lives of the lessprivileged inhabitants of this community, and the apparently arbitrary nature of their deaths, (*en la noche o la muerte*). The arrival at Macchu Picchu also goes some way to assuaging the nativistic yearnings which have tormented him to date. At last he is able to view at first hand some of the defining originary forces which have eluded him. This is particularly noticeable in the multiple references to primogenital symbols:

La cuna del hombre/la madre de piedra/la aurora humana/la primera arena.

Time is no longer a negative threatening presence, but something positive which has preserved and maintained this lost heritage. He has uncovered a timeless permanence which he had been previously unable to grasp. Thus, the previous vision of time has

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Mario Rodríguez Fernández, 'El tema de la muerte en 'Alturas de Macchu Picchu', *Aproximaciones a Pablo Neruda: op. cit.*, p. 214.

been replaced with a more consolatory one, as *el aire entró con dedos de azahar sobre todos los dormidos*. There is a gentle, protective quality suggested in its presence.

The inhabitants of this ancient citadel appear to have been annihilated in a savage and overwhelmingly brutal fashion:

os desplomasteis como en un otoño en una sola muerte.

Mario Rodríguez suggests that:

Macchu Picchu patentiza la aniquilación de la vida, la manera como puede la existencia ser anulada, cuán inmensa, en verdad, es el poder de la muerte.<sup>69</sup>

And yet the permanence this people achieved in their collective death - as exemplified in the monument itself - along with their communal struggle, is commended by the poet. It is as if the example of their collective experience has also enabled him to transcend the individual isolation which he associated with death and with the colonial experience. Their collective death, by contrast, is converted into a permanent record of their contribution, a moment of celebration rather than loss:

Pero una permanencia de piedra y de palabra: la ciudad como un vaso se levantó en las manos de todos, vivos, muertos, callados, sostenidos de tanta muerte, un muro, de tanta vida un golpe de pétalos de piedra: la rosa permanente, la morada: este arrecife andino de colonias glaciales.

This is also apparent in his poems about Easter Island, whereupon he also identifies the collective source of his own labours in a past tradition:

eran parte de un rostro que no fue derribado,

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p. 215.

punto de un ser, racimo que derrotó cenizas. ('Los constructores de estatuas')

The source of this epiphany is again conveyed in Alturas de Macchu Picchu in terms of physical height;

el alto sitio de la aurora humana: la más alta vasija que contuvo el silencio: una vida de piedra después de tantas vidas.

The permanence of this architectural legacy is transformed into an analogy for his own writing, as the perennial concerns of the poet for a permanent lyrical legacy somehow now appears possible. It is a theme to which Neruda returns again and again, most noticeably in *El gran océano*. However the underlying barbarity implied in the early cantos of *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*, in *las olas sangrientas, la paz sulfúrica* becomes more explicit upon his ascent of Macchu Picchu. Significantly, this is indicative of the poet's unwillingness to obfuscate or camouflage the more unpleasant aspects of this legacy, which is in stark contrast to the narrative of history envisaged by Cardenal in *Homenaje a los indios americanos*.<sup>70</sup>

In Cantos viii and ix, the poet embarks on a series of suasive gestures as a means of reconciliation between the contemporary and the past, and between himself and these people:

Sube conmigo, amor americano.

Besa conmigo las piedras secretas.

Continuing the archaeological metaphor, we note the lyrical progression from *selvas perdidas* to a *selva clara* in canto viii, as he acquires more knowledge about this ancient people. We also witness a development in the seasonal metaphor, from autumn to a somewhat *gastada* spring and in the diurnal cycle, which

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Such attention to the more unpleasant aspects of the pre-colonial reality is also apparent in 'Los hombres' in *La lámpara en la tierra*.

embodies a journey from the darkness and half-light of the opening cantos to the vibrancy of an *aurora* and *alba mía* for the poet, upon his ascent of Macchu Picchu.

The narrative alters somewhat in Canto ix, where in true Whitmanian style, the poet begins to employ a series of shorter, occasionally rhymed verses, to describe Macchu Picchu. The linguistic and technical composition of this sequence is very interesting. It is a rich and multi-layered series of hendecasyllabic verses which combine many of the techniques and suggestions of earlier cantos. The rhythm is measured and regular, expressing the urgent and intense mood of the poet, when he finally confronts the Inca ruins. He varies his description of the stone edifice; polen de piedra, pan de piedra, manantial de piedra, vapor de piedra, libro de piedra, luz de piedra, rosa de piedra, all of which combine to reinforce the dramatic effect Macchu Picchu had on him. He repeatedly employs past participles, like enterrada, sumergido, combatida, cerrado, encarnizada, endurecida to reconfirm the sense of helplessness and inadequacy which he experiences when confronting the temporal and the natural. The ancient monument also evokes the poet's unequalled sensuous powers; we hear, we see and we feel the actuality of Neruda's experience at Macchu Picchu. Throughout he employs elemental, corporeal and architectural symbols, all of which he has used before; such as luna, nieve, estrella, trueno, volcán, muralla, torre, bastión, techumbre, águila, serpiente, puma. But here, the accumulative impact of short and similar verse lengths reinforces this moment of unusual intensity and insight. It is an occasion for celebration and one which is vitally important for Neruda's future development.

After focusing on the imposing physical presence of Macchu Picchu, the poet begins to shift his focus back onto the individual inhabitants:

subir todos los escalones del aire hasta el vacío, rascar la entraña hasta tocar el hombre. He identifies the shared suffering and exploitation experienced by those who constructed the edifice and the exploitation suffered by the contemporary inhabitants of Latin America. He expresses a need to lay bare the truth behind this construction and to identify the essence of their existence:

déjame hundir la mano y deja que en mí palpite, como un ave mil años prisionera, el viejo corazón del olvidado!

The influence of Whitman and his use of catalogue are clearly apparent. Neruda gradually moves from a cataloguing of the collective experience to a naming of the forgotten individuals who erected this monument, and who rarely feature in the annals of history. They are subsequently categorised according to profession, transformed into generic figures of oppression and torture. As a result they are rehabilitated and almost apotheosised through his verse, in much the same fashion as Guillén sought to revaluate black culture and identity. This poem thereby becomes a passionate manifesto of community. His identification with the forgotten, activated by an enduring humanism, ensures that they will not be overlooked again. Their collective sacrifice, compared in one verse to the quintessential symbol of self-sacrifice in Christian mythology - that of Christ's crucifixion - becomes an inspiration for the poet. It has allowed him to redefine his position, to identify a more urgent, contemporary challenge:

A través de la tierra juntad todos los silenciosos labios derramados y desde el fondo habladme toda esta larga noche, como si yo estuviera con vosotros anclado.

He thus ends this extensive poem by offering himself as spokesman for the contemporary victims of oppression, as a chronicler of present-day suffering and torture. He has also come to the realisation that if he is to comprehend the nature of his own condition, and his mortality, he must understand that of his fellow men and women. As Emir Rodríguez Monegal observes in Neruda - El viajero inmóvil:

Al revelársele la solidaridad con aquellos hombres que levantaron la ciudad ... el poeta descubre su entronque profundo con una tierra, una raza, una hora, en la que tiene sus verdaderas raíces. De aquí arranca el canto. Porque el poeta también descubre allí la confirmación de una vocación poética: la del canto de América.<sup>71</sup>

Thus, he is able to re-emerge, in true mythical fashion, out of the abyss of individual isolation to engage in a more enriching relationship with those around him:

Déjame olvidar hoy esta dicha, que es más ancha que el mar, porque el hombre es más ancho que el mar y sus islas, y hay que caer en él como en un pozo para salir del fondo con un ramo de agua secreta y de verdades sumergidas.

La lámpara en la tierra heralds the incipient stages of Neruda's journey of rediscovery, to an imagined place of origin. It also signals the temporary suspension of temporal boundaries, as Neruda embarks on an imaginative journey of regression to an earlier period in this continent's history. He dates this moment of inception to the year 1400. The historical canvas of the collection will span over five hundred years of America's history, concluding on February 5th, 1949.

La lámpara en la tierra is a composite of many different narratives that recount the particulars of the creation of the world, the diurnal and human cycles. Throughout, the sequence brims with references to rejuvenation and light. As a result it contrasts quite abruptly with the half-light and shadow of much of *Residencia en la Tierra*. We sense an overwhelming need on Neruda's part to transcend the actual in order to uncover the originary values evident in the natural landscape, in language, and in human relationships. We also sense a palpable need on

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1977), p. 456.

Neruda's part to subvert the limiting restrictions of time and the present, in search of the permanence and constancy he views in this alternative landscape. The world of history is not overlooked or denied by Neruda, but its mutability and finality are witnessed in the demise of the original civilisation:

el idioma del agua fue enterrado, las claves se perdieron o se inundaron de silencio o sangre.

In the first stanza of 'Amor América' Neruda begins by transporting us to a pre-nominative landscape (*tierra mía sin nombre, sin América*). It is an imagined world of originality from which he derives metaphorical, conceptual and linguistic inspiration. The natural world is expansive and qualitatively superior to the insignificant impact of man (*vasija/párpado del barro trémulo*). This will however change as the collection evolves, and we witness the emerging and definitive role of historical and ordinary personages in the development of the continent's history.

At this juncture, the poet identifies an elemental potential in nature which has thus far eluded him. These natural elements which predate the arrival of man appear to be frozen in time and yet filled with experience (raida). It is a primeval landscape which is, as yet, unspoiled. It is perceived by the poet to be both a sacred and fundamental key to his identity. The particulars of this culture have however been lost and their recovery underpins much of the *Canto general*:

## Nadie pudo

recordarlas después: el viento las olvidó, el idioma del agua fue enterrado, las claves se perdieron o se inundaron de silencio o sangre.

The retrieval of this vital linguistic identity assumes an importance for the poet, in the same way as it sustains both *Homenaje a los indios americanos* and Guillén's verse. Its recovery

will enable Neruda to reconstruct and forge a nexus between past, present and future generations:

... hasta la más delgada palabra aún no nacida de mi boca.

In common with Cardenal, this underlying sense of heredity is reinforced by the language of familial relationships which Neruda employs throughout the poem; *hermanos pastorales, padre mío, madre caimán.* Man, as yet unformed and unnamed, is repeatedly identified with the integral and fundamental elements of nature, and increasingly as the key to the recovery of this lost heritage:

Tierno y sangriento fue, pero en la empuñadura de su arma de cristal humedecida, las iniciales de la tierra estaban escritas.

Although primeval man holds the key to Neruda's historical and linguistic identity, the ambivalence of the image Neruda presents of these ancestors, reflects the ambivalence and syncretism of the historical heritage at his disposal. We see that, although he highlights the ingenuity and skill of these early inhabitants, he never occludes the fundamental brutality and violence of their ancient civilisation. In this way, Neruda's project differs quite radically from that of Cardenal, who embraces a largely uncritical vision of their common pre-colonial history. Clearly Neruda wishes to engage with the totality of this historical reality.

There is a definite contrast in this poet's mind between the constancy and enduring presence of the natural world, and the demise of this apparently fragile ancient culture:

cayó una gota roja en la espesura y se apagó una lámpara de tierra. The poet becomes increasingly aware and conscious of an inescapable need to commemorate and record this suppressed memory, and of his own emerging role as historian and chronicler:

Yo estoy aquí para contar la historia. Desde la paz del búfalo hasta las azotadas arenas de la tierra final ...

We note the transition in the poem from an initial sense of loss and powerlessness, as represented by the numerous passive verbs, to the more active and participatory role of the poet, as evidenced by his use of first person active verbs; busqué/toqué/dije/anduve/apreté.

This section effectively amounts to a challenge to memory and to inherited perceptions of history as Neruda embarks on a process of interrogation and nomination. In 'Vegetaciones' the poet journeys further into this landscape *sin nombres y sin números*, to excavate more of the local lexicon and flora. The indigenous vegetation offers the poet an opportunity to enumerate, in true Whitmanian fashion, the acoustic and visual impact of the native landscape. Like Guillén and his articulation of the rhythms of the oral vernacular of Havana, this poet also appears to revel in the indigenous nomenclature and in the alliterative, assonant effects of their names on his tongue.

The constancy and repetitive quality of the natural cycle and in particular the staple crop of corn, reinforces the poet's sense of optimism and assurance in the future. Not only are they symbolic of fertility and of a people at one with their natural surroundings, they also serve to iterate the poet's identification with a forgotten or suppressed memory. The language is brimming with references to maternity and regeneration, while the tree emerges as a metaphor for both nation and the life cycle. The roots are transformed into a transgenerational link, nurtured and vitalised by the fertile soil surrounding it, the leaves symbolic of the different conflicts which arise during the life of an individual or a nation and the flowers become, ultimately, a symbol of our mortality:

Utero verde, americana sabana seminal, bodega espesa, una rama nació como una isla, una hoja fue forma de la espada, una flor fue relámpago y medusa, un racimo redondeó su resumen, una raíz descendió a las tinieblas.

The constancy of nature and in particular its regenerative powers exhilarate the poet. There appears to be an ongoing confrontation between life and death throughout the *Canto general*, between good and evil, between the ephemeral and the permanent, which is also detected in much indigenous verse. The lexis of agricultural and biological creation and reproduction collude to recreate the sense of a primeval, uninterrupted life-force and, by contrast, to highlight the impoverished condition of man.

We witness similar techniques in 'Vienen los pájaros' where Neruda braids pre-Columbian ontological myths into a celebration of the local birds. These poems are highly symbolic, representing the diverse indigenous people who inhabited this continent. It is a veritable catalogue of ornithological vibrancy and colour which serves to rehabilitate originary models of culture.

But it is in 'Los ríos acuden' that the poet confronts perhaps one of the central issues of the *Canto general* - the loss and recuperation of language, which he has alluded to in 'Amor América'. In this poem Neruda examines the significance and evolution of the four great rivers of Latin America: the Orinoco, the Bío Bío, the Amazon and the Tequendama, tracing the enormous impact they have had on the geographical shape of the continent. The commonality of language and expression, symbolised by these four great rivers which traverse the continent, allows Neruda to transcend the limitations of the immediate present to uncover an idiom which articulates a convergent sense of Pan-American identity. The centrality of the language is persistently emphasised. As I have suggested in Chapter One, this interrogation and revision of the imposed, inherited idiom is central to any process of self or national redefinition. Language comes to represent a continuum between past and present, between the individual poet and the collective identity.

Initially Neruda employs the analogy of a woman to trace the trajectory of each river and to describe the continent as a whole. He visualises her body, as he does in 'La guerra', as beautiful but tortured, bringing vitality and energy, yet herself left ravaged and deformed. As if looking at Latin America from above, he employs the metaphor of the tree to depict this network of tributaries, which ultimately flow into each other, creating gullies and lakes, reservoirs and streams. The trajectory and composition of the individual rivers reinforce in the poet's mind the diversity, as well as, the similarities, between the different idioms which comprise Latin America. Each river is described in originary terms, as a primal source. The Orinoco, from the north, the genesis of this ontological journey, evokes a timeless presence, which Neruda imbues with great musicality.<sup>72</sup> The acoustics of this passage are quite beautiful, as exemplified in the following sequence:

río de razas, patria de raíces tu ancho rumor, tu lámina salvaje vienen de donde vengo, de las pobres y altivas soledades, de un secreto como una sangre, de una silenciosa madre de arcilla.

Language, in the poet's view, is a common and unifying force among the people of Latin American, and although cognisant of the many diverse influences which have shaped it, both indigenous and foreign, the poet continues to view it as a defining,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> René de Costa suggests that Neruda's systematic elaboration of both the geography and history of Latin America is quite deliberate, in that he wants to 'move us from wonder to sympathy, from awe to pity', seeking to involve the reader at each subsequent stage. *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda: op. cit.*, p. 112.

elemental and originary force. In the opening passage, with implicit references to the biblical story of Eve, Neruda constructs a virginal feminine entity, laden with possibilities of fertility and potential. This is achieved by the numerous references to sources - cauces, eras de manantiales, lágrimas vitales. He visualises the woman's body, her head, forehead and waist, bringing vitality and energy.

He employs the biblical story of creation to convey the transition from innocence to knowledge, mirroring to some degree his own lyrical transformation. In this way we witness how he moves through the different rivers, employing each to highlight the essential differences between each stage of his own transformation. In the sequence on the Orinoco, for instance, the poet's position is essentialist. Here he expresses a desire to reappropriate an unspoiled ancient landscape and to return to this paradisical, primeval state:

déjame como entonces ir desnudo, entrar en tus tinieblas bautismales ... déjame hundir las manos que regresan a tu maternidad, a tu transcurso ...

We do sense a real feeling of continuance, of transhistorical links between the poet and his ancestors, sourced and reinforced by their common affinity with nature. It effectively marks the initial stage in this process of personal rehabilitation and recuperation of the unique identity of the Americas.

The Tequendama river allows the poet to explore further the problems of his suppressed linguistic heritage. It could also represent another stage in Neruda's own personal development and the transition from the hermeticism of his early writing, to the more socialised vision apparent here. On a linguistic level he bemoans the lack of record and the vulnerability and ultimate demise of the oral society which predated the literate, chirographic culture. He compensates for this by stressing the potentiality of this lost culture as evident in the residual permanence and constancy of the river. The alternating verse lengths, and his use of both broad and slender vowels mimic the repetitive rhythm of a speaker's voice, culminating in the beautiful climactic image of the waterfall, reaching its final destination:

abriendo muros de oro hasta caer del cielo en el teatro aterrador de la piedra vacía.

However, he reserves special attention for the Bío Bío river of his native Chile. The linguistic component of his Chilean identity is explored, as well as his deep affinity with the natural world. The sense of fluidity and evolution of the river reinforce the vital historical and linguistic links which the poet identifies in the specific cadences of the Chilean idiom:

Pero háblame, Bío, Bío, son tus palabras en mi boca las que resbalan, tú me diste el lenguaje, el canto nocturno mezclado con lluvia y follaje.

There is a strong sense of belonging, of an identification with these primal sources. As such it conveys the defining relationship he has with his own country. Both the river and the tree function as enabling metaphors, which allow him to explore and confront the linguistic and historical reality. He also employs the river metaphor to great effect in his tribute to the five fellow poets in 'Los ríos del canto'. The fluidity of their lyrical language is characterised by Neruda as akin to that of the easy, uninterrupted current of the river. Of González Carbalho, for example, he muses:

Entonces, en el mapa desordenado de las pequeñas vidas con tinta azul: el río, el río de las aguas que cantan, hecho de la esperanza del padecer perdido, del agua sin angustia que sube a la victoria. Mi hermano hizo este río: de su alto y subterráneo canto se construyeron estos graves sonidos mojados de silencio.

In *Confieso que he vivido*, the poet again employs the river metaphor to describe his own evolution as the national poet:

Mi poesía y mi vida han transcurrido como un río americano, como un torrente de aguas de Chile, nacidas en la profundidad secreta de las montañas australes, dirigiendo sin cesar hacia una salida marina el movimiento de sus corrientes.<sup>73</sup>

Not only is the river an acknowledgement of the fluidity and evolution of language but also of the poet's determination to record his own poetic evolution. As he goes on to say in *Confieso que he vivido*, it is also an expression of his desire to record the totality of the historical reality:

Mi poesía no rechazó nada de lo que pudo traer en su caudal; aceptó la pasión, desarrolló el misterio, y se abrió paso entre los corazones del pueblo.<sup>74</sup>

'Los ríos acuden' is underpinned by references to a suppressed history of barbarity. In 'Bío Bío' suggestions of a more unpleasant side to his national history come to the fore:

y luego te vi entregarte al mar dividido en bocas y senos, ancho y florido, murmurando una historia color de sangre.

In 'Amazonas' the language also assumes a threatening and menacing tone. The underlying suggestions of violence evident in the opening sequence of 'Los ríos acuden' become more evident in this sequence on the Amazon. The river is ascribed forceful,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> op. cit., p. 241.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> ibidem

masculine characteristics and there are several sexual references to paternity and male dominance, evident in particular in the use of *esperma verde* and *árbol nupcial*. We note also the use of language of menace and control; *muertos, vigilar, salvaje*, all evidence, I believe, of Neruda's willingness to address the legacy of violence and barbarity caused by colonialism. This process of redefinition, of a re-appropriation of his original identity Neruda admits, requires an attitude of honesty and openness. He cannot afford to indulge in mythification or nostalgia in this search.

For the poet this journey has become a memory-building exercise, a defining stage in the search for an authentic identity. It is, in many respects, a journey in onomastics, a naming process. Like Whitman, Neruda embarks on a cataloguing of native fauna and flora, along with the indigenous inhabitants, as if by his naming, they are retrieved and thus recorded for posterity. This attention to language and to the recuperation of linguistic particulars as viewed in this poem mirror the primary concerns of the *Canto general*.

In Alturas de Macchu Picchu there are repeated references to the loss of language:

... porque todo, ropaje, piel, vasijas, palabras, vino, panes, se fue, cayó a la tierra. (Canto vi)

Ya no sois, manos de araña, débiles hebras, tela enmarañada: cuando fuisteis cayó: costumbres, sílabas raídas, máscaras de luz deslumbradora. (Canto vii)

What becomes increasingly more apparent throughout this poem is the poet's thirst for knowledge about this displaced idiom:

qué idioma traes a la oreja apenas desarraigada de tu espuma andina? ... Qué dicen tus destellos acosados? Quién va rompiendo sílabas heladas, idiomas negros, estandartes de oro, bocas profundas, gritos sometidos, en tus delgadas aguas arteriales? (Canto viii)

In the early sequences of the *Canto general*, generally the poems are suffused with the silence created by the displacement of the originary culture and language. In 'Los hombres', for example, he observes:

Todo es silencio de agua y viento.

In Los conquistadores the subversion of the original language by the Spanish colonisers is accorded equal significance with the physical barbarity of the colonisation. Neruda highlights this through an evocation of the silence or diminished condition of the language which remained; *el silencio puro/un silencio estupefacto/el reino enmudecido/rumor/sordo* and through the brutality of the language which he employs to describe this colonisation of the idiom (*devorar/pudrir/amasar*).

However, Neruda's perception of language is never essentialist and does not preclude the significance and influences of other idioms. Although critical of the violence and barbarity of the Spanish colonisation of the Americas, like Martí and Guillén, Neruda does acknowledge the vital contribution of the peninsula to his linguistic formation. In 'A pesar de la ira' (Los conquistadores), Neruda insists upon the vital syncretism of his identity. He acknowledges that la luz vino a pesar de los puñales, and articulates a need to transcend the feelings of anger which engulf him when he contemplates the experience of colonisation:

... se derramó una luz sobre la tierra: número, nombre, línea y estructura.

> Páginas de agua, claro poderío de idiomas rumorosos, dulces gotas elaboradas como los racimos,

sílabas de platino en la ternura de unos aljofarados pechos duros, y una clásica boca de diamantes dio su fulgor nevado al territorio.

He makes reference to the skills of the Spanish cartographers and the technical expertise they brought to the region, but also, perhaps more significantly, alludes to the import of Spanish literary figures in his own development. Throughout he places particular emphasis on the unifying and cohesive nature of the inherited language.

In *Que despierte el leñador* he also affirms the influence of North America, in particular the language and example of its poets. Whitman, to whom I referred earlier, is signalled out for particular attention, but Neruda also alludes to the influence of Poe, Melville and Theodore Dreiser on his work. It would appear that the poet is enabled through the identification of a common heritage and language which predates the present reality, to assert and celebrate a commonality of experience and expression:

Bajo la noche de las praderas hace ya tiempo reposan sobre la piel del búfalo en tu grave silencio las sílabas, el canto de lo que fui antes de ser, de lo que fuimos.

This syncretism of language which Neruda embraces is enabled by the renewed sense of heredity and tradition which he has identified in the language itself. What becomes evident during the course of the *Canto general* is that the poet has advanced from the experiences of isolation and alienation apparent in his earlier verse, to a much more communal and collectively-defined project. This realisation that he is a constituent part of a much greater cycle of events and experiences enables him to redefine his own position within this cycle. He comes to view his poetic craft as part of an ongoing collective continuum, rather than an isolated, individualistic expression. His life is, he acknowledges, inextricably linked to the lives of others and to the natural world which he inhabits.

On Easter Island, off the coast of Chile, Neruda uncovers a coincidence of purpose between himself and the creators of the monolithic stone statues. In 'Los constructores de estatuas' he asserts the analogy between the craft of poetry and other trades and identifies the important legacy of artistic heritage. He begins the poem by attempting to decipher the identity of these unknown sculptors but comes to the realisation that their identity, like his own, is embodied in the work which the artist bequeaths to future generations. They, like the edifice at Macchu Picchu, come to represent the *deseo de eternidad* which Neruda has been seeking<sup>75</sup>:

Yo soy el constructor de las estatuas. No tengo nombre.

No tengo rostro. El mío se desvió hasta correr sobre la zarza y subir impregnando las piedras. Ellas tienen mi rostro petrificado, la grave soledad de mi patria, la piel de Oceanía.

Inextricably intermeshed with the natural world around them, the art of these ancestors is transformed into a link between past and present time, between past and present generations of artists and significantly between the lyrical self and his community:

... las estatuas son lo que fuimos, somos nosotros, nuestra frente que miraba las olas, nuestra materia a veces interrumpida, a veces continuada en la piedra semejante a nosotros.

The poet has identified a nexus of shared experiences and a common humanity which transcend temporal boundaries:

Miradlas hoy, tocad esta materia, estos labios tienen el mismo idioma silencioso que duerme

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Alain Sicard, El pensamiento poético de Pablo Neruda: op. cit., p. 246.

en nuestra muerte ...

This sense of heredity is also explored in the final sequence of the *Canto general* in 'La línea de madera':

Yo soy un carpintero ciego, sin manos.

He vivido

bajo las aguas, consumiendo frío, sin construir las cajas fragantes, las moradas que cedro a cedro elevan las grandezas.

As the poet writes, he attempts to excavate further links and associations:

... mi canto fue buscando hilos de bosque, secretas fibras, ceras delicadas, y fue cortando ramas, perfumando la soledad con labios de madera.

This nexus between the poet and other craftspeople is embedded in his relationship with the natural world. The natural world, as he suggests in 'América no invoco tu nombre en vano' has provided him with an inspirational canvas from which he can draw metaphorical and symbolic sustenance:

soy y estoy en la luz que me produce, vivo en la sombra que me determina, duermo y despierto en tu esencial aurora.

It is clear that nature and its particulars are an abiding presence in the *Canto general* and the constancy and permanence which the poet views in the natural world enable him to re-interpret his own particular role within a continuing cycle of events. 'Eternidad', from the *Canto general de Chile*, is inspired by the reinvigorated canvas of springtime, by the regenerative natural forces which the poet has repeatedly sought out in his own life. On this occasion he stresses his affinity with the cyclical process of nature and recognises that his own fate mirrors, and, is intertwined with, that of the natural world:

De dónde vengo sino de estas primerizas, azules materias que se enredan o se encrespan o se destituyen o se esparcen a gritos o se derraman sonámbulas, o se trepan y forman el baluarte del árbol, o se sumen y amarran la célula del cobre o saltan a la rama de los ríos, o sucumben en la raza enterrada del carbón o relucen en las tinieblas verdes de la uva?

The lyrical tone is now more self-assured and confident, as evidenced in the active use of verbal alternatives. Once again he likens the poetic craft to that of a river, forcing and shaping the earth through which it flows. In a similar fashion, Neruda is suggesting that the poet must mould the stubborn language and imagery available to him into something coherent and manageable:

En las noches duermo como los ríos, recorriendo algo incesantemente, rompiendo, adelantando a noche natatoria, levantando las horas hacia la luz, palpando las secretas imágenes que la cal ha desterrado, subiendo por el bronce hasta las cataratas recién disciplinadas, y toco en un camino de ríos lo que no distribuye sino la rosa nunca nacida, el hemisferio ahogado.

Conscious of the often difficult and challenging nature of this task, the poet is however reinvigorated by his growing significance as a national poet, and recognises that he has become the medium through which disparate elements of his national identity will be linked and ultimately deciphered. In 'Eternidad', Neruda recognises that he has a responsibility to harness the many disparate elements of this identity to create a revised model of self and nation: Pero yo soy el nimbo metálico, la argolla encadenada a espacio, a nubes, a terrenos que toca despeñadas y enmudecidas aguas, y vuelve desafiar la intemperie infinita.

In the natural world, Neruda has uncovered a positive elemental potential. He also comes to celebrate the symbiosis between this natural world and the people he encountered when the *Canto general* was composed. In *El fugitivo* (Poem II), Neruda recalls one man who sheltered him during this clandestine period, and focuses in particular on this man's innate respect for and knowledge of nature:

Su bondad conocía el fruto, la rama troncal y el trabajo de la poda que deja al árbol su desnuda forma de copa. A los caballos conversaba como a inmensos niños ... Él conocía cada rama, cada cicatriz de los árboles, y su antigua voz me enseñaba acariciando a los caballos.

It is a relationship and a gift which the poet both craves and celebrates. He contrasts this with the corruption and betrayal of González Videla, as, in what should have been his darkest hours, he was able to locate an elemental quality which would sustain and animate him into the future:

todo eso envolvía mi cuerpo como un nuevo traje terrestre, y habité la bruma de arriba, el alto pueblo de los pobres.

The final poem of *El fugitivo* is also highly significant in this regard. On this occasion, Neruda seeks out an elemental

component - corn - which is of central importance to indigenous mythology. According to traditional mythology, life is cyclical and this circularity is articulated through the reproductive forces viewed in the natural world. For Cardenal, as well as for Neruda, the eternality of the corn comes to represent the possibility of rebirth and change. This renaissance also comes to reiterate a link between past and present time:

El maíz te lleva mi canto, salido desde las raíces de mi pueblo, para nacer, para construir, para cantar, y para ser otra vez semilla más numerosa en la tormenta.

The constancy of the natural world is also explored in *El gran* océano. The sea is an enduring presence in Neruda's poetry and is indicative of an abiding fascination on his part with its power and apparent ruthlessness. This sequence of poems examines a variety of subjects related to the sea and marine life. In the opening poem, 'El gran océano', the sea is ultimately transformed into a metaphor for life itself. For Neruda, the waves crashing onto the shore symbolise the transience of human life and in them he identifies a symbol of his own mortality. The totality of the sea comes to represent *la totalidad abrasadora* of death, to which he refers in *Alturas de Macchu Picchu:* 

Del brazo sumergido que levanta una gota no queda sino un beso de la sal. De los cuerpos del hombre en tus orillas una húmeda fragancia de flor mojada permanece. Tu energía parece resbalar sin ser gastada, parece resbalar a su reposo.

Yet in the individual demise of each wave the poet also uncovers a more fundamental regenerative potential:

La ola que desprendes, arco de identidad, pluma estrellada, cuando se despeñó fue sólo espuma, y regresó a nacer sin consumirse.

Toda tu fuerza vuelve a ser origen.

The circularity of human life, cultural and historical identity, so central to Cardenal's vision also, is located by Neruda in the constancy and permanence of the sea. Life, death and rebirth become inextricably linked in the poet's mind. In 'La ola' Neruda also articulates this further recuperative potential identified by him in the sea:

La ola viene del fondo, con raíces hijas del firmamento sumergido. ... Viene como una flor desde la tierra cuando avanzó con decidido aroma hasta la magnitud de la magnolia, pero esta flor del fondo que ha estallado trae toda la luz que fue abolida, trae todas las ramas que no ardieron y todo el manantial de la blancura.

The language of these poems oozes vitality and potential, in the abundant references to rebirth, regeneration and repetition. Even the shape of the poems, which on occasions mirror the undulation of the waves, suggest an immensity and perpetuity desired by the poet.

Throughout *El gran océano* Neruda conveys the interconnectedness of the individual wave to the expanse of the sea. This is transformed by the poet into a metaphor for his own life. As he traces the rise and demise of the wave and its resubmersion into the anonymity of the sea, his own life and lyrical process are re-interpreted. The circularity and the collectivity he identifies in the nature world, have enabled him to view his own

life from a different perspective. Although separate from society and the community, he has come to recognise the fundamental links which bind him to this community. The poet, like the wave, is individual and unique, but is nevertheless enmeshed with the community which has shaped him:

es la unidad del mar que se construye: la columna del mar que se levanta: todos sus nacimientos y derrotas.

Therefore, intermeshed with this reconsideration of the temporal is a re-alliance of the poet and his community. His identification with, and, loyalty towards the communities and individuals who shielded him, enable Neruda to escape the exclusive concerns of self. Thus, in much the same fashion as Whitman remarked - *I am large ... I contain multitudes* - Neruda too comes to substitute the individual lyrical voice for a collective persona:

Soy pueblo, pueblo innumerable.

This transformation of the lyrical voice is also articulated quite evocatively by Neruda in the penultimate poem of *El fugitivo*:

No soy una campana de tan lejos, ni un cristal enterrado tan profundo que tú no puedes descifrar, soy sólo pueblo ...

Neruda's re-immersion into society is harnessed, I believe, like that of Guillén, to the poet's burgeoning involvement in politics. Renewed by a growing understanding of the commonality of human experiences, Neruda's focus shifts quite dramatically from the isolationist and solitary perspective of both *Residencia en la tierra*, to a much more participative, collective perspective. In reality, the individual lyrical journeys undertaken by these three poets are sustained by a growing awareness of their collective responsibilities. For Guillén, Neruda and Cardenal, a retrieval of self is inextricably intermeshed with the reconciliation of public and private voices.

In Los ríos de canto, in his poems dedicated to some fellow poets, Neruda confirms this transition in his lyrical perspective. He clearly admonishes himself for his previous isolation and for what he now views as his acquiescence to the social elite. This he recognises was brought about by his unwillingness, or inability to comment on everyday concerns, and by his preference for matters aesthetic. Paradoxically he admits, this is what he was lauded for:

Cuando yo escribía versos de amor, que me brotaban por todas partes, y me moría de tristeza, errante, abandonado, royendo el alfabeto, me decían: '¡Qué grande eres, oh Teócrito!'

When his focus shifted, he was shunned and condemned by those who had formerly praised him. Paradoxically, for the poet, this rejection was transformed into an enriching and positive experience:

Pero yo había conquistado la alegría.

The sense of elation and incipient change, located and propelled by his re-engagement with the social, is echoed in the language he employs in the first poem in *Los ríos del canto* dedicated to the poet Miguel Otero Silva:

Y salgo de repente a la ventana. Es un cuadrado de transparencia, es pura la distancia de hierbas y peñascos, y así voy trabajando entre las cosas que amo: olas, piedras, avispas, con una embriagadora felicidad marina.

For the poet, the moment of epiphany occurs when he witnesses a young girl reciting one of Miguel Otero Silva's poems to striking miners. The apparent redemptive potential of Otero's poetry proves crucial for Neruda as he asserts his own transition: Yo no soy Teócrito: tomé a la vida, me puse frente a ella, la besé hasta vencerla, y luego me fui por los callejones de las minas a ver cómo vivían otros hombres.

The 'art for art's sake' mentality is no longer sufficient. This is a concern to which Neruda returns on many occasions. In *La arena traicionada*, he continues this critique of fellow poets who embrace such exclusionary poetics. In 'Los poetas celestes' he denounces the poetry and evasive attitude of some writers towards the socio-historical reality around them. Their slavish obsession with convention - the *falsos brujos* and *cadáveres de la moda* - conflicts sharply with Neruda's new committed position. Some years later, in *Odas elementales* (1954) Neruda would return again to this theme and in 'El hombre invisible' would highlight what he believed was the excessive subjectivity and irrelevance of much classical verse:

nadie sufre, nadie ama, sólo mi pobre hermano el poeta ... nadie llora de hambre o de ira, nadie sufre en sus versos porque no puede pagar el alquiler, a nadie en poesía echan a la calle con camas y con sillas.

The most obvious corollary to this is the more public and more politicised poetics which emerge during the course of the *Canto general*. We recall how in 'Amor América', the opening poem of the entire collection, Neruda committed himself to a new kind of poetry, distinct from the introspective nature of the *Residencia*, when he asserted *Yo estoy aquí para contar la historia*. In the final sequence of the *Canto general*, he traces the beginning of this personal and lyrical transition to his experiences during the Spanish Civil War:

El firme amor, España, me diste con tus dones. Vino a mí la ternura que esperaba y me acompaña la que lleva el beso más profundo a mi boca.

Subsequent to the Spanish Civil War, Neruda had become increasingly more involved in the internal politics of Chile and was finally elected to the Senate as a member of the Communist party in 1945. Angry and disillusioned by the policy betrayals of the new president Gabriel González Videla, for whom he had campaigned, Neruda publicly criticised the new president both in the Senate and in a Caracas newspaper. In his final address to the Senate on January 6th, 1948, Neruda asserted:

Asumo la responsabilidad de mis palabras, pero no hay duda de que la claridad, la verdad con que han sido dichas, contienen el espíritu militante del grande, del heroico partido de Recabarren.<sup>76</sup>

His virulent criticism of the president and his reaffirmation of the ideals of Recabarren, founder of the Chilean Communist Party, would lead to a warrant being issued for his arrest. This prompted Neruda to go into hiding for almost two years, between 1948-9, during which time he composed the *Canto general*. Ultimately, it would be his experiences underground which would radicalise him, and alter irrevocably his perceptions of poetry and of the poet. However, I believe the poet's increasing sense of dissatisfaction with conventional lyrical content is underwritten by the project outlined by him at the beginning of the *Canto general*. The desire to interrogate and ultimately redefine the lyrical process and his own lyrical voice is inextricably linked to a need expressed by him at the outset to decipher the *claves* and unravel the *silencio* of his colonised identity.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Para nacer he nacido: op. cit., pp. 338-9.

We have noted an obvious progression from the disorientation and isolation of his early poetry, from his search for meaning and significance, to this moment of illumination. In 'El poeta' the poet depicted a painful image of his earlier life. He describes an individual beset with jealousy and bitterness, *aislado*, *escondiendo*, existing in an almost death-in-life situation, for whom death was an imposing and constant threat:

Antes anduve por la vida, en medio de un amor doloroso: antes retuve una pequeña página de cuarzo clavándome los ojos en la vida.

This poem announces a change of direction. The transition is evident in the repeated use of preterite tenses, which suggest a life to which he will no longer return. In the introductory poem of *La arena traicionada* Neruda assesses the possibilities available to him. It is conceivable, he suggests, that some writers and artists may be able to shy away from the more unpleasant aspects of history, and to proceed as though oblivious to certain realities. This is a course Neruda cannot take. Thus, he asserts his commitment to addressing the totality of experience:

Tal vez, pero mi plato es otro, mi alimento es distinto: mis ojos no vinieron a morder olvido: mis labios se abren sobre todo el tiempo, y todo el tiempo, no sólo una parte del tiempo ha gastado mis manos.

He is anxious to stress the link between the lessons of history and the contemporary experiences of Latin America. For him, it is not a fleeting lesson from history, but rather a formative, communal experience *para conocer caminando*. The poet places particular emphasis on enunciating the unspoken, and in sharing fully in the pain of others:

Por eso te hablaré de estos dolores que quisiera apartar, te obligaré a vivir una vez más entre sus quemaduras ... Neruda opts to embrace life itself and, to include in the poetic, narrative themes and experiences which had hitherto been excluded. Consequently, he embarks on a critique of the region's entire political system; its dictators, its ambassadors, its politicians, legislators, lawyers and the various multinationals which are inextricably bound up with it. In 'Los muertos de la Plaza' and 'Las masacres' he details the barbarity of specific historical events, yet refuses to indulge in a sentimental lament for the dead:

Yo no vengo a llorar aquí donde cayeron: vengo a vosotros, acudo a los que viven.

In this recovery of history, in his naming of these hitherto anonymous people, Neruda re-appropriates the aesthetic text for each and everyone. Thus, the victims are transformed from faceless objects of pity, into symbols of hope and renaissance:

pero ellos saldrán de la tierra a cobrar la sangre caída en la resurrección del pueblo.

Lyrical activity has been transformed from a solitary exercise defined by introspection and concern with self, to one imbedded in the collective experiences of his fellow man. Individual concerns have been enriched by the shared humanity witnessed during his time amongst the community. In 'Serán nombrados' (*Coral de año nuevo para la patria en tinieblas*) the poet asserts the validity of this new, committed verse. As if his left hand were reproaching his right, Neruda articulates the internal debate between committed and non-committed verse.<sup>77</sup> At this point he is acutely conscious of the attendant political responsibilities of his role:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> There are many similarities between this poem by Neruda and two poems by the Nicaraguan poet Pablo Antonio Cuadra; 'Mis dos pies' (1934-6) and 'Pablo y Antonio' (1949-56) which are worth exploring. *Obra poética completa* (Costa Rica: Libro Libre, 1986/1984), *Vols. I & III* respectively.

No me entregaste, patria, el dulce privilegio de nombrarte sólo en tus alhelíes y tu espuma, no me diste palabras, patria, para llamarte sólo con nombres de oro, de polen, de fragancia.

The lost idiom which he sought to recuperate in the early sequences of the *Canto general* has now been located in this convergence with nation and with the totality of history:

me diste con la leche y la carne las sílabas que nombrarán también los pálidos gusanos que viajan en tu vientre, los que acosan tu sangre saqueándote la vida.

In reality, Neruda feels compelled to enunciate and to condemn and to engage fully with the socio-political reality. Conscious that he is now unable to remain separated from this reality, he embarks on a critique of those who have betrayed and cheated the inhabitants of the region. The 'gusanos' to whom he refers in 'Seran nombrados' are political figures like González Videla, whom he dehumanises repeatedly: *perro mentiroso/piojo maligno*.

This chronicle of betrayal is even more apparent in *La arena traicionada*. In a continued shift of lyrical perspective, Neruda oscillates in *La arena traicionada* between criticism of those who have exploited others in Latin America and a celebration of the anonymous victims. 'La Standard Oil Co.', 'La Anaconda Mining Co.' and 'La United Fruit Co.' are probably his most celebrated poems in this regard. In these poems he unravels the links between business and political power in Latin America and is bitterly critical of this self-serving relationship of manipulation and greed. In a parody of the biblical tale of creation, Neruda catalogues the economic exploitation of Central America and its citizens in 'La United Fruit Co.'. The ensuing socio-economic deprivation is reflected in the dehumanisation of the workers. They are stripped of their identity and reduced to a mere statistic, of even less value than the product they are exporting:

un cuerpo rueda, una cosa sin nombre, un número caído, un racimo de fruta muerta derramada en el pudridero.

The individual portraits are in many cases simple caricatures; the obese, manipulative bosses, the compliant and evil dictators and the defenceless workers. Neruda's sympathies clearly lie with the exploited and marginalised sections of society. In 'Las tierras y los hombres' his compassion for their suffering and alienation is clearly apparent:

Yo entré en las casas profundas, como cuevas de ratas ... Me atravesaron los dolores de mi pueblo, se me enredaron como alambrados en el alma: me crisparon el corazón.

Ultimately, Neruda sacrifices his individual concerns for the collective needs of the *pueblo*. He rehabilitates anonymous victims by merging them with the collective identity:

no eran nadie, eran todos los hombres, no tenían rostro, eran pueblo ...

He continues to admonish himself for his previous preoccupation with the aesthetic, to the exclusion of this communal experience:

llamé a los rostros impasibles que antes adoré como estrellas y me mostraron su vacío.

Clearly Neruda's recovery of self is tied to a recovery of history. He has come to recognise that any renovation of the lyrical voice is inextricably linked to an explication of his historical condition. He began this chronicle in the uninhabited and quasi-edenic landscape of *La lámpara en la tierra* but swiftly moved to that of the colonisation of America (*Los conquistadores*) and the continent's subsequent independence (*Los libertadores*). His perspective is never essentialist, neither wholly anti-Spanish nor anti-American in its aims, as evidenced by the sentiments of 'A pesar de la ira', but Neruda does trace the barbarity and destructiveness of the colonisers and the effects of these intrusions on the indigenous inhabitants and cultures of the Americas in some detail.<sup>78</sup>

In Los conquistadores, Neruda outlines the trail of barbarity and wanton destruction perpetrated by these invaders. The vulnerability and helplessness of the native population at the moment of colonisation, is clearly emphasised in the first two poems by a simple, but effective, repetition of verbs of violence in the passive, or in those which suggests passivity:

Fueron amarrados y heridos, fueron quemados y abrasados, fueron mordidos y enterrados. ('Vienen por las islas')

Cuba, mi amor, te amararron al potro, te cortaron la cara, te apartaron las piernas de oro pálido, te rompieron el sexo de granada, te atravesaron con cuchillos, te dividieron, te quemaron. ('Ahora es Cuba')

As in 'La guerra' and 'Los ríos acuden', the natural landscape is humanised and compared to a violated and mutilated woman. The Spanish colonisers are depicted as brutal and unrelenting in their methods, and the poet's anger at this treachery is palpable. As I have suggested earlier, the after-effects are conveyed in both poems through Neruda's insistence on the silence and vacuum

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Robert Pring-Mill notes that 'A pesar de la ira' was in fact added by Neruda as an addendum to *Los conquistadores* at the request of some Mexican friends who suggested that he had presented an unfair appraisal of the Spanish contribution to Latin American culture, *A Poet for all Seasons: op. cit.*, p. 32.

which remained in their wake; *vacío/solas/soledad/silencio*. The indigenous people are stripped of their humanity and all that is left are their skeletal remains:

... los huesitos de tus hijos se disputaron los cangrejos. ('Ahora es Cuba')

Perhaps one of the most poignant effects of colonisation suggested by Neruda is the unfamiliarity of the language and religion imposed by the colonisers. Even at the moment of death, the incomprehension of the native people is clearly apparent:

Los hijos de la arcilla vieron rota su sonrisa, golpeada su frágil estatura de venados, y aun en la muerte no entendían.

The incomprehension and sense of estrangement experienced by the indigenous people, which Neruda refers to in 'Vienen por las islas', with respect to these newly imposed languages, cultures and traditions, is articulated on other occasions by him throughout the *Canto general*, but is particularly evident in *Los conquistadores* and *Los libertadores*. In 'Duerme un soldado' the conquistador is described as an *extraño nacido del océano*. In 'Las agonías' for example:

Las visitas de otro planeta, sudadas y barbudas, iban a hacer la reverencia.

El capellán Valverde, corazón traidor, chacal podrido, adelanta un extraño objeto, un trozo de cesto, un fruto tal vez de aquel planeta de donde vienen los caballos. Atahualpa lo toma. No conoce de qué se trata: no brilla, no suena,

## y lo deja caer sonriendo.

As in *Coral de año nuevo para la patria en tinieblas* - when González Videla and his cronies are referred to as *gusanos*, *perros* and *insectos* - throughout *Los conquistadores*, Neruda stresses the animality of the Spanish colonisers to expose their covetous spirits and barbaric methods. In 'Duerme un soldado' their presence is compared to *una invasión de insectos*. Cortés lacks humanity: *no tiene pueblo, es rayo frío/corazón muerto en la armadura*. Alvaredo is also dehumanised and depicted *con garras*, while Balboa's equivalence of dogs and Indians is not lost on Neruda. Guatemala is devoured *por el hocico de los tigres* and Peru's colonisers carry with them:

cruces con ganchos de reptil, cruces salpicadas de pústulas, cruces como piernas de araña, sombrías cruces cazadoras.

The indigenous people are invariably described as *sorprendidos* or *palpitantes* and yet Neruda, in articulating the plight of his *hermanos sorprendidos*, also identifies a common link between the indigenous people and the foot-soldiers of Cortés, recognising their lowly position in Spanish society:

hijos del desamparo castellano, conocedores del hambre en invierno y de los piojos en los mesones. ('Llegan al mar de México')

Just as Guillén was able to transcend issues of ethnicity in order to address problems pertaining to economic discrimination, similarly Neruda's class consciousness unravels other aspects of the colonialist reality. Throughout *Los conquistadores*, Neruda repeatedly exposes the avarice and superficiality which underpinned the Spanish project:

Cortés recibe una paloma, recibe un faisán, una cítara de los músicos del monarca, pero quiere la cámara de oro, quiere otro paso, y todo cae en las arcas de los voraces. ('Cortés')

The church comes in for particular criticism, for the role it played in the ensuing cultural genocide:

El obispo levantó el brazo, quemó en la plaza los libros en nombre de su Dios pequeño haciendo humo las viejas hojas gastadas por el tiempo oscuro. ('Un obispo')

In Los conquistadores and Los libertadores the emphasis is always on the effects of this displacement of the originary expression, culture and beliefs of the Americas. Throughout, Neruda employs quite conventional antithetical images of light and darkness, of sterility and fecundity, of silence and noise to convey the devastating effects of colonisation on the autochthonous culture and inhabitants of the Americas and the subsequent recovery of this indigenous culture. The process of colonisation and the 'conquistadores' are always shrouded in half-light or darkness, while the liberators are persistently associated with light and colour. For example, in 'Cita de cuervos', the poet makes repeated references to the lack of light; *apenas alumbrada, en tinieblas, las oscuras paredes,* to highlight the nefarious activities of the colonisers. The demise of Cuauhtémoc is depicted in a similar way, by the suggestion of a depletion of light:

Toda la sombra preparaba sombra. Era la tierra una oscura cocina, piedra y caldera, vapor negro, muro sin nombre, pesadumbre que te llamaba desde los nocturnos metales de tu patria. ('Cuauhtémoc') Similarly, Valdivia's assault on Lautaro is couched in a suppression of colour and light; sus propios ojos aplastados/en la noche sombría. Conversely, Lautaro's life is associated with luz, la aurora and la primavera. The presence of San Martín, also articulated by means of the diurnal cycle, is profoundly regenerative:

Te galopamos, San Martín, salimos amaneciendo a recorrer tu cuerpo, respiramos hectáreas de tu sombra, hacemos fuego sobre tu estatura. ('San Martín')

The recuperation of language is also articulated through an interconnectedness identified between man and nature. In 'América insurrecta' the recovery of linguistic independence is conveyed as follows:

Nuestra tierra, ancha tierra, soledades, se pobló de rumores, brazos, bocas. Una callada sílaba iba ardiendo, congregando la rosa clandestina, hasta que las praderas trepidaron cubiertas de metales y galopes.

The devastating silence of the opening poem has been replaced by noise and voices as Neruda suggests that political liberation is inherently linked to the recuperation of an autonomous cultural and linguistic identity. Throughout 'Intermedio', for example, Neruda counterpoints a series of contrary images of light and darkness or half-light - *sombra sumergida/crepúsculo/apenas alumbrado* - as well as indicators of silence and noise - *hiedras silenciosas* - to articulate the detrimental effects of this intrusion on the linguistic and cultural landscapes of America:

Se oscureció la extensión matutina, trajes y telarañas propagaron la oscuridad, la tentación, el fuego del diablo en las habitaciones. Una vela alumbró la vasta América llena de ventisqueros y panales, y por siglos al hombre habló en voz baja, tosió trotando por las callejuelas, se persignó persiguiendo centavos.

As he chronicles the savagery of Alvaredo, Cortés and Pizarro among others, and their sustained subversion of this landscape, Neruda again identifies a residual resistance in nature. The roles of vanquished and vanquishers are reversed as the natural world appears to align itself with the indigenous people.<sup>79</sup> Nature and the indigenous people become indistinguishable and the newcomers, viewed as intruders into this idyll, are unable to withstand the assault of nature:

La nieve araucana quemó como una hoguera de blancura el paso de los invasores. Caían de frío los dedos, las manos, los pies de Almagro y las garras que devoraron y sepultaron monarquías eran en la nieve un punto de carne helada, eran silencio.

It is this link between man and nature which Neruda views as the key to future change. Again, it is a rather conventional technique in political poetry, also used extensively by Cardenal, in which the roots of future struggles are metaphorically sourced in elemental forces or in the land itself. Indigenous man is repeatedly viewed as possessing an unspoken affinity with the natural world:

eran piedra y árbol raíces

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> There are interesting parallels between 'La tierra combatiente' and Pablo Antonio Cuadra's 'Poema del momento extranjero en la selva', which I will examine in greater detail in Chapter Four, in particular in the metamorphosis of the natural world into a combative and defensive agent of the people.

de los breñales sacudidos, hojas con forma de lanza, cabezas de metal guerrero ...

It is a technique which Neruda employs to great effect throughout *Los libertadores*. The liberators and activists of more recent times - Toqui Caupolicán, Arauco, Lautaro, Tupac Amaru, Martí, Sandino, Toussaint L'Ouverture - are persistently identified with the constancy and potential of elemental forces. For example, Arauco is described in the following way:

Arauco fue un útero frío, hecho de heridas, machacado por el ultraje, concebido entre las ásperas espinas, arañado en los ventisqueros, protegido por las serpientes.

Similarly, Toqui Caupolicán:

es un rostro del bosque, un mascarón de acacias arrasadas, una figura rota por la lluvia, una cabeza con enredaderas.

As Alain Sicard observes:

Todos portan símbolos del mundo natural. El agua, la tierra, la arena, el mineral les confieren, tanto como esas virtudes guerreras o políticas que los caracterizan, el carácter invencible.<sup>80</sup>

As a result their renaissance and, with it Neruda's hopes for change, are harnessed to the cyclical inevitability of the natural forces. Thus, the defeat of Caupolicán can be viewed by Neruda in a much more positive fashion:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> El pensamiento poético de Pablo Neruda: op. cit., p. 294.

La sangre quemante caía de silencio en silencio, abajo, hacia donde está la semilla esperando la primavera.

Más honda caía esta sangre.

Hacia las raíces caía.

Hacia los muertos caía.

Hacia los que iban a nacer. ('El empalado')

The renaissance of Tupac Amaru is also articulated through a perceived convergence of nature and man:

Tupac Amaru, sol vencido. Desde tu gloria desgarrada sube como el sol en el mar una luz desaparecida. ... Y Tupac es una semilla, ... se guarda en el surco, ... Y Tupac germina en la tierra. ('Tupac Amaru')

Sandino and Martí's renaissances are also located in the constancy of the natural world. Both are in effect subsumed by the land as their individual efforts converge with those of the collective:

Sandino con sus guerrilleros, como un espectro de la selva, era un árbol que se enroscaba o una tortuga que dormía o un río que se deslizaba. ('Sandino')

Está en el fondo circular del aire, está en el centro azul del territorio, y reluce como una gota de agua su dormida pureza de semilla. ('Martí') In the introductory poem to *Los libertadores*, the tree acts as a regenerative symbol, as a positive force which negates the terror perpetrated by the conquistadores:

Este es el árbol de los libres. El árbol tierra, el árbol nube, el árbol pan, el árbol flecha, el árbol puño, el árbol fuego.

Here too we witness a gradual assimilation of *árbol* and *pueblo* as man and nature are perceived as indistinguishable:

sus labios eran las hojas del inmenso árbol repartido.

The tree, and, ultimately the natural world, are transformed into cohesive symbols of collectivity through which the poet identifies individual struggles and suffering and which embody his own aspirations for change in Latin America. Thus, nature acts as an enabling nexus with his origins, as a transgenerational link between past and present, reinforcing the sense of heredity which had been displaced by colonialism:

## el árbol

nutrido por muertos desnudos, muertos azotados y heridos, muertos de rostros imposibles ...

The circularity identified in the natural cycle enables this poet to link past and present experiences of injustice and poverty and to assert the commonality of Latin America's experiences and history. In addition, the collectivity identified in the natural world, in the coalescence of elemental forces, also enhances the poet's own convergence with his community. This revised sense of self enables Neruda to retrieve a positionality within an ongoing continuum, which ultimately is mirrored in the natural world, as in 'América, no invoco tu nombre en vano': soy y estoy en la luz que me produce, vivo en la sombra que me determina, duermo y despierto en tu esencial aurora: dulce como las uvas, y terrible, conductor del azúcar y el castigo, empapado en esperma de tu especie, amamantado en sangre de tu herencia.

This renewed sense of heredity and belonging which Neruda has sought out is articulated through an increasing identification with the collective struggles of all Americans:

Somos la misma tierra, el mismo pueblo perseguido, la misma lucha ciñe la cintura de nuestra América. ('Llegará el día')

At the beginning of 1949, enriched after almost a year in hiding, Neruda reaffirms his resolve to immerse himself fully in the concerns of the community. In 'Yo no sufrí' (*Coral de año nuevo para la patria en tinieblas*), he again articulates this reconvergence of the lyrical self with the communal:

Yo no sufrí. Yo sufro sólo los sufrimientos de mi pueblo. Yo vivo adentro, adentro de mi patria, célula de su infinita y abrasada sangre. No tengo tiempo para mis dolores. Nada me hace sufrir sino estas vidas que a mí me dieron su confianza pura ...

The poet is sustained by the shared humanity and spirit of fraternity exhibited even amidst the poverty and hardship of these people's lives. The solitude and introspection of his earlier verse have been irrevocably displaced, and with them other superficial concerns with wealth and notoriety. The simple flowers given to him by his hosts prove to be of more value and significance than the rich reserves of gold normally exploited in these mountains:

Flores de Punitaqui, arterias, vidas, junto a mi cama, en la noche, vuestro aroma se levanta y me guía por los más subterráneos corredores del duelo, por la altura picada, por la nieve, y aun por las raíces donde sólo las lágrimas alcanzan. ('Las flores de Punitaqui')

Ultimately he has uncovered the meaning and significance which he was unable to locate in his life up to this:

... hallé por fin la fundación perdida, la remota ciudad de la ternura.

The self has been transformed and subsumed into an identity chiefly shaped by the collective and the subjective lyrical task is repeatedly mirrored in the collective projects of all artisans:

Cada recorte es una mano, cada costura es una vida, en ella vive la unidad de las vidas forestales, una cadena de ojos y caballos. ('Talabartería')

His poetry is thus transformed into a tapestry depicting the discrete artistic and historical components of Chile:

Y allí el telar hilo a hilo, buscando reconstuyó la flor, subió la pluma a su imperio escarlata, entrejiendo azules y azafranes, la madeja del fuego y su amarillo poderío, la estirpe del relámpago violeta, el verde enarenado del lagarto. Manos del pueblo mío en los telares, manos pobres que tejen, uno a uno, los plumajes de estrella que faltaron a tu piel, Patria de color oscuro ... ('Telares')

Defined by this interconnected web of influences exhibited in both the natural cycle and in collective human behaviour, the poet assumes the challenges of a more public poetics:

Escribo para el pueblo, aunque no pueda leer mi poesía con sus ojos rurales. Vendrá el instante en que una línea, el aire que removió mi vida, llegará a sus orejas, y entonces el labriego levantará los ojos, el minero sonreirá rompiendo piedras, el palanquero se limpiará la frente, el pescador verá mejor el brillo de un pez que palpitando le quemará las manos, el mecánico, limpio, recién lavado, lleno de aroma de jabón mirará mis poemas, y ellos dirán tal vez: 'Fue un camarada'. ('La gran alegría')

This renewed sense of identification, inspired by an essential humanism will sustain the poet and nurture his re-engagement with society.

Yo soy, the final sequence of *Canto general* is, in essence, a summary of the poet's life and work. In it he evokes many memories and images from his life, beginning in the rural idyll of his childhood, through his first experiences in the city as a student, and from there to his time in Asia. All these experiences appear to have had a defining and influential effect on his work. In 'Compañeros de viaje' again he celebrates the redemptive nature of the collective:

Salí a vivir: crecí y endurecido fui por los callejones miserables, sin compasión, cantando en las fronteras del delirio. Los muros se llenaron de rostros: ... Con ellos fui: sólo en su coro mi voz reconoció las soledades donde nació.

In 'La línea de madera' he reasserts his integral links with other artisans and with the earth:

Amé cada materia, cada gota de púrpura o metal, agua y espiga y entré en espesas capas resguardadas por espacio y arena temblorosa, hasta cantar con boca destruida, como un muerto, en las uvas de la tierra.

The final poem of the *Canto general* embodies the dramatic transition in the lyrical voice which has taken place. It also articulates many of the enabling metaphors I have examined throughout this chapter, which the poet has employed to convey this radical transformation of self and poetics:

Entre los seres, como el aire vivo, y de la soledad acorralada algo a la multitud de los combates, libre porque en mi mano va tu mano, conquistando alegrías indomables.

Y nacerá de nuevo esta palabra, tal vez en otro tiempo sin dolores, sin las impuras hebras que adhirieron negras vegetaciones en mi canto, y otra vez en la altura estará ardiendo mi corazón quemante y estrellado.

This brings us to the end of the *Canto general* which was completed on February 5, 1949, a few months short of the poet's 45th birthday. Although it would not be published in its entirety until 1950, the magnitude and significance of the *Canto general* would make the collection perhaps the most significant project ever undertaken by Neruda.<sup>81</sup> In *Confieso que he vivido*, the poet recalls the impact of this year in exile:

Hay un viejo tema de la poesía folklórica que se repite en todos nuestros países. Se trata de 'el cuerpo repartido'. El cantor popular supone que tiene sus pies en una parte, sus riñones en otra, y describe todo su organismo que ha dejado esparcido por campos y ciudades. Así me sentí yo en aquellos días.<sup>82</sup>

In many ways the *Canto general* is quite a poignant account of this period in Neruda's life, as the threat of exile looms. However, what we also observe is a complete transformation of the lyrical voice, with a sublimation of the poet's solitary voice to a more collective idiom that is informed by the commonality of experiences and feelings witnessed during his time in hiding.

From the essentially solitary and introspective posture of his earlier poetry, we have witnessed a genuine movement on the part of this poet towards a new, more politicised kind of lyric, which is simultaneously articulatory and communicative, denunciatory and redemptive.

Nature is always present and the circularity and regenerative qualities viewed in the natural world, become an enabling metaphor for the re-alliance of this poet with his community. In 'Infancia y poesía', a lecture given by Neruda in 1954, the poet articulated this attachment to the tellurian:

Para saber y contar y contar para saber ... tengo que empezar así esta historia de aguas, plantas, bosques, pájaros, pueblos, porque es eso la poesía, por lo menos mi poesía.<sup>83</sup>

Of the rural landscape of his childhood he recalled:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> Robert Pring-Mill has outlined the clandestine preparation and subsequent publication of the *Canto general* in some detail in *A Poet for all Seasons: op. cit.*, pp. 23-43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>82</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 245.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>83</sup> Obras completas I: op. cit., p. 25.

La naturaleza allí me daba una especie de embriaguez.<sup>84</sup>

The particulars of the flora and fauna, the land and seascapes of his native Chile underpin the entire *Canto general*.

However, Neruda's project is not a wholly imaginative or lyrical creation, but one which is also informed by the narrative of history. This imbues his verse with a certain relevance and a sense of heredity and continuity. The realism and with constancy of the elemental forces suggest to Neruda that his own life is not an isolated subjective exercise, but rather one which is and nurtured by a transgenerational continuum. defined Therefore, this transformation of the lyrical self is inherently linked to a transformation of perceptions of nationhood and ethnicity. By immersing himself in the history, language and culture of the peoples of the region, Neruda suggests that his own identity is ultimately shaped and defined by this collective history. This convergence of public and private idioms underpins and sustains the entire collection.

Neruda's *ars poetica* in the *Canto general* centres on a radical redefinition of his artistic direction. The new vision he uncovers is bound together by several overlapping themes and symbolic threads, such as those already suggested - a synthesis of individual and collective concerns, a recovery of historical and political particulars coupled with a celebration of the solidarity and humanity shown him by the community of men and women who sheltered him during his clandestine life.

Ultimately, what we view in the *Canto general* is a revision of the conventional expectations of poet and poetry, wherein the teleology of both the poet and poetry are radicalised. People and places normally excluded from the aesthetic text are rehabilitated in the poetry of Neruda as he breathes life into these hitherto anonymous individuals. This ineluctable need on his part to record and to chronicle the everyday remains visible through much of his

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, p. 26.

later verse as well. As a national poet, Neruda has come to recognise the need to assume this mantle of spokesman for the more marginalised sections of society. As Emir Rodríguez Monegal suggests of Neruda in the *Canto general:* 

... está en todas partes al mismo tiempo porque no es ya un hombre, ni un poeta, sino una voz que viene desde el fondo de los tiempos y que canta hoy, vocalizando todas las voces mudas del Nuevo Mundo.<sup>85</sup>

So the 'cuerpo repartido' of the popular poet has been restructured and transformed. In the unravelling of his artistic testament, one of the central issues has been that of the coalescence of the aesthetic and the political. Such a linking of ideological and cultural issues, such a synthesis of apparently contrary perspectives, remained vital to Neruda's redefinition of identity:

Yo no voy a morirme. Salgo ahora, en este día lleno de volcanes hacia la multitud, hacia la vida. ('Voy a vivir')

Throughout the *Canto general* we have witnessed Neruda's progress and evolution from despair, to a renewed sense of optimism and hope sourced in the transcendent power of the collective. In common with Guillén and Cardenal, Neruda has been concerned with the retrieval of originary models of language, culture and meaning which have been displaced by the colonial experience. By re-inscribing this narrative of history, language, people and place, Neruda has reaffirmed the positionality of these displaced ex-centric models. The *Canto general* charts a crucial phase in this journey of redefinition and reconstruction undertaken by Neruda.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> Emir Rodríguez Monegal, 'El sistema del poeta', *Pablo Neruda: op. cit.*, p. 80.

### **CHAPTER FOUR**

### Ernesto Cardenal - Reclaiming Origins

Homenaje a los indios americanos was originally published in 1969 and is, in my view, Ernesto Cardenal's most substantial collection of poems.<sup>1</sup> It is informed primarily by the poet's investigations into indigenous America, in particular Mayan culture and cosmology but also by his research into Náhuatl and Inca cultures as well as those of the indigenous peoples of North America. The project is prompted by what could be described as a 'nostalgia for origins'.<sup>2</sup> In common with Neruda and Guillén, Cardenal is also engaged in a search for authenticity and is concerned with the recovery of exemplary models from a largely unspoken or suppressed historical and cultural heritage. The nature and purpose of the archetypal models which he retrieves are worthy of sustained examination as they provide valuable insight into the manner in which Cardenal's discourse of postcoloniality differs from those articulated by Guillén and Neruda.

Many of the poems in *Homenaje a los indios americanos* are populated by originary, quasi-mythological figures who serve to highlight the stark contrasts detected by the poet between traditional and contemporary society. One critic suggests that Cardenal's engagement with this past tradition is driven by an overwhelming desire to create 'an inspiring ethical identity'.<sup>3</sup> The poet was almost certainly influenced in this regard by the tremendous sense of personal disillusionment which had engulfed him and by what he viewed as a decline in the values of modern society. In the poet's view, this degradation was apparent, not only in the increasingly materialistic and commercial nature of society, but also in the simultaneous decline in spirituality in contemporary life. Consequently, prompted by a desire to counter this more degenerative contemporary model, Cardenal sought to resuscitate models of society and behaviour which are located, in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Homenaje a los indios americanos (Buenos Aires: Carlos Lohlé, 1974)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Harold Bloom, A Map of Misreading: op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Stephen F. White, *Modern Nicaraguan Poetry - Dialogues with France and the US* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1993), p. 175.

the main, in the remote historical period of indigenous, pre-Conquest America. Like the other two poets, clearly Cardenal is anxious to uncover an alternative lyrical discourse which more accurately reflects the local identity. In this regard, the indigenous canvas provides the poet with an abundance of linguistic and metaphorical possibilities with which he can carve out a more authentic model of society and behaviour and culture.

Cardenal's evocation and affirmation of the indigenous past may be more clearly understood in the light of Northrop Frye's critical model of myths.<sup>4</sup> Frye suggests two contrary axes around which myth is centred; the apocalyptic model and the demonic model. The first of these implies a desired, affirmative world, laden with connotations and images of fertility, concord and hope. The second model denotes a contrary image of a negative and undesired world, impeded by implications of sterility, futility and confusion. Cardenal, as we have seen, repeatedly views the indigenous past within the parameters of an apocalyptic model. A desire to recapture this pre-colonial perfection underpins Cardenal's discourse of post-coloniality. In contrast, modernity and progress are persistently viewed as negative and undesired models of society and behaviour, particularly in attitudes to spirituality and culture.

According to Fanon's model of decolonisation, the desire for sources is often triggered by such a nostalgia for models and meaning from a past time which predates the colonial period.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, such a project of recuperation evokes new meanings which enable this poet to establish a continuum in terms of cultural practices between present and past traditions. In this regard, Cardenal's project mirrors those undertaken by both Guillén and Neruda, as both sought to identify and celebrate a continuation of artistic practices and a coincidence of purpose between themselves and previous generations of artisans.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> 'Archetypal Criticism - Theory of Myths', Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 131-239.
 <sup>5</sup> op. cit., pp. 178-9.

For Cardenal, this evocation of the past also allows him to reaffirm and celebrate the significance of an essential but, hitherto, largely excluded, aspect of his cultural heritage. As he seeks to affirm his own position within the cultural continuum, the nature of the poetic idiom and that of the aesthete are inevitably transformed. As I will illustrate, throughout *Homenaje a los indios americanos* Cardenal persistently challenges conventional perceptions of the lyric. Although he is concerned throughout with matters intrinsic to the lyric, such as use of language and rhyme, he is also clearly anxious to renovate and broaden the lyrical platform. This is evident, I believe, in the manner in which he - like Neruda and Guillén - blends apparently extraneous themes into the lyric; such as those of economic, political, ecological, cultural and spiritual import. In 'Nele de kantule' he even has a position on herbalism.

In addition, Cardenal transforms radically canonical conventions governing the lyricist and the lyrical form. In this regard, Cardenal is influenced principally by his study of indigenous culture and by exteriorismo, which I will examine further later in this chapter. This poet is often accused of assuming an anti-formal or anti-aesthetic posture because of the periphrastic and almost prosaic nature of many of the poems in this collection. On occasions, he is criticised for his use of an oralised lyric and for the use of jargon and casual, everyday references in his verse. However, as I hope to illustrate, this revision of the lyrical form is informed by an abiding concern for the true essence of poetry and sustained by archetypal models that Cardenal has located in the traditional societies of America. Homenaje a los indios americanos is also significant in that Cardenal intermeshes concerns of a collective nature with more subjective issues of mortality and love. This convergence and reconciliation of public and private idioms is yet another significant link between these three poets. As a consequence of this subversion of the lyrical voice, the expected relationship between aesthetics and the material reality is persistently questioned and, in a quest for relevance, is ultimately revised and extended. This revision is central to the poet's new role within a changing lyrical perspective.

Thus, what I hope to explore in the course of this chapter is the manner in which Cardenal engages with and, ultimately, subverts inherited perceptions of self, nation and the aesthetic. As with the *Canto general* and Guillén's three collections of poetry, *Homenaje a los indios americanos* is clearly part of a greater collective project of national and regional rehabilitation which aims to define a truly original post-colonial aesthetic.

During the course of this chapter I will examine the manner in which Cardenal employs the indigenous tradition to unravel some fundamental concerns. Three of his primary concerns are, firstly, the role of culture within society, secondly, the nature of the historico-political situation in Nicaragua; two issues which are common to all three poets, and, thirdly, the nature and influence of spirituality on contemporary society. Through his employment of paradigmatic models from the indigenous tradition, the poet is able to envisage an alternative prism through which the present reality may be viewed. This alternative vista, is nostalgic but also restorative, in that it suggests other models of behaviour and meaning through which the present reality can be either negated or transcended. The indigenous canvas he uncovers is thus transformed by Cardenal into an enabling and reaffirming tool with which he redefines inherited perceptions of self and nationhood and which suggest other temporal and spatial possibilities. Cardenal's project assumes two primary functions; firstly, it serves as an instructive model which illustrates alternatives from a past tradition and secondly, it has a prophetic function which articulates the poet's belief in the realisation of these alternative possibilities.

As an anthology, *Homenaje a los indios americanos* articulates many of the ambivalences inherent in such a post-colonial project of redefinition; such as negation of and confrontation with an inherited or imposed colonial tradition. Although we witness some acknowledgement on Cardenal's part of the syncretic reality which has been formed out of the colonial experience, his primary desire is for a reaffirmation of pre-colonial models of society and culture.

# Creating a post-colonial aesthetic

Born in 1925, into a bourgeois Nicaraguan family, Ernesto Cardenal's life began in a similar fashion to that of other children of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie. He was educated at home and abroad and also travelled extensively during his youth to Mexico, New York and Paris. In time he acquired a reputation as a poet and critic and returned to Nicaragua in 1950 to set up a publishing company and bookshop. However, he became involved with an emerging political movement in Nicaragua that aimed to topple the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza García and as a result, was briefly imprisoned in 1952. In 1954, in the aftermath of an aborted coup in which he was also involved, a friend and coconspirator, Adolfo Báez Bone, was tortured and murdered in prison by Somoza's children. Cardenal was profoundly distressed by the murder but had also by this time become somewhat disillusioned by the failure of this latest political initiative. However, he remained in Nicaragua and continued to write poetry. His most significant collection of poetry up to this point was Epigramas, many of which denounced Somoza and the brutality and repressive nature of the Somoza dictatorship.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately Cardenal would become involved with the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional and would become a spokesman for the FSLN from exile in Costa Rica. When the FSLN succeeded in their struggle to topple the Somoza regime in 1979, Cardenal was appointed Minister of Culture in the new Government of National Reconstruction and would remain in that position for over ten years. This brief biographical introduction to the life of Cardenal serves as an indication into how external ideological and political forces impacted in a fundamental way upon the nature and shape of his verse. Towards the end of the 1950s, the poet experienced a spiritual conversion which brought him to Kentucky and into the Trappist Order. As a direct consequence of his relationship with Thomas Merton, his spiritual adviser in Kentucky, Cardenal embarked upon a reappraisal of the indigenous cultures of the Americas.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Epigramas (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Carlos Lohlé, 1973)

### From Private to Public Poetics

Any reading of Homenaje a los indios americanos must explore the manner in which Cardenal, like Guillén and Neruda, braids issues of artistic and cultural importance with those of politics. Marxist poetics, as I have illustrated in Chapter One, have always sought challenge enhance these links and thus to conventional perceptions which suggest that aesthetics and politics are separate, antagonistic bodies of experience.

The Uruguayan writer and critic, Mario Benedetti, suggests that the Cuban revolution of 1959 marked a pivotal moment in Latin America with regard to attitudes towards the aesthetic.<sup>7</sup> Benedetti believes that many artists and intellectuals underwent a genuine transformation during and subsequent to this period and, in order to develop true ethical and cultural leadership, came to the realisation that they had to engage fully with the historicopolitical reality. Cardenal was undoubtedly influenced in this regard by the resurgence of interest in matters of ideological or historical importance that had become increasingly more evident in the literature of Nicaragua.

Between the early 1940s and the 1960s, several key political events would contribute to a more heightened political awareness on the part of the Nicaraguan intelligentsia. The brutality of the National Guard had continued to foment opposition attempts to overthrow the regime of Anastasio Somoza García. Cardenal's involvement in an aborted coup in 1954, and the torture and death of his co-conspirator and fellow poet, Adolfo Báez Bone, are two key events that would surely have impacted upon the poet's political re-awakening. Two years later, in 1956, young a Nicaraguan poet, Rigoberto López Pérez assassinated Anastasio Somoza, the first of this family dynasty which were to rule Nicaragua for almost fifty years, but was then shot himself by Somoza's bodyguards. This act of selflessness undertaken in the collective interest, together with the death of his friend Báez Bone,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Mario Benedetti, *El escritor latinoamericano y la revolución posible* (México: Ediciones Nueva Imagen, 1977), p. 95.

would have major repercussions for the subsequent direction of the life of Ernesto Cardenal. Anastasio Somoza's son, Luis, assumed power and subsequently imposed an equally brutal and repressive regime. Disillusioned by the political situation and in particular by the apparent indefatigability of the Somozas, Cardenal was consumed by a general desire to withdraw and reflect upon the world. The result was his religious conversion and his joining of the contemplative Trappist Order in 1957.

However, anxious that his vocation is not erroneously viewed as escapist in nature, Cardenal has asserted that these contemplative and religious feelings had always been present, but had been suppressed or ignored by the younger man:

... surgía siempre un rostro borroso en mis sueños, en las horas de soledad, en el silencio de la noche, después de las fiestas; que era el Dios reprimido, relegado a las sombras del inconsciente.<sup>8</sup>

While he was with the Trappists, the influence of Cardenal's spiritual adviser, the philosopher and poet Thomas Merton, was hugely significant. Despite the fact that Cardenal left the Trappists after two years for reasons of ill-health, Merton's influence would continue to shape the Nicaraguan poet throughout his life. Inspired by Merton's vision of an engaged, and politicised religious community, a year after his ordination in 1965, Cardenal and two friends, established the contemplative community of 'Our Lady of Solentiname' on an island in the Gran Lago of Nicaragua. Cardenal persistently sought to involve himself and this community in the political life of Nicaragua but ultimately the politicisation of the community at Solentiname would contribute to its destruction by the National Guard less than ten years later.

Many of Cardenal's poems written after his spiritual conversion are informed by a close analysis of the bible. In time, Cardenal, like others engaged in Liberation Theology during that period,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Cardenal, Vida en el amor (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Carlos Lohlé, 1970), p. 135.

would fail to distinguish between the exigencies of Christianity and those of politics. Marxism came to be viewed as a natural extension of Christian teaching:

La meditación, la profundización, la mística es la que me ha dado a mí la radicalización política.<sup>9</sup>

Aspirations for an eternal afterlife were temporarily supplanted by the more immediate concerns of democracy and socialism.

Established in 1960, the literary group 'Frente Ventana' was a direct response to the increased number of acts of brutality perpetrated by Somoza's National Guard. The role of this literary group was much more coherent and focused than that of other vanguard movements which had preceded it. As a group it would provide intellectual and cultural leadership for the nascent political opposition.<sup>10</sup> Francisco de Asís Fernández outlines the responsibilities of this group in the following way:

... se dio a la tarea de ubicar a la universidad y a los universitarios como un frente ideológico en el contexto de explotación, opresión, represión, analfabetismo, tortura, crimen y miseria que vivíamos los nicaragüenses.<sup>11</sup>

What was becoming clear throughout the 1960s was, not only the growing opposition to the successive Somoza regimes, but also an urgency felt by the intelligentsia, to take charge of the cultural, as well as the political direction of Nicaragua. One of the founders of the 'Frente Ventana', Sergio Ramírez, recalls:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Cardenal, *La santidad de la revolución* (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1978), p. 20. In the same book, he also remarked 'El marxismo es un fruto del Evangelio', p. 30.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> The 'Frente Sandinista' was not officially founded until 1962.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Francisco de Asís Fernández, *Poesía política nicaragüense* (Managua: Ministerio de Cultura, 1986), p. 16. For a more comprehensive overview of the radical changes which took place in Nicaraguan culture during this period and over the subsequent two decades, see John Beverley & Marc Zimmerman, *Literature & Politics in the Central American Revolutions* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 63-6 & pp. 72-8, Stephen White, *Culture & Politics in Nicaragua* (New York: Lumen Books, 1986), pp. 78-81 and de Asís Fernández, *ibid.*, pp. 10-18.

... from the beginning we did reject the position that had reigned in Nicaragua up to that time in terms of artistic labour: the famous story of art for art's sake; the artist's sworn aversion to political contamination.<sup>12</sup>

Many Nicaraguan writers came to view aesthetic commitment as inseparable from participation in the revolutionary struggle. Ricardo Morales Avilés, a prominent member of the Frente Sandinista during this period, outlines something of their position with regard to cultural leadership:

The cultural struggle cannot rest above the revolutionary struggle, nor lie parallel to it; the cultural struggle is an integral part, one front, of the revolutionary struggle.<sup>13</sup>

Cardenal also asserted the inexorable links between material reality and the production of culture:

... we've united cultural transformations with the idea of creating a society free of violence ... In Nicaragua, cultural liberation has been a part of the struggle for national liberation.<sup>14</sup>

I have noted already in Chapter One how Cardenal, in the prologue to *Poesía nueva de Nicaragua*, was at pains to highlight the very real distinctions between political and propagandist verse, but he was always conscious of the functional nature of this cultural project. In a later interview with Ronald Christ, Cardenal remarked:

In reality, what I would have wanted to say is that my preoccupation ... is that of writing poetry which serves others in communicating its meaning.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> White, Culture & Politics in Nicaragua: ibid., p. 80.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p. 66. The original interview was published in 1974.

In the same interview, he alluded to the need to simplify complex material and thus provide a more accessible kind of verse.<sup>16</sup> He had clearly set out to challenge conventional perceptions of the poet and poetry as remote and inaccessible, and sought to reengage the aesthetic with issues of historical and political importance. In common with Guillén and Neruda, Cardenal was persistently seeking to transcend conventional barriers which alienated art from the historico-political reality.

Thomas Merton was the first person who encouraged Cardenal to study native American culture. When he left the Trappist monastery, Cardenal continued his investigations into indigenous American culture particularly while he was in the Benedictine monastery in Cuernavaca, Mexico where he studied from 1960 to 1962. In 1965, Cardenal travelled with Merton across the American plains to learn more about the Native American Indians, a trip he recalls in the poem 'La danza del espíritu':

Y aquel gran viejo que yo vi en Taos (con la bata y las trenzas parecía vieja) me entendió cuando yo dije: to heaven. Porque el turista vejete de New England le preguntó si conoció los búfalos: Sí, de niño; y con tristeza: No más búfalos ... I wonder where they have GONE y yo dije to heaven y el vejete jjjj se rió como de un chiste y el viejo jefe sonrió triste (y me entendió) (otoño 1965, mi viaje a usa a ver a Merton y los indios)

Cardenal's project was thus clearly shaped by a conflation of spiritual, artistic and ideological intentions. His desire to contextualise and democratise cultural practice and expression, was, I believe, also influenced by his perceptions of the *sabio* as he perceived it within indigenous society as well as by these ideological intentions. Cardenal's political responsibilities were inherently linked to his artistic intentions, and his desire to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p. 65.

rehabilitate a previously excluded text and audience into the cultural experience through a radicalisation of the poetic form and content, challenges conventional assumptions of both the poet and poetry. Clearly Cardenal's project is enmeshed also with an appreciation of the manner in which the self and collective national identities are interwoven. Therefore, in order to transform his own lyrical idiom, the poet recognised that he had also had to interrogate that which defined his collective identity.

# **Defining** Influences

At this juncture I want to explore some of the primary literary figures who, I believe, influenced the content and concerns of *Homenaje a los indios americanos*. The first of these is Cardenal's compatriot and the father of Modernism, Rubén Darío. Pablo Antonio Cuadra, one of Nicaragua's most eminent poets and critics and himself a huge influence on Cardenal, fulsomely praises the role of Darío in the development of the Nicaraguan lyric, in particular, in his re-evaluation of the indigenous within the context of the national cultural identity:

... esta corriente mestiza ... corre abajo, en la subhistoria, y tarda siglos en confundirse con la corriente de arriba, de la literatura culta. El fenómeno literario que removió las aguas y produjo el enriquecimiento mutuo de las dos corrientes se llama Rubén Darío.<sup>17</sup>

Cuadra goes on to affirm:

El hizo consciente el mestizaje; el hizo historia al darle verbo.<sup>18</sup>

According to Cuadra, Darío was the first to articulate something of Nicaragua's largely repressed indigenous heritage:

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Cuadra, 'Rubén Darío y la aventura literaria del mestizaje', Aventura literaria del mestizaje y otros ensayos (Costa Rica: Libro Libre, 1988) p. 88.
 <sup>18</sup> ibid., p. 88.

... fue Darío el primer valor que en la corriente de nuestra literatura culta no sólo señala lo indio como fuente de originalidad y de autenticidad literarias, sino que proclama en sí mismo, contra todos los complejos y prejuicios de su tiempo, el orgullo de ser mestizo.<sup>19</sup>

This reaffirmation of the indigenous is evident in some of Darío's early sonnets such as 'Chinampas' and 'El sueño del inca' (1888).<sup>20</sup> Although always conscious of the legacy of colonial Spain, Darío was equally anxious to acknowledge the enduring influence of the autochthonous tradition on his perceptions of self and on his poetic development:

En el fondo de mi espíritu, a pesar de mis vistas cosmopolitas, existe el inarrancable filón de la raza; mi pensar y mi sentir continúan un proceso histórico y tradicional; mas de la capital del arte y de la gracia, de la elegancia, de la claridad y del buen gusto, habría de tomar lo que contribuyese a embellecer y decorar mis eclosiones autóctonas.<sup>21</sup>

Although 'Palabras liminares', his controversial introduction to *Prosas profanas y otros poemas* (1896/1901), provides an important insight into Darío's intellectual arrogance, it is also significant with regard to the general reassessment of the indigenous culture which was taking place at the turn of the century:

Si hay poesía en nuestra América, ella está en las cosas viejas: en Palenke y Utatlán, en el indio legendario y el inca sensual y fino, y en el gran Moctezuma de la silla de oro.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 89.

 $<sup>^{20}</sup>$  The 'chinampas' were raised floating gardens which were constructed in the Valley of Mexico to facilitate further food production and thus aid the expansion of the region, the remains of which can still be seen today at Xochimilco in Mexico D. F.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Rubén Darío Esencial: op. cit., p. 113.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Poesías completas (Madrid: Aguilar, 1967), p. 546.

For the most part, Darío evokes an heroic and exoticised image of indigenous society, which acts as a largely metaphorical alternative to the Euro-centric tradition:

Ellos eran soberbios, leales y francos, ceñidas las cabezas de raras plumas; ¡ojalá hubieran sido los hombres blancos como los Atahualpas y Moctezumas.<sup>23</sup>

In reality, Darío was almost completely removed from the historical reality of Nicaragua and incorporated the indigenous motif into his work in much the same manner as he used that of European or Hellenic origin. However, two of Darío's most significant poems with regard to this engagement with the autochthonous are 'Salutación del optimista' and 'Tutecotzimi' which I now want to examine in a little more detail.

'Salutación del optimista' opens on an air of prescience and anticipation.<sup>24</sup> There are recurring suggestions of imminent change:

Porque llega el momento en que habrán de cantar nuevos [himnos lenguas de gloria. Un vasto rumor llena los ámbitos; mágicas ondas de vida van renaciendo de pronto; retrocede el olvido, retrocede engañada la muerte, se anuncia un reino nuevo, feliz, sibila sueña ...

Clearly, Darío, in an effort to assert a new collective Hispanic idiom which would reflect both peninsular and indigenous influences, was anxious to resuscitate the autochthonous cultural heritage of America:

Unanse, brillen, secúndense tantos vigores dispersos; formen todos un solo haz de energía ecuménica. Sangre de Hispania fecunda, sólidas, ínclitas razas,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> 'A Colón', *ibid.*, p. 704.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> 'Cantos de vida y esperanza' (1905), *Rubén Darío Esencial: op. cit.*, pp. 338-340.

muestren los dones pretéritos que fueron antaño su triunfo. Vuelva el antiguo entusiasmo, vuelva el espíritu ardiente que regará lenguas de fuego en esa epifanía.

In this way, his reappraisal of the indigenous contribution in many ways could be viewed as a precursor to Cardenal's project in *Homenaje a los indios americanos*. 'Tutecotzimi' is also highly significant and suggests interesting parallels with regard to Cardenal's project.<sup>25</sup> In this poem, Darío is not only seeking an alternative symbolic and metaphorical landscape, but he also exhibits a need to record something of a cultural and historical precedent which has been hitherto forgotten or misunderstood. Once again the indigenous text offers the poet a new linguistic potential as he clearly anticipates the richness of the new mosaic which he will uncover:

¡Suene armoniosa mi piqueta de poeta!
¡Y descubra oro y ópalos y rica piedra fina, templo o estatua rota!
Y el misterio jeroglífico adivina la Musa.

Darío is transformed as he begins to excavate new meanings from this past tradition. As an excavator of this forgotten heritage, he appears to assume many new roles; namely those of anthropologist and interpreter:

De la temporal bruma surge la vida extraña de pueblos abolidos; la leyenda confusa se ilumina; revela secretos la montaña en que se alza la ruina.

In this regard, the similarities between Darío and Cardenal are quite striking. The indigenous canvas is transformed into a enabling motif, with which both poets can excavate additional meaning. For both poets, this recovered tradition allows them to transform and expand upon the conventional role of the poet.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> 'El canto errante' (1907), Poesías completas: op. cit., pp. 713-8.

There are also many parallels in terms of the formal techniques employed by both poets. Darío delights in an enunciation of the local flora and fauna, hitherto excluded from the local culture, which is also an important feature of Cardenal's poetry. Both poets are at pains to uncover a continuum between the present and their indigenous ancestors and consequently employ the present indicative to great effect, to recreate the immediacy of the historical period:

Los centenarios árboles saben de procesiones, de luchas y ritos inmemoriales. Canta un zenzontle. ¿qué canta? ¿Un canto nunca oído? El pájaro en un ídolo ha fabricado el nido. (Ese canto escucharon las mujeres toltecas y deleitó al soberbio príncipe Moctezuma.)

Like Cardenal in 'Netzahualcóyotl' and 'Kayanerenhkowa', Darío in this poem transports the reader, through his employment of the present indicative, to the immediacy of the historical period - the beginning of Cuacmichín's reign:

Cuaucmichín, el cacique sacerdotal y noble, viene de caza. Síguele fila apretada y doble de sus flecheros ágiles. Su aire es bravo y triunfal. Sobre su frente lleva bruñido cerco de oro; y vese, al sol que se alza del florestal sonoro, que en la diadema tiembla la pluma de quetzal.

The pace of 'Tutecotzimi' is swift, as Darío leads us through a hitherto unspoken landscape. His focus throughout is on the splendour and heroism of this historical period. He indulges in an exuberance of language, in an almost superfluous use of adjectives, as the heroes are referred to as 'el gran cacique', 'los altos sacerdotes', 'el fuerte cacique'. Cuaucmichín thus assumes an almost superhuman stature:

¡Cuaucmichín! El octavo Rey de los Mexicanos

era grande. Si abría los dedos de sus manos más de un millón de flechas obscurecía el sol. Era de oro macizo su silla y su consejo.

Darío makes simple assertions about his heroes. He praises Cuaucmichín's rejection of blood sacrifice and his nobility of character; *alababa a los dioses, maldecía la guerra*. The superhuman quality which Darío attaches to the indigenous leader is mirrored in Cardenal's portraits of Netzahualcóyotl, Nele de Kantule and Deganawida. In addition, both Darío and Cardenal are at pains to explain indigenous words and concepts within the text. For example, Darío in 'Tutecotzimi' - *Pipil, es decir niño*. Cardenal also explains unfamiliar terms as evidenced in the following series of examples:

Cuceb quiere decir Revolución literalmente "Ardilla" (lo que gira). ('Ardilla de los tunes de un katún')

Cambió su nombre 'León-Fuerte' por 'Coyote-Hambriento' (una cabeza de coyote con un nudo; el nudo quiere decir ayuno)

Rodeado de tlamatinimes 'los sabedores de cosas'. ('Netzahualcóyotl')

Kayanerenhkowa ('la Gran Paz') ... Inventó el wampúm - la escritura de conchas. ('Kayanerenhkowa')

Both poets also make implicit or explicit criticisms of modern society, by contrasting the splendour of the pre-Columbian era with the inadequacies of contemporary society:

Nuestros padres formaron nuestras sagradas leyes; hablaron con los dioses en lengua de verdad. ('Tutecotzimi')

Ahora son reales los animales

que estaban estilizados en los frescos y los príncipes venden tinajas en los mercados. ('Las ciudades perdidas')

The grandeur and nobility of this era obviously captivated Darío and engendered a sense of nostalgia and envy, also palpable in many of Cardenal's poems. Pablo Antonio Cuadra sums up the significance of 'Tutecotzimi' in the following way:

Es la primera incorporación del indio a nuestra poesía culta, y esa incorporación la realiza para elaborar un mensaje contra la tiranía, la violencia y la guerra.<sup>26</sup>

However, there is one crucial distinction between Darío and Cardenal. Darío's engagement with his autochthonous heritage formed part of an ongoing search for novelty of lyrical expression and metaphor. The indigenous canvas offered him an alternative lyrical potential. Although he did contribute to the general reappraisal of the pre-colonial identity of the Americas, and to the 'equi-valence' between motifs and mythologies of indigenous and European origin, he never aspired to any genuine decolonisation of the cultural text. Cardenal's challenge is much more complex. Although equally concerned with a renovation of lyrical form and technique, the indigenous canvas provides him with originary models of society and meaning which he genuinely believed could be, and of necessity, must be, retrieved and re-established in contemporary society.

A second, and equally significant, influence on Cardenal was the Nicaraguan vanguardia. Like other vanguard movements, the Nicaraguan vanguardia was engaged in an unravelling of inherited perceptions and structures of cultural identity. Chronologically the Nicaraguan movement was relatively late when compared to other Latin American vanguard movements, but is generally considered to have begun in 1927, with the publication of José Coronel Urtecho's 'Oda a Rubén Darío' and to have ended in 1933.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> 'Rubén Darío y la aventura literaria del mestizaje', op. cit., p. 90.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Francisco de Asís Fernández, in the prologue to *Poesía política nicaragüense* suggests 1929 as the starting date for the vanguardia, *op. cit.*,

'Oda a Rubén Darío' is quite an irreverent and caustic attack on Darío; on his Francophile affectations and his perceived detachment from local Nicaraguan experiences:

Tú comprendes. Tú que estuviste en el Louvre, entre los mármoles de Grecia, y ejecutaste una marcha a la victoria de Samotracia, tú comprendes por qué te hablo como una máquina fotográfica en la plaza de la Independencia de las Cosmópolis de América, donde enseñaste a criar centauros a los ganaderos de las Pampas.<sup>28</sup>

Clearly Coronel Urtecho was questioning Darío's significance for future generations of Nicaraguan poets because of the latter's abstract and highly symbolic use of language. On occasions the vanguardia rejected Dario's use of language in quite a vehement fashion, dismissing it as verbalismo retórico, sentimentalismo cursi, romanticismo histérico, modernismo sodomita.<sup>29</sup> However in reality, as Guiseppe Bellini has observed, the relationship between the vanguardist writers and Darío was quite ambivalent:

La rebelión contra Rubén Darío fue, en realidad, un acto de amor hacia él, que todo lo había cantado, y el comienzo de toda renovación.<sup>30</sup>

This ambivalence is echoed by Pablo Antonio Cuadra, one of the primary figures in the new literary movement:

<sup>p. 9, while Ernesto Mejía Sánchez suggests 1928, Romances y corridos nicaragüenses (Mexico: Imprenta Universitaria, 1946), p. 12.
<sup>28</sup> H. Verani, Las vanguardias literarias en Hispanoamérica -</sup>Manifiestos, proclamas y otros escritos (Rome: Bulzoni, 1986), p.159.
<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Jorge Eduardo Arellano, 'El movimiento nicaragüense de vanguardia', Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos, 468 (June, 1989), p.11.
<sup>30</sup> Guiseppe Bellini, 'Notas sobre la evolución de las vanguardias en Centro América - Nicaragua', Las vanguardias tardías en la poesía

... aunque atacábamos a Rubén Darío, aunque le llamábamos 'nuestro amado enemigo', éramos sus hijos y como hijos herederos de su lección de universalidad.<sup>31</sup>

In 1931, Pablo Antonio Cuadra and another Nicaraguan poet, Octavio Rocha, established the 'Rincón de vanguardia' in a Granada newspaper, where the views of the vanguardia could be publicly aired. This forum was continued throughout the following two years (1932-3) in the same paper, but under a different title 'Vanguardia - cartucho literario'.<sup>32</sup> Many years later, Cuadra would sum up the principal aspirations of the vanguardist writers in the following way:

We wanted something more direct. We believed that this ornate poetry with its language like gold filigree had been surpassed and that we could discover a new kind.<sup>33</sup>

Their manifesto, 'Ligera exposición y proclama de la anti-academia nicaragüense', published in April 1931, in 'El Diario Nicaragüense' outlines some of the underlying objectives and principles of this new movement.<sup>34</sup> These included the establishment of Granada as the literary capital of Nicaragua, the creation of a new national literary identity, based on the traditional culture and expression of Nicaragua and the eradication of any lyrical expression which may appear contrived or academic.<sup>35</sup> Crucially, with regard to the nature of this new creative process, their emphasis was on a shared or collective discourse, which should be both accountable to and accessible by the public at large.<sup>36</sup>

Consequently, this search for a new and more authentic idiom prompted many vanguard poets to identify originary models of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> 'En la casa de Darío', Aventura literaria del mestizaje y otros ensayos: op. cit., p. 139. Also see Arellano, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Giuseppe Bellini, op. cit., pp. 74-5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Stephen White, Culture & Politics in Nicaragua: op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Verani, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Historically, there was always bitter rivalry between Granada and Leon, the two principal cities of Nicaragua.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> As Jorge Eduardo Arellano suggests, this movement was ultimately 'una expresión de raíces populares', *op. cit.*, p. 28.

meaning and expression within the largely unrecorded oral heritage of Nicaragua. This aggressive embrace of orature, and its identification as the perceived locale of a pristine mode of expression is, as I have noted in previous chapters, often a feature of post-colonial writing. It is a phenomenon already observed in the verse of Nicolás Guillén. Ernesto Mejía Sánchez, one of the central figures of the vanguardia, explained their focus in the following manner:

Los jóvenes poetas y escritores nicaragüenses buscaban ansiosamente una expresión propiamente nacional, y en esa búsqueda llegaron al folklore, la expresión más autóctona y limpia de la nación.<sup>37</sup>

Consequently, the most significant corpus of material produced during this period were the 'corridos' and 'romances' which date from the late 1920s and early 1930s, many of which were not published until 1940-1. The language and rhythms of these 'corridos' and 'romances' were subsequently recreated by the vanguard poets in their own work. A clear perception among many of the vanguard poets was that any redefinition of the national cultural identity lay in such a popular literary project and precisely in such a rehabilitation and reaffirmation of the orature of their country. They never envisaged it as an essentialist exercise which denied Nicaragua's peninsular influences, but rather one which was sustained by the inherent syncretism of Nicaraguan culture. In fact, as Pablo Antonio Cuadra confirmed, many of the 'romances' and 'corridos' which the vanguardist writers collected were of peninsular origin.38 Ernesto Mejía Sánchez concurs with Cuadra, but also emphasises the unique contribution of the Nicaraguan idiom which occurred during the assimilative process:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Mejía Sánchez, *op. cit.*, p. 12. However Beverley and Zimmerman reiterate Arellano's view that the aims of the vanguardist project never really went beyond that of the purely folkloric, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Cuadra, 'Rubén Darío y la aventura literaria del mestizaje', *op. cit.,* pp. 86-8.

Estos romances que trajeron los conquistadores, en las tierras americanas adquirieron nuevo vigor y perennidad por la amorosa y constante labor creativa de nuestros pueblos. Estos romances han llegado a ser nuestros, porque significan la vida y la pasión acumuladas del pueblo que los canta y porque han engendrado el 'corrido' que es la base para una 'épica' americana.<sup>39</sup>

At that time, Cuadra concluded that the genuine cultural identity of Nicaragua could only be located within the popular tradition:

Se necesita, pues, una cultura verdaderamente nicaragüense para lograr en su plenitud un arte vernáculo nicaragüense ... necesitamos necesariamente vivir nuestra vida nicaragüense y lograrla en el arte con los elementos apropiados ... nuestro arte vernáculo tendrá que ser un arte histórico, documental.<sup>40</sup>

Ultimately this inchoate expression of cultural nationalism by the Nicaraguan vanguardia did not appear to lie in any overt opposition to foreign culture and influences, but rather in a desired redefinition and extension of inherited lyrical boundaries.<sup>41</sup> In this regard, there are many parallels between the Nicaraguan vanguardia and the position of Nicolás Guillén particularly in the latter years of the 1920s. The vanguardia's preferential embrace of orature merits further analysis, in particular, an examination of the manner in which it was articulated and incorporated into the body aesthetic. It is also of significance given Cardenal's employment of such material and the techniques of orature he employed in *Homenaje a los indios americanos*. Pablo Antonio Cuadra's two collections of poetry from the period; *Canciones de pájaro y señora* (1928-36) and *Poemas nicaragüenses* (1930-33) are a good starting point.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Mejía Sánchez, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> 'Hacia nuestra poesía vernacular' (July, 1932), H. Verani, *ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> However, Ernesto Mejía Sánchez does confirm that as the vanguardia became more enmeshed in the political turmoil of the period, it did adopt a much more essentialist posture, *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Both collections are contained in Cuadra's Obra poética completa, Vol. I: op. cit.

Cuadra's poem 'Ars poética' (1930) captures many of the underlying concerns of the vanguardia:

Volver es necesario a la fuente del canto: encontrar la poesía de las cosas corrientes, cantar para cualquiera con el tono ordinario que se usa en al amor ...

Debemos de cantar como canta el gorrión al azahar: encontrar la poesía de las cosas comunes la poesía del día, la del martes y del lunes, la del jarro, la hamaca y el jicote, el pipián, el chayote, el trago y el jornal ...<sup>43</sup>

In this poem, clearly Cuadra is concerned with the recuperation of the originary expression of Nicaragua. He is seeking to eradicate the ornate academic language normally employed in the lyric and replace it with the colour and vitality of the local lexicon. In the first part of *Canciones de pájaro y señora*, what is most evident is the conscious incorporation by Cuadra of the techniques of oral poetry into the aesthetic.<sup>44</sup> Many of the poems in *Canciones de pájaro y señora* exhibit the conventional irony and humour of oral poetry. They are clearly constructed with attention to the needs of a perceived audience in mind. This is most evident in the poet's use of 'vos' and the familiar form of the verb, in his diverse use of rhyme and in the lexis of the Nicaraguan vernacular which he employs. In 'Romance de la hormiga loca', for example, he even resorts to a phonetic representation of animal sounds.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 88-9. H. Verani suggests 'Ars poética' was actually written in 1934, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> In this regard, I believe it is also important to countenance the influence of the Spanish Generation of 1927 on the Nicaraguan vanguardia. For further insight into this period and into the work of the generation of 1927, see Sandra Cary Robertson, *Lorca, Alberti and the Theater of Popular Poetry* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1991), pp. 15-24.

For the most part, these early poems deal with conventional themes of oral verse some of which we have already viewed in Guillén's *Motivos de son* and *Sóngoro cosongo;* the vicissitudes of everyday life, relationships, disappointment in love. Some have a more allegorical intention, such as 'Historia del alacrán y la luna' and 'Fabulilla del antojo'. Other poems such as 'El hijo de septiembre' and 'Mis dos pies', examine more serious issues regarding national identity and the nature of poetry. 'El hijo de septiembre' articulates some of the many conflicts which surround him, and ultimately is an exploration of the binary nature of his Nicaraguan identity:

Tengo el grito bilingüe en las dos fosas porque me dieron flechas en el lado blanco y balas en mi dolor moreno.

most striking aspect of Cuadra's Initially, the Poemas nicaragüenses (1930-3) is the dramatic change in attitude on the part of the poet. The frivolity and ease of manner characteristic of so much of Canciones de pájaro y señora have been supplanted by a more deliberate ideological posture on the part of the poet. Although written contemporaneously, the two collections differ radically in terms of tone and content. Some poems, such as 'Oda fluvial' and 'La venta de las vocales' exhibit a concern for language; in particular the etymology and preservation of the national idiom. Cuadra's poetics appear to be underscored by a persistent search for the source of his identity, for una cultura verdaderamente nicaragüense, in all its manifestations.<sup>45</sup> In 'Iglesia de Chontales', he looks to the beliefs of rural Nicaragua, to the local landscape in poems such as 'Patria de tercera' and 'Trazo', and to his own childhood in 'Inventario de algunos recuerdos'. Such a reconciliation of past and present, of public and private indios also characterises much of Homenaje a los idioms americanos. Equally apparent is the manner in which Cuadra appears to be searching for a continuity between past and present

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> H. Verani, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

voices and traditions, between his ancestors and contemporary Nicaraguan poets such as in 'Introducción a la tierra prometida'. *Poemas nicaragüenses*, like *Homenaje a los indios americanos*, is concerned with the centrality of historical experiences in the evolution of the poet and of Nicaragua.

From the outset, the vanguardia was primarily concerned with issues of aesthetic importance. However, in 1927, in the same year that José Coronel Urtecho published his 'Oda a Rubén Darío', Nicaragua was invaded by US marines. 1927 was also the year in which Augusto César Sandino began his popular revolution in opposition to this North American intervention in Nicaragua. These political events did prompt a certain degree of nationalistic fervour on the part of some vanguard poets.<sup>46</sup> Consequently, the ideological intentions of the vanguardist movement became more apparent.<sup>47</sup> Giuseppe Bellini, for example, highlights the political nature of the vanguardist project:

La 'vanguardia' no solamente ha renovado la expresión poética en Nicaragua, sino que ha descubierto al país y participado activamente de su historia y su condición, procurando proyectarlo hacia un futuro de signo distinto, anclado en el espíritu eterno de la tierra.<sup>48</sup>

Pablo Antonio Cuadra believed that the project of recuperation undertaken by the vanguardia was shaped by the threat posed by North America:

Estamos intervenidos por una raza distinta. Queremos intelectualmente conservar la nuestra. No dejar que se evapore nuestro espíritu latino: indoespañol. Conservar nuestra tradición, nuestras costumbres arraigadas. Nuestra lengua. Conservar nuestra nacionalidad; crearla todos los días.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Bellini, op. cit., p. 79.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Beverley & Zimmerman, Literature & Politics in the Central American Revolutions: op. cit., p. 63.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 91.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> 'Dos perspectivas', (28-6-1931), H. Verani, op. cit., p. 165.

By textualising particular instances of historico-political significance, Cuadra was, I believe, suggesting a complementarity of aesthetics and politics within the Nicaraguan experience.<sup>50</sup> In this regard, Cuadra's influence on Cardenal is, in my view, of paramount importance.

As a literary movement, many of the vanguard writers had become conscious of the need to fuse a renovated lyrical expression with a more heightened awareness of the historical reality. However, the question of political identity and in particular, of a more politicised discourse, was perhaps the most divisive question amongst them. Many of them had been educated in the conservative, bourgeois tradition of middle-class Nicaragua.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, as several critics have pointed out, their political views were invariably complex and changeable.<sup>52</sup>

The movement effectively disintegrated in 1933, but many of the vanguard poets continued to work together, gradually with more explicit political intent. In 1934, Sandino was assassinated by the National Guard while participating in peace talks, despite having been assured of his personal safety. Heavily influenced by José Coronel Urtecho and by their own political conservatism, the vanguard poets had come to distrust the nationalistic sentiments of Sandino in any case and had begun to lend their unequivocal support to Anastasio Somoza, the head of the National Guard, in the misguided belief that they could manipulate him to serve their own interests.<sup>53</sup> As Cuadra himself recalls:

... in our cult of the new, we wanted to get involved in a new kind of politics that was against what had gone before. Fascism had a greater influence over some of us ... We were

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Vicky Unruh however cautions against any direct correlation between vanguardism in aesthetics and liberalism in politics, which as we will see was precisely the case with the Nicaraguan vanguardia, *Latin American Vanguards* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), pp.6-7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Arellano, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Bellini, op. cit., p. 82. Also see Beverley & Zimmerman, op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Arellano, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-3.

obsessed with a nationalism that we wanted to be ultraoriginal. And, of course, Communism repelled us, because our movement was nationalistic. We were a movement parallel to Sandino, and the Communists at that time were deeply internationalistic.<sup>54</sup>

Somoza was inaugurated as president in 1937, but the relationship between the vanguardia and the new president would change irrevocably within a short time.<sup>55</sup> With time many of the vanguardia, including Coronel Urtecho and Cuadra, would regret this initial support for Somoza.<sup>56</sup> In fact, Cuadra came to view the entire period as detrimental and personally destructive:

... when I look back on those years when I was with Coronel and involved in that political venture, I can see what a loss it was for my poetry.<sup>57</sup>

I want to conclude this appraisal of the vanguardia by examining in some detail two of Cuadra's most influential poems from *Poemas nicaragüenses*, 'Introducción a la tierra prometida' and 'Poema del momento extranjero en la selva', because I believe there is a clear correlation of language, concerns and themes between these two poems and many of Cardenal's poems in *Homenaje a los indios americanos*.

Both of Cuadra's poems are concerned with issues of mythic and archetypal significance. Both exhibit a preoccupation with the preservation or recuperation of the heritage and language of Nicaragua. In addition, there is an explicit correlation implied in both poems between the exigencies of the contemporary poet and those of the traditional artisans, all of which Cardenal explores at length in *Homenaje a los indios americanos*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Stephen White, *Culture & Politics in Nicaragua: op. cit.*, p. 20. <sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, p. 12 & pp. 19-20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, p. 20. Beverley & Zimmerman outline Cuadra's changing political allegiances in more detail, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-6.

'Introducción a la tierra prometida' begins with a personification of the sun. Laden with connotations of rebirth and rejuvenation, this potent image is evoked primarily as a symbol of continuity and constancy as Cuadra aims to articulate a link between himself and his ancestors and between past and present traditions. Ultimately it becomes a symbol of collective endeavours, reflected in the syntax of the opening sequence which shifts increasingly from the first person singular to the first person plural. The image of the sun in Cuadra's poem is quite ambivalent. He counterposes suggestions of old age and fatigue with those of renewal and rebirth at the onset of the new diurnal cycle. We are thus enabled to anticipate an exchange between two generations, as the poet shifts with apparent ease, between past and present, from the position of an isolated individual to one of greater identification with a collective body, namely his ancestors:

Voy a enseñarte a ti, hijo mío, los cantos que mi pueblo [recibió de sus mayores cuando atravesamos las tierras y el mar para morar junto a los campos donde crecen el alimento y la [libertad.

This generational interchange is further enhanced by a blurring of both temporal and poetic indicators, together with Cuadra's interplay of genealogical and familial relationships; hijo mío, padres, abuelo campesino, nuestros nuestros muertos. The particulars of his linguistic heritage may be lost but the poet has identified an elemental potential in the natural world, in his personification of the sun, symbolic through which these particulars can be recovered. Thus the natural world, as it is for Neruda and Cardenal, is transformed into an both active participant in this process of cultural recovery and recuperation:

Ahora estamos ya en el mes de las mariposas y, alrededor del grano cuya resurreción ellas anuncian [disfrazadas de ángeles, brotan también las palabras antiguas caídas en los surcos, las voces que celebraron el paso de este sol corpulento y [anciano

amigo de nuestros muertos, agricultor desde la edad de [nuestros padres,

propietario de la primavera y de sus grandes bueyes [mansos.

Cardenal also employs such elemental symbols of renewal and rebirth to anticipate the recovery of a forgotten culture throughout *Homenaje a los indios americanos*. This technique is evident in 'Milpa' for example:

Bajo la tierra los granos, grada a grada una grada cada día están subiendo la pirámide del maíz. La noche está llena de estrellas bien brillantes señal de lluvia.

Cardenal also seeks out links with which he can weave together the past and the present, individual and collective meaning. In 'Nele de Kantule' for example:

Y como en ese tiempo los hombres no sabían decir hermano les dijo que para decir hermano dijeran 'Cargüenatdi' y para decir hermana 'Om' para llamar al marido de mi tía se dice 'Tuc-so' y el marido de la hermana de la esposa se dice 'Ambe-suhi' y el hermano o hermana del suegro se dice Saca ...

In the opening sequence of 'Introducción a la tierra prometida', Cuadra also suggests that sacrifices made by previous generations may sustain and nurture subsequent generations. In a powerful image of self-sacrifice - a woman pricking her finger on the thorn of a flower - the poet effectively links the notion of the inherent sacrifices of a political struggle to a staple of Nicaraguan life; corn. In doing so, he establishes a natural homology between resistance and the ordinary labours of Nicaraguans. There is a harmonic coexistence of the natural and the political in the poet's mind at this juncture. What is also significant is the manner in which he explores the synthesis between the human and the natural cycles. By suggesting the symbiotic nature of the relationship between his ancestors and the natural world, a relationship which Cardenal also celebrates, Cuadra uncovers a further potential for rebirth. Thus, the finiteness of human life is subverted by the possibility of change and rebirth as viewed in the natural world. This was a view shared by Cardenal, who, as we will see, readily embraced indigenous views on the circularity of time. In 'Mayapán' for example:

Pero el tiempo es redondo se repite pasado presente futuro son lo mismo revoluciones del sol

revoluciones de la luna revoluciones sinódicas de los planetas y la historia también revoluciones Se repiten.

Both Cuadra and Cardenal asserted the valence and superiority of the collective nature of indigenous tradition, wherein shared experiences and a strong sense of heredity enabled a the linear, historical view of time. The transcendence of individualism of contemporary society is repeatedly criticised by Cardenal, in poems such as 'Mayapan' and 'Economía de Tahuantinsuyu'. In 'Introducción a la tierra prometida', Cuadra also celebrates collectivity, by focusing on the explicitly communal nature of the harvest and the camp-fire singing:

Ellos encendían las fogatas después de la labor y aquí escuché las estrofas de este himno campal que entonaban nuestros padres en la juventud de los árboles y que nosotros sus hijos repetimos, año tras año, como hombres que vuelven a encontrar su principio.

Throughout this poem by Cuadra, one is acutely conscious of his persistent concern for language and for the retrieval of a lost lexicon - *esa palabra sin voz*. Language and its recovery, become one of the principal objectives of this lyrical task:

dadme ese canto, esa palabra inmensa que no se alcanza en el grito de la

noche

ni en el alarido vertical de la palmera, ni en el gemido estridente de la estrella.

Cardenal exhibits a similar concern for retrieval of language throughout 'Netzahualcóyotl'. It is also apparent in the following verses from 'Nele de Kantule' as he delights in the indigenous names for the rivers:

Hablaba de los ríos 'Olopurgandihual', 'Manipurgandihual' 'Siapurgandihual' y 'Calipurgandihual'.

Cuadra's poem culminates in a hymn to Nicaragua, to the flora and fauna of his country. Similarly, he delights in the articulation of the local nomenclature, flora and fauna and in doing so, like Cardenal, rehabilitates this local idiom within the lyrical context:

Eres tú, colibrí, pájaro zenzontle, lechuza nocturna, chocoyo parlanchín verde y nervioso, urraca vagabunda de las fábulas campesinas. Eres tú, conejo vivaz, tigre de la montaña, comadreja escondida, tú, viejo coyote de las manadas, zorro ladrón, venado montaraz, anciano buey de los corrales.

In 'Poema del momento extranjero en la selva', Cuadra embarks on yet another journey to the very source of his identity. He does not return to a mythological paradise. Rather he refutes this notion of an idyllic, untainted landscape by depicting instead a kind of subverted paradise, scarred by violence and upheaval, not unlike that evoked by Neruda in 'Amor América'. In this regard Cuadra and Cardenal's verse differ quite substantially. Cuadra is clearly concerned with the recovery of the totality of history, whereas Cardenal, as we will see, persistently engages in a nostalgic recuperative exercise, and recreates an indigenous world almost completely devoid of criticism. However, certain similarities between Cuadra and Cardenal are suggested in this poem.

The main body of 'Poema del momento extranjero en la selva' is framed within two virtually identical sequences of verses. There is a persistent dialectic at work throughout; between local and foreign forces, between considerations of the past and the present. The task of the poet, it would appear, is to draw together these myriad influences and presences, and forge a new voice for the future. He clearly recognises his responsibilities:

Tengo que hacer algo con el lodo de la historia, cavar en el pantano y desenterrar la luna de mis padres.

Thus, it is here, in this corrupted landscape, that Cuadra identifies the origins of this personal and national odyssey of redefinition. The corrupting presence is that of the five hundred North American marines whom he depicts as being at odds with the very landscape of Nicaragua:

En el corazón de nuestras montañas 500 marinos entran con [ametralladoras.

Oigo voces.

The ambivalence of the language he employs is testament to the challenges inherent in the vanguardist project for a recovery of the national idiom and identity. It is a language laden with references to violence, and yet paradoxically, Cuadra's position, as the creator of an alternative landscape, is viewed as a positive and challenging one, evidenced in the language of illumination and creativity he employs: allí anterior a mi canto anterior a mí mismo invento el pedernal y alumbro el verde sórdido de las heliconias, el hirviente silencio de los manglares y enciendo la orquídea en la noche de la toboba.

Abruptly, through his use of the progressive form, we are transported to the immediacy of this historical reality, to the precise moment of the marines's incursion into Nicaragua. Cardenal, in poems such as 'Netzahualcóyotl', also makes great use of the present indicative to recapture an important historical moment. With an adept use of alliteration, Cuadra recreates the voices and songs of the marching soldiers:

Vienen marchando. Cantan entre sotocaballos y ñámbaros Cantan al paso y caen desde las altas copas las últimas lunas nicaragüenses.

(Rojas lapas hablan lenguas locas.)

The menacing nature of these foreign voices and their unfamiliar language thus comes to represent in the poet's mind, the figurative and literal subversion of Nicaragua and the demise of a once mythical paradise. But again, as in 'Introducción a la tierra prometida', Cuadra identifies a potential for recovery in the natural world and in the local. Throughout this poem there is a persistent interweaving of the human and natural worlds, which, as we will witness shortly, is also a characteristic of Homenaje a los indios americanos. On one occasion this synthesis is articulated by Cuadra by means of the image of his deceased ancestors buried under the forest. Once again, they are not a symbol of the finiteness of death but rather of a potential renaissance. By shifting through the lodo of history, Cuadra appears to have uncovered a potential for the future. The animals and birds, even the forest itself, all combine to repel the invasion. The triumph of the local is reflected in the malarial faces of the foreign soldiers.

We also witness this triumph in the transformation of the lyrical voice, as it shifts from the first person singular to the collective plural; *oimos*, *hemos dicho*, *vemos*, *presenciamos*. The expulsion of the foreign and the embrace of the local create a renewed optimism of self and nationhood:

Oigo voces: las arañas azules tejen una nueva bandera virgen. Anterior a mi canto anterior a mí mismo, en el corazón de nuestras montañas donde invento el pedernal y alumbro bajo el verde sórdido de las heliconias bajo el hirviente silencio de los manglares sus blancos huesos delicadamente pulidos por las hormigas.

The local is revaluated and rehabilitated through Cuadra's naming of the victims of this invasion. In the act of naming he retrieves them from anonymity, and in doing so, commits them to the collective memory. Throughout, there is a palpable sense of familiarity and intimacy between the poet and these named victims, similar to that suggested by Neruda in *La tierra se llama Juan*. Clearly, Cuadra has uncovered a role for himself within this ongoing artistic tradition. There is a palpable sense of placement and belonging within this continuum of artistic practices, wherein he acknowledges foreign influences on his own literary development, but also seeks to reaffirm the validity of the local inherited tradition which has also shaped him.

I believe *Poemas nicaragüenses* and *Canciones de pájaro y señora* clearly convey some of the overriding concerns of the Nicaraguan vanguardia. In many ways these collections are emblematic of the vanguard movement as a whole as Cuadra oscillates between the traditional and the new, between an assimilation of conventional poetic forms and the invention of the new. The influence of Pablo Antonio Cuadra and the vanguard movement as a whole on Cardenal can never be underestimated as 'Poema del momento extranjero en la selva' and 'Introducción a la tierra prometida',

both in terms of form and lyrical content, preempt Cardenal's approach in *Homenaje a los indios americanos*.

Although Cuadra disapproved fundamentally of the growing politicisation of the lyric, he was still actively involved with the anti-Somocista cultural platform, and in 1954, under the auspices of 'La Prensa', he began to edit a weekly literary supplement known as 'La Prensa Literaria'.<sup>58</sup> It was here that Cuadra would expand upon his earlier vanguardist study of indigenous culture and on 'the recovery and incorporation of the Indian into our poetry'.<sup>59</sup> The culmination of this research into indigenous cultures would provide an even more striking parallel between these two poets that is worth exploring.

Written between 1958-9, less than ten years before *Homenaje a* los indios americanos, Cuadra's *El jaguar y la luna* had, in my view, a profound influence upon Cardenal and upon the shape and content of *Homenaje a los indios americanos*.<sup>60</sup> Like Cardenal, Cuadra was fascinated by the indigenous heritage of America. Its recovery and validation within the canonical discourse was inherently linked to the poet's redefinition of self. For both poets this indigenous tradition is transformed into an enabling lyrical tool, with which they seek out paradigmatic models of meaning and cultural practice. In so doing, they forge a continuity of cultural practices and a symbiosis of past and present experiences which dislodge the sense of marginality and displacement which underpin their shared colonised condition. Both poets share a reliance on historical research and construct a canvas which conflates myth and history.

An initial point of comparison between the two poets is illustrated by Cuadra's poem 'Meditación ante un poema antiguo'.

Preguntó la flor: ¿el perfume acaso me sobrevivirá?

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> de Asís Fernández, *op. cit.*, p. 17 & Beverley & Zimmerman, *op. cit.*, p. 65.
 <sup>59</sup> White, *Culture & Politics in Nicaragua: op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> El jaguar y la luna in Obra poética completa, Vol. III (Costa Rica: Libro Libre, 1984), pp. 57-128.

Preguntó la luna: ¿guardo algo de luz para después de perecer?

Mas el hombre dijo: ¿por qué termino y queda entre vosotros mi canto?

Cuadra adopts not only one of the central thematic concerns of his indigenous ancestors - that of the ephemerality of human life - but he also imitates the parallel and rhetorical structures evident in so many indigenous poems:

Como esmeraldas que perforo como esmeraldas que ensarto en un hilo mi canto.

Como esmeraldas que perforo como esmeraldas que ensarto en un hilo mi vida.

Mi vida y mi canto en un hilo. ('El collar de esmeraldas')

The similarities in terms of metaphor and poetic structure between this poem by Cuadra and the two indigenous poems which follow are quite striking:

Yo perforo esmeraldas: yo oro estoy fundiendo: ¡Es mi canto! En hilo ensarto ricas esmeraldas: ¡Es mi canto!<sup>61</sup>

Labro esmeraldas, oro moldeo: es mi canto. Engasto esmeraldas:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Taken from the 'Cantares mexicanos', Angel M. Garibay, La literatura de los aztecas (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1970), p. 118.

### es mi canto.62

Such an assimilation of indigenous lyrical techniques is mirrored in Cardenal's 'Cantares mexicanos', both of which I will examine in greater depth later in this chapter.

Both Cardenal and Cuadra exhibit a shared concern for the fragility of cultural practices. We witness it in many of Cardenal's poems, such as 'Cantares mexicanos' I and II, 'Mayapán' and 'Tahirassawichi en Washington'. It is also suggested in Cuadra's 'Una nueva cerámica india' and 'La calavera de ...'. Aside from the urgency to recuperate and preserve something of this lost language and heritage, Cuadra is clearly conscious of the possibility that future generations will be unable to decipher his verse. In this way he suggests a further parallel between himself and his indigenous ancestors:

Los viejos signos pintados en el barro se olvidaron. Largos siglos cayó sobre nosotros la ignominia.Largos olvidos, el tiempo.<sup>63</sup>

However there are clear fundamental differences which distinguish the manner in which these two poets engage with this past. The tone of most of Cardenal's Indian poems is, as I will illustrate, nostalgic and essentialist. He looks at this period in American history through rose-tinted glasses, with an inevitable sense of envy and regret. The comparisons with the present-day prove to be generally unequal and disappointing, merely reinforcing his perception of a contemporary society dogged by greed, capitalism and atheism. In its place, Cardenal opts to imagine a future utopia, where pre-colonial values and models can

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> From the 'Cancionero Otomí', José Alcina Franch, Mitos y literatura azteca (Madrid: Alianza, 1989), p. 118.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> A similar anxiety about future interpretation is implied in Cardenal's 'Netzahualcóyotl' and '8 Ahau'.

be re-enacted, aided by the combined efforts of the Sandinistas and Christianity.

Cuadra's project is quite distinct. He appears to have identified an elemental potential in the landscape and language of rural Nicaragua and in the inherited traditions of his ancestors, which he hopes to reconstruct in his lyric. In 'La literatura nicaragüense', Cuadra cites the observations of two historians on the craftwork of the Nicaraguan Chorotega Indians:

Los artistas (chorotegas) asimilaron todas las ideas que les llegaron de lugares diversos, sin perder por ello sus facultades creadoras. Es ésta, seguramente, la más exacta explicación del alto nivel artístico de su cerámica, así como de su gran cantidad de estilos y variaciones.<sup>64</sup>

And of his own project, Cuadra remarked:

*Me propuse hacer en palabras lo que mis antepasados expresaron plásticamente.*<sup>65</sup>

Thus, this assimilative and syncretic approach of the Chorotegas, appears to be the rubric which Cuadra adopts, in that he too draws on diverse influences - both autochthonous and foreign - to broaden the symbolic and metaphorical base of his verse. In this regard, I think it is possible to suggest that Cuadra was more influenced by Darío and modernism in general. Cuadra, unlike Cardenal, never imagines a future utopia that will supplant the present reality such as that envisioned by Cardenal. He is always at pains to identify the inevitable futility of this task and to articulate its inevitable limitations. This crucial distinction between the two poets is illustrated quite effectively in Cuadra's 'El nacimiento del sol'.<sup>66</sup> The poem begins with an implied return to origins, as the poet chronicles his lyrical achievements to date:

<sup>64</sup> Aventura literaria del mestizaje: op. cit., p. 45. It is interesting to note that the first edition of *El jaguar y la luna* was accompanied by Cuadra's own sketches which were inspired by local indigneous pottery.
<sup>65</sup> 'En la casa de Darío', op. cit., p. 141.
<sup>66</sup> From *El jaguar y la luna*: on cit. p. 61

He inventado mundos nuevos. He soñado noches construidas con sustancias inefables. He fabricado astros radiantes, estrellas sutiles en la proximidad de unos ojos entrecerrados.

As the architect of a new idiom, apparently he is highly skilled. Yet this novelty of expression pales into insignificance when compared to the authentic and inchoate experiences of his ancestors:

# Nunca, sin embargo, repetiré aquel primer día cuando nuestros padres salieron con sus tribus de la húmeda selva y miraron al oriente. Escucharon el rugido del jaguar. El canto de los pájaros. Y vieron levantarse un hombre cuya faz ardía.

Herein lies the crucial difference between the two poets. Cuadra's verse never exhibits the same potential or desire for the recoupable as Cardenal's. In my view, Cuadra engages with the indigenous after the fashion of Darío, to broaden his metaphorical base. He never really imagines it as an idyllic alternative to the present reality as Cardenal does.

Cardenal's engagement with the autochthonous reality also serves another another function - to offer an alternative political vision and stimulate political activism, which is never one of Cuadra's central concerns. Consequently, Cardenal's grasp of many of the historical facts regarding indigenous America is quite selective. Aside from a few occasions - in 'Economía de Tahuantinsuyu', 'Katún 11 Ahau' and 'Mayapán', for example - Cardenal rather unashamedly ignores the more unpleasant and brutal aspects of indigenous society. Cuadra, on the other hand, does address the brutality and basic hierarchical nature of indigenous society in a more forthright manner, as in 'La pirámide de Quetzalcóatl' for example. His poetic vision is therefore, unlike Cardenal's, not always of an unspoiled and pristine landscape. In spite of their distinct approaches to their indigenous legacy, the influence of Cuadra on Cardenal's *Homenaje a los indios americanos* is, in my view, hugely significant.

### Homenaje a los indios americanos

I want to begin my analysis of *Homenaje a los indios americanos* by examining one of the central poems of the collection, 'Netzahualcóyotl', as I believe it provides a good introduction to the manner in which Cardenal employs the indigenous legacy.<sup>67</sup>

The first thing that strikes one when reading this long poem is the strong reliance throughout on historical material. Cardenal has clearly researched both the poetry and biography of this Náhuatl king-poet and makes extensive use of the myths and anecdotes associated with him.<sup>68</sup>

He begins the poem by returning to a mythical place of origin, to Tamoachan, where, according to ancient mythology, Quetzalcóatl, a potent symbol of knowledge and self-sacrifice in the Náhuatl tradition, began the process of regeneration of human life:

Otra vez como en Texcoco, como en la corte, cuando recitaban en el jardín junto a un 'árbol florido'.

This implied and desired return to origins is vital to Cardenal's general redefinition of culture and society and mirrors that envisaged by Neruda in 'La lámpara en la tierra'. B. Malinowski and Mircea Eliade, to whom I have referred in Chapter Three, suggest that such a return to a presumed originary landscape is crucial to the future recovery of exemplary models of behaviour and meaning. The evocation of such a sacred or primordial space not only provides a true potential for re-enactment of this

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Many historians appear to prefer the spelling 'Nezahualcóyotl' and many subsequent editions of *Homenaje a los indios americanos* revert to this spelling. However I will retain Cardenal's 1974 spelling throughout, unless quoting directly from other sources.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Netzahualcóyotl ruled Texcoco from 1402 until 1472.

mythical time, but also reinforces a sense of kinship and placement between past and present generations.<sup>69</sup>

Cardenal's decision to employ a succession of verbs in the present indicative (digo/oigo/veo) helps to re-immerse us in the immediacy of this historical period, just as it did in Cuadra's poems. But it also reflects a more pressing intention on Cardenal's part, namely the re-invention and recuperation of the tenets of behaviour associated with the reign of this ancient leader. Thus we witness how the poet is enabled, through the power of myth, to be transported and to transport us to a more idyllic alternative to the present reality. While Neruda, in *La lámpara en la tierra*, locates such archetypal models in the natural world, Cardenal in this poem at least, cites the example of a real historical figure as his primary source of inspiration.

Much of the information on Netzahualcóyotl, both pertaining to his personal life and to the laws and social structures put in place during his rule, is derived from historical texts such as the *Colección de cantares mexicanos* held in the National Library in Mexico City or from subsequent studies undertaken by historians such as Angel M. Garibay and Miguel León-Portilla to name but a few.<sup>70</sup> Whether the information takes the form of anecdotal references to his youth or more specific references to the educational or legal systems effected during his reign, Netzahualcóyotl is repeatedly cited as an exemplary and inspirational figure:

'El Rey tiene riquezas pero es pobre' dijo a aquel leñador y a su esposa. En la construcción del dique 'Netzahualcóyotl' el mismo Emperador cargó troncos, cargó rocas. Y después hizo el Zoológico de Chapultepec. Hay que sembrar más magueyes en mi reino

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Mircea Eliade, Myth & Reality: op. cit., pp. 5-19, Malinowski & the Work of Myth (Ivan Strenski, ed.): op. cit., pp. 82-87.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Angel M. Garibay published a two-volume study entitled *Historia de la literatura náhuatl* in 1953 & 1954. Miguel León-Portilla's *Los antiguos mexicanos a través de sus crónicas y cantares* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992) was first published in 1961.

... 'Plántese maíz, ayote, frijol a la orilla de las carreteras para los viajeros, para los pobres, no será robo, no han de morir por ello.'<sup>71</sup>

He re-imagines this inspirational and prophetic figure as Netzahualcóyotl, in the poet's mind, embodies an admirable concern with political and spiritual leadership, as well as with a concern for social justice and artistic creativity. For Cardenal, Netzahualcóyotl embodies an enviable combination of the pragmatic and the poetic, which he himself hopes to emulate:

y fue Místico, Legislador, Astrólogo, Ingeniero hizo versos, y también hizo diques platicando de puentes y de poesía nueva cuestiones de carreteras y cuestiones de melodía.

Another source of admiration is the centrality of culture evident in this ancient society and the Náhuatl perception of the role of the *sabio*. The Náhuatl 'visión poética' of the world was based on the fundamental belief that the only means of ensuring permanence in this life, of counteracting the forces of mortality and of achieving closer proximity to their God - *El Dador de la vida* - was by perfecting one's creative expression.<sup>72</sup> In Náhuatl society, therefore, the work of the artist had to be perfected and honed. As Miguel León-Portilla suggests:

... afirmaron en incontables ocasiones que tal vez la única manera posible de decir palabras verdaderas en la tierra era por el camino de la poesía y el arte que son 'flor y canto'.<sup>73</sup>

León-Portilla goes on to explain further:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Much of this anecdotal detail about the life of Netzahualcóyotl is also contained in José Luis Martínez's *Nezahualcóyotl - Vida y obra* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1972), pp. 67-73.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> For a more comprehensive illustration of the significance of poetry, art and symbolism in the Náhuatl tradition and for a more detailed explication of 'flor y canto' (*in xóchitl, in cuícatl*), see León-Portilla, *Los antiguos mexicanos a través de sus crónicas y cantares: op. cit.*, p. 90 & pp. 118-23. <sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, p. 126.

La poesía y el arte en general, 'flores y cantos', son para los tlamatinime, expresión oculta y velada que con las alas del símbolo y la metáfora puede llevar al hombre a balbucir, proyectándolo más allá de sí mismo, lo que en forma misteriosa, lo acerca tal vez a su raíz.<sup>74</sup>

Throughout 'Netzahualcóyotl', Cardenal celebrates this indigenous philosophy which emphasised the importance of culture and its role in developing society's relationship with the divine.

Sólo el canto nos hace famosos, no la guerra. Rodeado de 'tlamatinimes' 'los sabedores de cosas' Las palabras que él pintó son verdaderas.

According to ancient Toltec belief, the philosophy which Netzahualcóyotl and others absorbed as a barrier against the more militarist views of the neighbouring Aztecs, intellectuals and artists were charged with uncovering the 'verdad' which underpinned human existence. This lay not in a search for 'truth' per se, but rather in the uncovery of an expression of permanence, which, they believed, could transcend human mortality:<sup>75</sup>

> Miserere mei Quiero flores que duren en mis manos.

In many ways the concerns expressed by indigenous poets pertaining to mortality and the ephemerality of human existence which are recreated here by Cardenal, have become conventional or commonplace components of poetry. The Spanish mystics, for example, in their desire for a closer union with God, identified the need for an ascetic contemplative life and for a complete renunciation of the individual will and the concerns of this world. We recall for example, how Fray Luis de León, in both 'Noche

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> ibid., p.126. Tlamatinime means sabio.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> León-Portilla, *ibid.*, pp. 118-23.

serena' and 'Vida retirada', repeatedly bemoans the temporary nature of this life and the inevitable depreciation of our earthly denotations of stature and ownership.<sup>76</sup> Much of Cardenal's earlier work, in particular that written during his time in the Trappist monastery in Kentucky in the late 1950s and early 1960s, is underpinned by similar concerns of mortality and spirituality. I am thinking in particular of *Gethsemani, Ky*, which was formulated in the Trappist monastery of 'Our Lady of Gethsemani' in Kentucky between 1957 and 1959 (although not actually composed until after he left the order) and the prose collection *Vida en el amor* which was written while Cardenal continued his preparations for the priesthood in a monastery in Cuernavaca, Mexico.<sup>77</sup>

Cardenal is clearly drawn to this perception of intellectual or artistic activity, which conflates issues of spirituality with those pertaining to the aesthetic. In essence, the Toltec and Náhuatl definition of the poet implied someone with a special gift who was enabled, through periods of contemplation, to create something of value and permanence:

Parecen afirmar que la verdadera poesía implica un modo peculiar de conocimiento, fruto de auténtica experiencia interior, o si se prefiere, resultado de una intuición.<sup>78</sup>

Cardenal, given his own period of reflection with the Trappist order, could readily identify with this perception of poetry. Such a redefinition of the role of the poet enabled him to extend the parameters normally afforded poet and culture in contemporary society. Again he appears to draw directly on historical and poetic material preserved in those ancient texts to reappraise his contemporary situation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Fray Luis de León, *Poesías* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1980), pp. 29-31 & 9-12 respectively.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Gethsemani, Ky. is contained in Eduardo Urdanivia Bertarelli's La poesía de Ernesto Cardenal - Cristianismo y revolución (Lima: Latinoamericana Editores, 1984), pp. 169-177.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> León-Portilla, Los antiguos mexicanos a través de sus crónicas y cantares: op. cit. p. 126.

In a poem transcribed by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún and his scribes, further insight is shed onto the more extended role of the *sabio* in pre-Columbian society. In this poem, the *sabio* appears to comprise the collective responsibilities of intellectual and purveyor of knowledge, of teacher and guide - both moral and intellectual - of historian and interpreter of history, in addition to being a source of comfort to people in their everyday lives. The following few verses illustrate the general thrust of their definition:

Él mismo es escritura y sabiduría. Es camino, guía veraz para otros. Conduce a las personas y a las cosas, es guía en los negocios humanos.

El sabio verdadero es cuidadoso [como un médico] y guarda la tradición. Suya es la sabiduría trasmitida, él es quien la enseña, sigue la verdad. no deja de amonestar.<sup>79</sup>

In 'Netzahualcóyotl', Cardenal also celebrates the multi-layered nature of the sovereign's character. He applauds Netzahualcóyotl's rectitude for his opposition to the practice of human sacrifices, and for the way in which he demanded poems and songs of his subjects in place of sacrificial victims:

Nuestras ofrendas de corazones humanos nuestros sacrificios al Sol

son los cantos.<sup>80</sup>

Cardenal even suggests that during Netzahualcoyotl's reign, the authors of inferior verse were punished by higher taxes. Clearly,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> Historically, this is not completely accurate as José Luis Martínez notes that there were occasions when Netzahualcóyotl did accede to this practice, *op. cit.* p.46. However, in a general sense, the ancient Toltec philosophy which Netzahualcóyotl subscribed to, did reject the practice of human sacrifices as indefensible. León-Portilla, *ibid.*, pp. 35 & 137.

he is envious of the centrality of culture within this society and the extended role of the purveyors of culture:

Los reyes de Texcoco, Tenochtitlán y Tacuba: Reunión en la Cumbre, para hablar de poesía. Todos los tlamatinimes llegaban a Texcoco y el Emperador fue el mayor de los tlamatinimes. Esto es Educar: labrar rostros Y dio rostros a los otros, hizo sabios, fue un espejo puesto delante de sus rostros.

The fugacious nature of time appears to imbue the role of the *sabio* with an additional responsibility. He is, Cardenal suggests, charged with a further responsibility to interpret and chronicle a threatened heritage.

Hemos pintado el interior del cielo en cueros de venado ¿pero acaso nuestros descendientes entenderán el Códice?

This is certainly a perennial concern of poets and artists, Pablo Antonio Cuadra included, and is also a recurring theme in Náhuatl poetry.<sup>81</sup> Throughout this poem, Cardenal makes repeated references to the fragility of cultural transference. Although obviously preoccupied by the demise of this great culture, Cardenal is also suggesting a further parallel between himself and his predecessors, as the guardian of language and tradition, a responsibility, which as we have already seen in the Sahagún poem, was shared by Náhuatl poets. Miguel León-Portilla, for example, explains the recuperation of the ancient Toltec philosophy by the Náhuatl intellectuals in a manner which could also summarise Cardenal's project quite effectively:

Se piensa que guardando el recuerdo de aquella grandeza, resulta posible renovar en la propia vida algo de esa inspiración que había llevado tan alto a sus antecesores en la cultura.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>81</sup> León-Portilla, *ibid.*, pp. 171-9 and José Luis Martínez, *ibid.*, pp. 119-22.

León-Portilla's interpretation of Náhuatl intellectual life thus hinges on one of the primary functions of myth in society, that of the recovery of exemplary models from a sacred primeval time. Similarly, Cardenal is also engaged in a restorative cultural exercise through which he hopes to engender a regeneration of previous models and values which have been suppressed or forgotten during the process of colonisation.

Throughout this poem, the historical references to Netzahualcóyotl's rule are interspersed with references to the present reality for Cardenal. Always cognisant of the encroaching terror of Somoza, the poet was nevertheless striving to develop his spiritual and cultural project within the community at Solentiname on the Gran lago, near Granada:

Su gran sombra de palo de pochote 'príncipe caudillo de los poetas' Presidiendo la Hermandad de los cantores ... las tardes en que se reunía la hermandad ... Atabales en la brisa sobre el lago tranquilo el terror, la tiranía perezcan en buena hora sobre la tierra.

The significance which Netzahualcóyotl attached to precision in language is another source of envy for Cardenal. Cardenal repeatedly alludes to the inherent threat to language and communication during Somoza's reign of terror and even uncovers an historical precedent for Somoza in the figure of Tlacaélel.<sup>83</sup> Tlacaélel, as Cardenal points out, was instrumental in the burning of the ancient  $c \circ dices$  and paintings of their vanquished neighbours in an effort to contrive an entirely new version of Aztec history and religion:<sup>84</sup>

En Tenochtitlán, Itzcóatl el títere de Tlacaélel está quemando libros.

<sup>83</sup> León-Portilla, *ibid*, pp. 43-6 & p. 74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> ibid., pp. 90-1 & Martínez, op. cit., pp. 134-5.

Él y Tlacaélel. Dicen:

'no conviene que el pueblo conozca las pinturas' 'Se echarán a perder

> [los que están sujetos] y andará torcida la tierra'.

Just as Cardenal strives to counter the suppression of language and expression during Somoza's rule, he identifies a similar challenge faced by Netzahualcóyotl:

Los dueños del lenguaje exacto y la expresión cuidadosa Los que dan a los macehuales un lenguaje. Los maestros de la ciencia del 'tecpillatolli' ('lenguaje exacto') ... Un hablar verdadero como el náhuatl de Quetzalcóatl.

On this occasion the poet appears to conflate the Náhuatl definition of poetry as a source of truth and permanence and his own aspirations for accuracy and precision in artistic expression and content. This concern for language and cultural expression prompts Cardenal to articulate yet another shared aspiration, that of giving a voice to the voiceless, of empowering those without speech. Just as Netzahualcóyotl concerns lay with *los macehuales*, Cardenal's ultimate aspiration is to restructure aesthetic practices to re-include those normally excluded from the cultural experience, thus making culture more relevant to their lives:

Que los macehuales leyendo las piedras, los murales encuentren el sentido de sus vidas aquí en la tierra. ... La poesía es para el macehual, decía Netzahualcóyotl.

As we have seen, such a concern with the broadening of the aesthetic experience was also central to the work of both Guillén and Neruda.

Initially, the prosaic and periphrastic nature of this poem may imply little consideration on Cardenal's part for the exigencies of the poetic form. However, in reality, Cardenal reserves particular attention for language and employs varied and effective lyrical techniques throughout, many of which, as we will note, are similar to those used in Náhuatl verse.

The nature of education in the *calmécac*, the elite centres of learning in Náhuatl society and the absence of a writing system as we perceive it, ensured that most texts were memorised and passed on orally from one generation to the next.85 One of the primary concerns of all performance poets is the need to entertain and to avoid monotony. A consequence of this is the manner in which each performance of the poem often develops or embellishes the original text in some fashion. In order to facilitate recall, the Náhuatl poets and bards employed techniques, many of which are characteristic of oral or performance poetry in general. These include the repetition of key verses and refrains, a strong reliance on a series of conventional or stock images and metaphors which would be both accessible and relevant to the local audiences.

Cardenal embraces many of these conventional techniques associated with both oral or pre-literate poetry. These include repetition and parallelism, as well as intertextual explications for pre-Hispanic terms which may not be familiar to a contemporary audience, such as those cited earlier in relation to Darío. In addition, he also makes use of interpolated references to popular culture within poems of indigenous significance, to establish contemporary referentiality; such as *mini-falda/popcorn/bluejean/hongos alucinantes/la borrachera*. He casualises the lyric further by including many words of common parlance such as *cuate* and *mano* (as an abbreviated form of *hermano*).

The poet's use of verbal tenses is also highly significant. In the opening sequences of this poem, for example, he employs the present tense to great effect. Like Darío and Cuadra, such use of the present indicative allows him to transcend the finality of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> However, as León-Portilla illustrates, Náhuatl culture had also developed a sophisticated system of glyphs, ideograms and pictograms with which they recorded everything from calendrical changes to more complex philosophical ideas, *Los antiguos mexicanos a través de sus crónicas y cantares: op. cit.*, pp. 52-63.

historical time and to visualise an alternative temporality. The poem is framed within the actuality of Tamoachan and the 'Arbol florido', the latter a meeting-place for poets. Once the suspension of the temporal is effected, the poet then leads us on repeated occasions into an alternative, vibrant historical period where a different vision is realised:

Ando buscando a alguien entre las flores.

De tarde está pintando sus poemas. Mira desde la Biblioteca

las ensenadas de color quetzal las islas verdes yapalli contra el lago azul tejotli el cielo como pintado con hierba-de-azul y al borde del agua Texcoco color garza los templos pintados de blanco tizatl.

The present indicative effects this potential for change:

Aún se enseña a ser tolteca en las 'casas de canto' ... Allá está la reunión.

This self-assuredness on the part of the poetic voice runs contrary to a series of questions - both implied and direct - which are repeatedly posed throughout the poem in the future tense and in the subjunctive mood:

Tal vez así dejemos de ser mendigos (con los cantos) ¿Alguien puede acaso reinar en la tierra? Se nos oculta ...

Los amigos volverán a vivir? Tal vez somos como mosaico roto que se juntará de nuevo.

These doubts are subsequently counterbalanced by a series of exhortations at the close of the poem:

Ven otra vez a presidir junto al lago la reunión entre flores y cantos, de Presidente-poetas. Ponte en tu cabeza tu corona de flores oh rey Netzahualcóyotl.

Clearly, there are many shared themes which strengthen the similarities between Cardenal and the Náhuatl lyrical tradition; such as a common concern with the nature of human life, of death and immortality and of the place of poetry in our society. José Luis Martínez suggests that the Náhuatl poets limited themselves to a small number of recurring themes and concerns, and also concludes that they relied on a limited set of literary techniques, metaphors and motifs to explore these concerns.<sup>86</sup> During the course of this poem, Cardenal also incorporates many stock Náhuatl epithets and metaphors into his own text; such as la región del misterio or donde se vive sin cuerpo to refer to death and the afterlife, el Dador de la vida or el Inventor de la vida to connote God, el árbol florido which, although originally perceived as the meeting place for poets and artists in Náhuatl society, comes to signify the creative process itself for Cardenal. He also makes use of the Náhuatl concept of education and permanence of darles rostros and of epithets of piedras, plumas and jades finos to convey the futility of what we consider valuable and important in this life. We note also how he persistently identifies political tyrants with predatory animals in a similar fashion to the Náhuatl poets. This is not dissimilar to Neruda's dehumanisation of political dictators in both Coral de año nuevo para la patria en tinieblas and Los conquistadores.

On occasions 'Netzahualcóyotl' clearly mirrors the language and sentiments of many of Netzahualcóyotl's own poems. There are, for example, obvious similarities between the opening of Netzahualcóyotl's 'El árbol florido' and a line from Cardenal's poem:

¡Chupe miel al ave quetzal,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> Martínez, op. cit., p. 129.

chupe miel el dorado quéchol! ('El árbol florido')<sup>87</sup>

Las aves chupan miel en el Arbol Florido. ('Netzahualcóyotl')

In the following two examples we can observe further striking analogies between Cardenal and Netzahualcóyotl, particularly in their shared concerns with mortality and the immortality achieved through verse. Of note also are the striking similarities in their choice of metaphor and parallel structure:

Que los cantos sean duraderos, las metáforas como la calavera de cristal de roca como la máscara de diorita Sólo así se puede vivir en la tierra ... ('Netzahualcóyotl')

Como si fueran flores los cantos son nuestro atavío, oh amigos: con ellos venimos a vivir en la tierra

Verdadero es nuestro canto, verdaderas nuestras flores, el hermoso canto. Aunque sea jade, aunque sea oro, ancho plumaje de quetzal ... ¡Que lo haga yo durar aquí junto al tambor! ('Los cantos son nuestro atavío')<sup>88</sup>

Of course, such a coincidence of language and lyrical structure raises many issues of concern with regard to the legitimacy of Cardenal's project. Questions of plagiarism and mimeticism are inevitably suggested with respect to the manner in which this poet consciously utilises and absorbs the inherited text into his own poetry. In some cases, Cardenal acknowledges the original sources by naming the precise source, or by using quotation

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Martínez, op. cit., p. 184.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, p. 182.

marks or other indicators of reported speech. But on other occasions the character and nature of the original poet converge with the poetic voice as if they were indistinguishable voices:

Tan sólo en tu pintura vivimos. Dador de la vida. Y como figuras borradas en un códice así se borrará de tu pintura la Sociedad de los poetas.

The above excerpt from Cardenal's poem clearly echoes a poem by Netzahualcóyotl which also examines man's relationship with God:

Como una pintura nos iremos borrando, como una flor hemos de secarnos sobre la tierra, cual ropaje de plumas del quetzal, del zacuán, del azulejo, iremos pereciendo. Iremos a su casa.<sup>89</sup>

Questions of lyrical originality and imitation are largely dispensed with by Cardenal. He appears to have identified in these poems an enabling tool with which he can articulate his own concerns of mortality and culture, as well as reasserting the validity of the inherited text. Many of his own aspirations for political and social change are sourced in this re-interpretation and revaluation of indigenous mythology. His embrace of the underlying tenets of Náhuatl verse, also enables Cardenal to effect a sense of cultural continuity and permanence, or as he suggests:

El poder decir una palabras verdaderas en medio de las cosas que perecen.

It is thus in the creative process, through this articulation of an originary language and cultural models, that the poet establishes a stronger sense of lineage and ultimately reaffirms the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, p. 204.

positionality of the marginalised indigenous heritage. In reality, Cardenal had come to view his work as part of a natural continuum of cultural practice.

'Mayapán' provides us with some further vital insight into the particulars of Cardenal's project. As he traces the declines and successes within Mayan culture, the poet identifies a clear analogy between his own project and that of the poets of indigenous America. Each generation of artists, Cardenal opines, developed new forms of expression based not on wholly original work but on a corpus of motifs and influences inherited from previous generations. Thus, Cardenal, by utilising an inherited artistic canvas, by incorporating inherited artistic practices such as these into his own writing, was able to invent an entirely new means of expression:

Un artista oscuro en su estudio encorvado ensayando otras líneas otro estilo, 'avant-garde' poetas con nuevos ismos ismos mayas creando

otra etapa de civilización para el pueblo maya.

Hence, just as Borges dismissed conventional concerns of artistic originality, Cardenal also appears to have consciously sought out aesthetic and cultural precursors as a means of asserting an alternative identity, what Lois Parkinson Zamora referred to as historical precedents'. What is clear from 'usable both 'Netzahualcóyotl' and 'Mayapán' is that Cardenal, had uncovered an alternative corpus of language, references and correspondences within the indigenous, pre-Columbian tradition which reflected the particulars of his own project. By engaging with them, and elaborating upon these correspondences, Cardenal hoped to celebrate and reaffirm the validity of this autochthonous tradition. The retrieval of these parallels and originary models from this counter-culture also enabled the poet to revaluate his own sense of alterity and inherited perceptions of his role and responsibilities as a poet within the cultural praxis.

Within indigenous culture, as I have already suggested, Cardenal had identified a much more extensive role for the *sabio* which incorporated many extraliterary responsibilities. I would like to examine now, with reference to some of the other poems in *Homenaje a los indios americanos*, the manner in which Cardenal actively challenged conventional perceptions of the poet and poetry, through his engagement with the indigenous tradition.

In 'Netzahualcóyotl' there were several references to the need for the protection of language with the poet perceived ultimately as the purveyor of language and truth. It is a motif which Cardenal also develops in many of the Mayan poems. In '8 Ahau', for example:

Palabras falsas han llovido sobre nosotros ... Palabras falsas. Palabras de locura Hemos tenido el ataque de las malas lenguas.

On this occasion, Cardenal suggests that the assault on the precision and autonomy of language by the current Somoza dictatorship makes it incumbent on poets to become the custodians of a more truthful history:

> Escribimos en el Libro para los años futuros. Los poetas, los que protegemos al pueblo con palabras.

It is clearly a role which engages the poet in the revolutionary process, a process charged with providing intellectual guidance:

> Mi deber es ser intérprete vuestro deber (y el mío) es nacer de nuevo. ('8 Ahau')

Several other poems identify a protean intellectual figure. In Mayan culture he uncovers the multi-faceted figure of the *chilán*:

Chilán Poeta Intérprete Sacerdote hacé saber que ya llegó la primera luna llena del katún luna encinta.

Similarly in 'Katún 11 Ahau' the *chilán* appears to embody a combination of shaman, artist, and interpreter of sacred texts:

El Chilán:

el que lee las escrituras sagradas y estudia el cielo nocturno. - Los movimientos del Sol y de la Luna para saber el tiempo de la preparación de las tierras, la cortada de las mazorcas,

la quema de las milpas,

la puesta de las trampas, la búsqueda de los venados en el monte. El Chilán: Él señala los días de lluvia. Los días en que los hombres cantan. El final de la estación de las lluvias. Defiende de las plagas y el hambre. Distribuye la comida en los días de hambre. Supervigila la labrada de las estelas, diseña los nuevos templos, entrega las tabletas con los eclipses.

In the Cuna culture of Panama, Cardenal focusses on the role of the *nele* (sabio/medicine-man) and on Nele de Kantule (1870-1944) in particular. He appears to envy the breadth of knowledge and experience required for such a position and the accumulative skills of this man who underwent years of instruction in practical, as well as in more esoteric matters. His admiration for Nele de Kantule is further enhanced by the latter's democratic style of government and by the fact that he converted to Christianity before his death: Sabía todas las tradiciones y los cantos sagrados No fue partidario de la civilización recibida indiscriminadamente ni de la posición tradicionalista extrema de no recibir nada de los 'waga' sino: asimilar todo lo beneficioso de la civilización conservando todo lo valioso de los indios.

In many ways this assessment of Nele de Kantule's attitude to culture reflected Cardenal's own. Like the Cuna leader, Cardenal was anxious to preserve and catalogue the indigenous traditions of America, but also acknowledged and embraced other outside influences, in particular, that of the poetic tradition of North America. So although anxious to retrieve precedents and models from pre-colonial society, Cardenal's post-colonial vision was, like those of Guillén and Neruda, neither exclusivist nor essentialist in nature with regard to lyrical influences.

Many of the poems dealing with the North American Indians also revolve around similarly inspiring archetypal figures who provided cultural and political leadership, as well as spiritual their communities, such as Deganawida guidance to and Tahirassawichi in 'Kayanerenhkowa' and 'Tahirassawichi en respectively. In 'Cantares Washington' mexicanos II'. Netzahualcóyotl embodies a similar confluence of responsibilities as, in Cardenal's view, he too successfully combined a concern with aesthetics with a sense of communal solidarity and a desire to reshape the national identity. This admiration is, as I have already suggested, also apparent in 'Netzahualcóyotl' as Cardenal repeatedly draws our attention to the manner in which this poetleader cultivated an innovative approach to language and society. The manner in which he effected a certain degree of collective change through his focus on artistic practices and his assertion of the centrality of culture by Netzahualcóyotl, provide Cardenal with an alternative model of the poet.

On occasions Cardenal proffers an antithetical perspective on culture as a means of highlighting further positive aspects of Náhautl culture. In both 'Netzahualcóyotl' and 'Mayapán' he cites examples of the individualism evident in certain phases of Náhuatl and Mayan history and its effects upon the cultures of those societies. In 'Netzahualcóyotl' he repeatedly contrasts Netzahualcóyotl (the archetypal, prototype) with the more militarist individualism of the Aztecs (the flawed, imperfect model). Similarly, in 'Mayapán', he contrasts the highly-artistic, collective endeavours of classical Mayan culture with the inferior models produced during the reign of the Cocom. He begins 'Mayapán' by lauding the view underpinning Mayan society during the classical period that art was a means of praising God, an extension of one's spirituality:

textos bien labrados en los altares en los dinteles textos textos largos textos

textos en las gradas largos textos subiendo la larga fila de gradas el poema meticulosamente grabado en la escalera de piedra hacia el cielo.

In doing so, he strengthens the connection in his own mind between Mayan and Náhuatl cultures, in their shared respect for the poetic and the spiritual. In addition, he appears to be inferring that the apparent disinterest and democracy of this period in Mayan history stemmed precisely from the inherent spirituality which underpinned every aspect of their lives and everyday activities (he even refers to *los gritos del baseball sagrado*):

Las carreteras no eran para carros sino para ritos las carreteras, religiosas Las ciudades no tenían defensas (como pueblito maya de hoy, sin defensas entre sus milpas) No tenían murallas ni cuarteles la palabra 'muralla' no hay en su lengua la palabra 'cuartel' no hay en su lengua

#### Tan democráticos

que los arqueólogos no saben nada de sus gobernantes.

The logical corollary therefore, in Cardenal's mind, is that any subsequent manifestations of cultural decline are the result of an erosion of spiritual values. In the case of Mayan culture, he implies that during the post-classical period, the demise of spirituality and the cult of individualism associated with the Cocom reign brought with it an inevitable decline in artistic practices:

La mejor albañilería en la casa de los nobles no en los templos Las buenas esculturas (del estilo Puuc) (es decir, Antigüedades)

en las casas de los ricos Mediocres las esculturas de los templos incensarios de mal barro, poroso; y hechos en moldes; dioses en serie, mass production, assembly line, Henry Ford.

Although there is extensive debate about the reasons for the cultural demise of the Mayas between the 8th and 10th century, Cardenal appears to lay the blame firmly with the Cocom family who ruled the region from Mayapán for over 250 years, and their blatant disregard for matters spiritual. The paucity of the architecture and hieroglyphics of the post-classical period, he suggests, ran completely counter to the essence of Mayan culture:

y Mayapán 'LA QUE TIENE MURALLAS' Mayapán ciudad no maya.

Cardenal goes on to suggest a parallel between this decline evidenced during the Cocom rule and the inferior nature of contemporary American culture. He contrasts the sophistication of the hieroglyphics on the Mayan stelae during the classical period and the gaudy advertising signs along the highways in Texas. He also highlights the originality and skill of the Mayan artist who appears in sharp contrast to the monotonous conformity of the mass-produced products from the Ford assembly line. The colour and vibrancy of the quetzal in its natural habitat and its significance in ancient Mayan culture conflicts sharply with the image of the stuffed quetzal on President Arévalo's desk and the rampant commercialisation of contemporary Mayan culture.<sup>90</sup>

Cardenal's objectives in evoking such exemplars of cultural and spiritual decline are threefold. Firstly, he is attempting to reinforce the need to prioritise culture and cultural expression in contemporary society. By highlighting its collective function in indigenous society, he hopes to effect a more communal approach to culture in contemporary society and thus redefine his own role within the revolutionary praxis. Secondly, by reinforcing a link between the spiritual and the cultural as identified by him in indigenous culture, he also anticipates a similar reappraisal of religion and spirituality in modern society. Lastly, his evocation of negative historical figures such as the Cocom, is a means by which he can illustrate how the Somozas were neither aberrations nor unique. In doing so, he was seeking to demonstrate how such tyrannies were transitory in past times, a fact which may also engender hope for change with regard to the then Somoza dynasty.

Perhaps what is most interesting with regard to Cardenal's views on spirituality is the manner in which he conflates his own Christian perceptions of God with Náhuatl perceptions of 'El Dador de la Vida'. Firstly, God and 'El Dador de la Vida' or 'El Dueño del cerca y del junto' of the Náhuatl tradition were viewed as omnipresent, omnipotent and somewhat distant figures. Secondly, they were perceived as the source of all life and vitality, including poetry. Thirdly, all human activity, including poetry, was viewed by both Cardenal and indigenous society as a means of communicating and praising God. In 'Netzahualcóyotl' for example, Cardenal highlights the diminutive figure of man and asserts God

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> This is also apparent in 'Ardilla de los tunes de un katún' where Cardenal expresses his complete dismay at contemporary society's disregard for something which was held sacred by the ancient Maya 'Han comido Quetzal lo han comido frito'.

as the source of all life and vitality. In addition, he views poetry, or the creative act, as an extension of his spirituality, in other words as a means of communicating with God and of expressing truth:

Con la Belleza pinta las cosas el Dador de la Vida con Flor-Canto da color

las cosas son su Códice esos colores del lago, rosicleres de flores son sus flores y cantos, sus poemas tan sólo en su pintura vivimos Con los poemas nos acercamos a él, con pinturas. Inventamos cantos en honor de Aquel que se inventa y es inventor de las cosas y él está en los cantos no en las 'guerras floridas' sino en FLOR-CANTO y da los poemas mientras fumamos.

In the following poem recorded by León-Portilla, one notes how Tlapalteuccitzin, an indigenous poet, also perceives his verse as a medium of communication with God:

He llegado a los brazos del árbol florido, yo florido colibrí, con aroma de flores me deleito, con ellas mis labios endulzo. Oh Dador de la vida, con flores eres invocado. Nos humillamos aquí, te damos deleite en el lugar de los floridos atabales, ¡señor Atecpanécatl! Allí guarda el tamboril, lo guarda en la casa de la primavera, allí te esperan tus amigos, Yaomanatzin, Micohuatzin, Ayocuatzin. Ya con flores suspiran los príncipes.<sup>91</sup>

José Luis Martínez has also recorded an original poem by Netzahualcóyotl which conveys similar sentiments regarding the nature of 'El Dador de la Vida'. It is entitled 'Nos enloquece el Dador de la Vida':

No en parte alguna puede estar la casa del inventor de sí mismo, Dios, el señor nuestro, por todas partes es invocado, por todas partes es también venerado.

Se busca su gloria, su fama en la tierra. Él es quien inventa las cosas, él es quien se inventa a sí mismo: Dios. Por todas partes es también venerado. se busca su gloria, su fama en la tierra.

... Nadie en verdad es tu amigo, ¡oh Dador de la Vida! Sólo como si entre las flores buscáramos a alguien, así te buscamos, nosotros que vivimos en la tierra, mientras estamos a tu lado.<sup>92</sup>

Cardenal also embraces the Náhuatl concept of God as the originator of poetry. Again we note the similarities between the sentiments expressed by the Náhuatl poet, Aquiauhtzin, in this regard and those which follow, as expressed by Cardenal:

Sólo el dios, escucha ya aquí, ha bajado del interior del cielo, viene cantando.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> 'Diálogo de la poesía - flor y canto', León-Portilla, Los antiguos mexicanos a través de sus crónicas y cantares: op. cit., p. 135.
 <sup>92</sup> Martínez, op. cit., pp. 189-90.

Ya le responden los príncipes, que llegaron a tañer sus flautas. ('Diálogo de la poesía')<sup>93</sup>

Del cielo viene el cantor. Del interior del cielo las flores y los cantos sí, de su Interior. Brotan flores, brotan flores de mi atabal. Flor-canto son mis palabras. Yo ando siempre cantando. No ando en Propagandas

Tú estás en estos cantos Dador de la Vida. ('Cantares mexicanos II')

These additional links which Cardenal identifies between himself and his pre-Columbian ancestors in terms of spirituality are yet another means by which the poet establishes and reinforces the continuum between himself and the cultural identity and practices of his pre-Columbian ancestors. By persistently affirming this nexus between past and present traditions, Cardenal validates originary models of language, culture and spirituality located in the pre-colonial tradition which had been displaced by the colonial experience.

His engagement with indigenous America also provides Cardenal with an alternative temporal prism with which to interpret the historical and present reality. His anxiety to effect change and articulate a renewed sense of collective hope is enabled by his assimilation of one of the central tenets of indigenous mythology a belief in the circularity of time.

Virtually all cultures exhibit a conflict between these two distinct concepts of time; the linear and the cyclical. While the linear concept is fundamentally a product of the post-Enlightenment, industrial age, the cyclical has its roots in more traditional, preindustrial societies. Both Náhuatl and Mayan culture were centred on a belief in the cyclical nature of time which had evolved out of their interweaving of human and natural life cycles. Time, for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> León-Portilla, Los antiguos mexicanos a través de sus crónicas y cantares: op. cit., p. 131.

these indigenous cultures was therefore, in some way, recoupable. Ancient Náhuatl philosophy was centred on a belief that this world had evolved through a series of cycles and had at this period in history entered its fifth stage:

Cada edad o sol termina siempre con un cataclismo. Pero en vez de volver a repetirse una historia, fatalmente idéntica a la anterior, el nuevo ciclo ascendente en espiral, va originando formas mejores.<sup>94</sup>

This renovative and cyclical vision of earthly life was not shared by the Aztecs who arrived in Central Mexico towards the end of the 13th century. The Aztec philosophy of life was underpinned by a much more finalist interpretation of the cycles of civilisation. They sought to postpone the anticipated cataclysm at the end of this cycle of the earth's existence, and with it the death of 'Huitzilpochtli', their most important deity. Thus, they believed that they had to feed Huitzilpochtli (the sun) with the food of life, (human blood) and as a result, the Aztecs, as the chosen race, would achieve an unending and eternal life in this cycle or 'sol'.<sup>95</sup>

Contemporaneous with the rise of the Aztecs was the reemergence of the ancient Toltec belief in a more enduring cyclical view of time. Miguel León-Portilla outlines the basic tenets of this philosophy in the following way:

Para los sabios antiguos, seguidores del pensamiento tolteca, la única forma de hacer frente al cataclismo que pondría fin a la quinta edad, era buscando en un plano personal la manera de crear en sí mismos un 'rostro sabio y un corazón firme como la piedra' que hiciera digno al hombre de ir más allá de esta vida, a 'la región de los descarnados', en busca del principio supremo 'Tloque Nahuaque', Dueño del cerca y del junto, quien tal vez querría acordarse del hombre, ser fugaz como las plumas de quetzal que se desgarran.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> León-Portilla, *ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 90-3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 91-2.

This aspiration for moral perfection thus anticipated a future state of permanence in an afterlife, and consequently differed quite radically from the more apocalyptic view proposed by the Aztecs. Consequently, poets and philosophers like Netzahualcóyotl sought, through the medium of verse and song, to cultivate and reestablish a similar attention to moral behaviour such as this suggested in the older Toltec society.

Throughout Homenaje a los indios americanos Cardenal exhibits a similar anxiety to suspend historical time and embrace in its place the indigenous Toltec model of mythical time. As well as the indigenous perception of time, I believe Cardenal is also influenced by two further models, the Judaeo-Christian model and that of Marxist theory, both of which are also underpinned by fundamentally cyclical structures. Both of these theories are concerned with issues of primary importance to the poet. spirituality and the rise of materialism. Both are inspired by archetypal models of behaviour or society (the Garden of Eden and 'the primeval communal ownership of land').<sup>97</sup> Both posit the ultimate attainment of a collective or individual goal; (entry into heaven and salvation of the soul, the realisation of the 'whole man' in a classless society) through an evolutionary process. Whether this transformation of temporality is sourced in Cardenal's reading of indigenous cultures, or in experiences pertaining to his spiritual and political aspirations, what is evident in Homenaje a los indios americanos is that the issue of time becomes a crucial device in this collection.

Such a reappraisal of the temporal provides Cardenal with a significant and additional potential for artistic creativity. Pablo Antonio Cuadra, commenting on the extensive use of the indigenous canvas by Nicaraguan poets, suggests that one of the primary reasons for this attraction to the indigenous is precisely this 'capacidad mitificadora', this 'antiritmo histórico' which they identified in the indigenous tradition. Cuadra suggests that, as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> Engels/Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Preface to the German edition, 1883) (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), p. 15.

writers, it provides them with an alternative sense of hope and possibility.<sup>98</sup>

Both of Cardenal's 'Cantares mexicanos' suggest interesting perceptions of time. The first poem centres on what is essentially а universal concern of poets and artists regarding the ephemerality of human life and their work. In keeping with Náhuatl tradition, Cardenal chronicles time as transitory, and as I have already suggested, employs similar metaphors and language to those used by the Náhuatl poets to symbolise the fragility and erosion of our perceptions of significance by a much more powerful force - death. Flowers, precious stones and ceramic pieces all decay or fade away; se marchitan/se quiebran/se desmorona. There are clear parallels between the Náhuatl perception of life, death and the afterlife and Cardenal's articulation of it in Homenaje a los indios americanos.

In the following examples one is immediately struck by the use of a similar motif in Cardenal's verse and in indigenous poetry to connote their shared emphasis on the ephemerality of all human life. In the first excerpt from 'Cantares mexicanos I', the poet begins by listing a succession of parallel metaphors sourced in the natural world, after the fashion of the Náhuatl poets, to emphasise the transitory nature of human perceptions of status, value and beauty:

Las plumas de quetzal se secan los mosaicos de plumas de colibrí se descoloran como las flores los mosaicos de turquesa, de jade, de obsidiana y de nácar caen como flores. Los collares de caracoles y de jades se desgranan como sartas de flores de cacao ...

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> 'Introducción a la literatura nicaragüense', Aventura literaria del mestizaje y otros ensayos: op. cit., pp. 46-7.

He then concedes that this life is in fact illusionary and employs the motif of life as a dream to highlight the inevitability of death and the futility of much of the work of the poet:

... Sólo venimos a soñar aquí en la tierra a dejar unos manuscritos iluminados

como sueños.

Also of note is his perception of death as a democratic and levelling force:

Los reinados de los reyes son breves como las rosas ... y el Rey de Texcoco será entonces igual a cualquier [macehual.]

The similarities and parallels between this poem by Cardenal and some of the original Náhuatl lyrics are quite striking. Miguel León-Portilla for example, cites the original 'Cantares mexicanos' in his study. The following excerpt from the original poems illustrates a similar indigenous preoccupation with the fugacious nature of human life:

Uno por uno iremos pereciendo, ninguno quedará.

Metidla, oh príncipes de Huexotzinco, aunque sea jade, aunque sea oro, también tendrá que ir al lugar de los descarnados.<sup>99</sup>

This coincidence of language and thematic concern is also evident in the following poem by Netzahualcóyotl, recorded by José Luis Martínez:

## Graciosas flores

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> León-Portilla, Los antiguos mexicanos a través de sus crónicas y cantares: op. cit., p. 172.

hay que la aurora baña de rocío, muertas con los primeros resplandores que el sol derrama por el aire umbrío. Pasa en un punto su belleza vana, y así pasa también la pompa humana.

¡Cuán breve y fugitivo es el reinado que las flores ejercen, cuando imperan! ¡No es menos el honor algo y preciado que en sí los hombres perpetuar esperan! Cada blasón que adquieren se convierte en sus manos en símbolo de muerte.<sup>100</sup>

León-Portilla also includes other poems which articulate a common perception held by many indigenous poets of the essential vulnerability of the human condition. The following examples illustrate further the correlation in terms of theme between the poetry of Cardenal and indigenous verse:

El Dador de la vida se burla: sólo un sueño perseguimos, oh amigos nuestros, nuestros corazones confían, pero él en verdad se burla.<sup>101</sup>

¿Acaso hablamos algo verdadero aquí, Dador de la vida? Sólo soñamos, sólo nos levantamos del sueño. Sólo es como un sueño ... Nadie habla aquí la verdad ...<sup>102</sup>

According to Mayan tradition, many other worlds had existed before the present one, but each previous world had been destroyed by a deluge because of an underlying imperfection. The 'Popol Vuh', written since the Conquest, is perhaps one of the most extensive records of the Quiché Maya. The creation myth

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>100</sup> Martínez, op. cit., p. 271.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> León-Portilla, Los antiguos mexicanos a través de sus crónicas y cantares: op. cit., pp. 119-120.
 <sup>102</sup> ibid., p. 120.

contained therein centres on the exploits of the first humans, the 'Hero Twins', who outwitted the Gods of the underworld and attained the possibility of an afterlife. As Robert Sharer suggests, Xibalba, the place of death (the underworld) and paradoxically, also the genesis of this afterlife, was divided into a place of suffering and a place of pleasure depending on the kind of life or death you had experienced.<sup>103</sup> As Sharer records, many historians suspect the influence of Christian teaching on this perception of reward and retribution based on moral behaviour. Ultimately, the potential for rebirth centred on the most potent symbol of life and power in Mayan mythology, the sun:

The myth of the Hero Twins was one of the central axioms of ancient Maya life and ritual. It demonstrated how extraordinary humans could enter Xibalba, outwit the gods of death, and return, and thus was a metaphor for the greatest life force in the cosmos, the sun, which emerges from Xibalba every morning.<sup>104</sup>

Throughout *Homenaje a los indios americanos*, Cardenal comes to rely increasingly on these recurring threads and motifs of the cyclical view of life which he has identified in native Mayan culture. In many of his poems dealing with the Mayas, Cardenal assimilates much of their significance for astral and lunar cycles. By corroborating this particular aspect of Mayan beliefs, he is able to articulate some of his own aspirations for an afterlife and ultimately for a transformation of the current socio-political circumstances.

The following verses from 'Mayapán' illustrate more of Cardenal's attitude to the temporal:

El Tiempo el Tiempo el Tiempo la preocupación por el misterio del tiempo habían sido esas estelas o: obsesión de eternidad

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> The Ancient Mayas (Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 525.
 <sup>104</sup> ibid., p. 522.

# Fechas hacia atrás

buscando la eternidad buscando el futuro también hacia atrás, en la eternidad.

Here he celebrates and elaborates upon the Mayan fascination with time, and like his predecessors, seeks out an alternative locus in this past, which he hopes can be recreated in the present. As a result we are persistently aware of this poet's desire to recapture and recreate something of the originary, defining models of this culture. In order to do so, he has come to realise that he must surrender himself to the Mayan concept of mythical time, to this inherited belief in the potentiality of circular time:

Pero el tiempo es redondo se repite pasado presente futuro son lo mismo revoluciones del sol revoluciones de la luna revoluciones sinódicas de los planetas

y la historia también revoluciones Se repiten Y los sacerdotes

llevando la cuenta

calculando

las revoluciones.

He continues:

Y cada 260 años (un Año de años) la historia se repite. Se repiten los katunes Katunes pasados son los del futuro historia y profecía son lo mismo.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>105</sup> According to Mayan astronomy, the 'Katun' cycles were cycles of 7,200 days (or 20 years approximately) repeated approximately every 256 years. See Merideth Paxton 'The Books of Chilam Balam: Astronomical Content and the Paris Codex' in Antony Aveni's *The Sky in Mayan Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 216-46.

In both '8 Ahau' and 'Katún II Ahau', the poet also celebrates the Mayan belief in the circularity of time, in order to suggest that the avarice and injustice of the current regime will be transitory and short-lived.<sup>106</sup> Like the Mayan shaman, Cardenal comes to rely on the movements and changes in the natural world to determine the precise moment of transition and change:

Mirad la luna, los árboles de la selva para saber cuándo habrá un cambio de poder.

As Robert Sharer explains, the Mayas also relied extensively on shamanic interpretations of lunar and solar cycles to predict and explain periods of calamity.<sup>107</sup> Cardenal repeatedly celebrates this pragmatism shown by the Mayan shaman who predicted and prophesied practical advice of change through his close examination of planetary and astral cycles:

## El Chilán:

el que lee las escrituras sagradas y estudia el cielo nocturno. -Los movimientos del Sol y de la Luna para saber el tiempo de la preparación de las tierras, la cortada de las mazorcas,

la quema de las milpas,

la puesta de las trampas, la búsqueda de los venados en el monte.

The poet's lyrical ambitions are increasingly informed by his study of Mayan cosmology. There are many references to lunar and solar cycles in these poems which testify to the growing importance of this cultural tradition in Cardenal's interpretation of the contemporary reality. What is clear also is that the poet's political ambitions have become increasingly informed by his reading of Mayan cosmology. He persistently suggests a correlation between cosmological change and political change and between his own role as poet and priest in a period of revolution

 $<sup>^{106}</sup>$  'Ahau' means 'lord' and the 'katunes' were always named after the ruler who was in power on their final day.  $^{107}$  op. cit., p. 514.

and change in Nicaragua and that of the Mayan shaman. In reality, Cardenal aspires to a similar combination of the pragmatic and the spiritual which the shaman embodies and to an equally forceful conviction in the renovative and mythical potential of time. In many of the Mayan poems the poet reaffirms this commitment to the potentiality of mythical time through a persistent use of the future indicative:

Pero pasará el katún de los Hombres Crueles. El Katún del Arbol de la Vida será establecido. - Y un gobierno benévolo.

... Habrá buenos gobernantes para dicha del pueblo. Señores legítimos. Abundancia en las montañas, y bellas ceremonias. ('Katún II Ahau')

Such a use of the future is also manifest in 'Oráculos de Tikal (de un Ah Kin de Ku)', where even as he chronicles the fears of life under a dictatorship, the poet remains resolute in his conviction in the inevitability of political change as promised by the Sandinistas:

Como ves esa estrella en la tarde sobre la choza así iluminará tu vida la revolución. El pueblo saldrá de sus selvas espesas, de sus pedregales ... Será el tiempo de amanecer y del permanecer alertas el cambio del plato, el cambio del gobierno y saldrán a decir su enseñanza de las selvas espesas de los pedregales.

On occasions Cardenal even rationalises current difficulties according to indigenous ideology, as if they were akin to their perceptions of retribution and penitence:

Ubico, Carías, los Somozas Cuánto habremos de dar para saciarlos? In many of the Mayan poems, Cardenal identifies a further potent symbol of renaissance and hope in objects of organic significance:

Mirad cómo brilla en las mañanas el lucero Quetzalcóatl! Mirad el maíz: muere y renace tiernecito después de las primeras lluvias enviadas [por Tlaloc.]

Si no hay en la olla sino polvo es que estoy siendo molido como en piedra de moler por la [madre Cihuacóatl]

y revivirán mis huesos floridos! Quetzalcóatl me sacará de Mictlan.

('Cantares mexicanos I')

As I have illustrated in the previous chapter, this perception of the natural world as a restorative force is also a feature of the *Canto general.* 'Milpa' is a good example of the manner in which Cardenal employs such organicist myths. The essence of the poem centres on the Mayan belief that Chac, the Mayan God of rain and fertility, enables the germination of the corn each season.<sup>108</sup> However it is also informed by a parallel motif of human creation and rebirth and laden with suggestions of mythical import. Thus the poet begins by introducing this parallel theme in the opening verses:

El maíz está enterrado, invisible como los muertos en tu milpa.

Almost immediately we are led beyond the organic and into a self-contained terrain informed by intermeshing symbols and myths of rebirth and resurrection. The significance of the organic cycle is enhanced by the belief in Mayan mythology that corn was the true source of all human and vegetable life:

Bajo la tierra los granos, grada a grada una grada cada día están subiendo la pirámide del maíz.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>108</sup> Sharer, *ibid.*, pp. 531-2.

The cyclical nature of the corn, the collusion between many distinct elemental forces to bring about its germination, suggest to the poet another kind of parallel, that of a possibility for renaissance of human life. He contrives such an analogy between the human and the natural cycles, with a certain mythological intent, in an effort once again to imagine an alternative to the contemporary reality. There are echoes of the myths of Orpheus and Osiris, both of which are ultimately symbols of new life and immortality. Cardenal also suggests parallels between the mysterious and magical 'Coba', populated with strange and unusual animals and, Mictlan, the place of the dead in ancient Mexican tradition, between the purgatory of Christian belief and Hades, the underworld of Greek mythology.<sup>109</sup>

The use of such botanical and organicist motifs underpins many of the poems dealing with the native people of North American and Colombia in *Homenaje a los indios americanos*. The interdependence and respect for the natural world which the poet viewed in these cultures was clearly a source of envy and admiration. In poems such as 'Sierra Nevada' and 'Tahirassawichi en Washington', he celebrates the equilibrium between the organic and the human which sustained much native American philosophy. This harmony, Cardenal suggests, stemmed from parallels of renaissance and rebirth which these people identified in the natural world:

Y cantamos a la aurora cuando sale del oriente y toda la vida se renueva (esto es muy misterioso, les estoy hablando de algo muy sagrado)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> The poet's insistence on the east as the primary source of rejuvenation is also significant. In Mayan culture, the east symbolised not only the source of the rising sun but also a victory over the forces of death. Christianity is brimming with suggestions of renaissance originating in the east. The origins of Náhuatl culture were also believed to be in the east as the *tlamatinime* (sabios) came from the east. Quetzalcóatl was believed to have gone to Tlapalan, in the east of Mexico, a myth which tragically facilitated Cortés's success as he was erroneously perceived as the returning Quetzalcóatl. León-Portilla, *Los antiguos mexicanos: op. cit.*, p. 50 & p. 78.

Cantamos al lucero de la mañana el lucero es como un hombre y está pintado de rojo el color de la vida. ('Tahirassawichi en Washington')

The correlation between the botanical and the human enabled indigenous people to view life as simply a constituent part of a much greater cycle of events:

La vida es gestación; la muerte nacimiento. El feto es la primera fase de la gestación. El parto otra fase. Siembra, cosecha, nacimiento, muerte y renacimiento, son un solo ciclo: la Ley de la Madre. Los niños son 'semillas'. En la Sierra Nevada sienten que no se separan nunca de la Madre. ('Sierra Nevada')

In most of these societies, death was not perceived as final or immutable, but viewed as simply another phase in the life cycle:

Siempre están en un estado intra-uterino. Se estaba dentro de ella en el seno materno, se sigue estando después de nacer porque el universo entero es el útero de la Madre. La muerte es otro Utero ...('Sierra Nevada')

Cardenal's evocation of indigenous perceptions of life, death and the afterlife, enables him to examine further the relationship between past and present time and meaning. In 'Las ciudades perdidas' an unrelenting contrast is posited between past and present time. The poem begins with a detailed description of the deterioration now evident at Tikal and the degraded position of the Maya in contemporary Guatemalan society:

De noche las lechuzas vuelan entre las estelas, el gato-de-monte maúlla en las terrazas, el jaguar ruge en las torres y el coyote solitario ladra en la Gran Plaza a la luna reflejada en las lagunas que fueron piscinas en lejanos katunes.

Ahora son reales los animales que estaban estilizados en los frescos y los príncipes venden tinajas en los mercados.

This impoverished portrait of contemporary Mayan society was, the poet suggests, predicted and has now been realised. The portentous symbols of death and cultural demise evident in the Mayan drawings have become reality.<sup>110</sup> However, the poem is punctuated by a series of questions regarding the possibility of resuscitating the values of this now obsolete society:

¿Pero cómo escribir otra vez el jeroglífico pintar al jaguar otra vez, derrocar los tiranos? ¿Reconstruir otra vez nuestras acrópolis tropicales, nuestras capitales rurales rodeadas de milpas?

Just as he did in 'Netzahualcóyotl', Cardenal again evokes and reimagines the splendour of this past time by reverting to the present indicative. There is a palpable nostalgia on his part for this now-lost utopia, as a clear, but, rather simplistic, equation begins to emerge - that progress is ultimately damaging. As in 'Mayapán', persistent contrasts are suggested between past and contemporary society. The exemplary nature of this ancient society, both religiously and politically, is underlain by the inadequacies of modern society. The poet highlights the absence of self-interest or individualism on the part of the indigenous leaders and contrasts it with Somoza's obsession with building himself. Furthermore he monuments to emphasises the fundamental theocracy of these societies as a means of contrasting this with the more secular, even atheistic nature of modern society. Modernity, for Cardenal, with its inherent negativity is repeatedly counterposed in this poem as it is throughout Homenaje a los indios americanos with the alternative, and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>110</sup> See Merideth Paxton, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-7 for further explication of the particulars of Mayan hieroglyphics.

ultimately more positive vision suggested by the indigenous tradition. Ultimately it is Cardenal's focus on the indigenous perception of the temporal which effects this alternative realm of possibility and lyrical potential. In the poet's view, out of their sincere and harmonious relationship with the natural world, his indigenous ancestors appear to have succeeded in interweaving different perceptions of time. As a result of his embrace of indigenous temporal considerations, Cardenal has also uncovered an unexpected but rich interpenetration of mythical and historical time. As a corollary to this potentiality of mythical time viewed in indigenous society, Cardenal's wish to recuperate the originary values of this era is achieved:

Pasado y futuro están confundidos en sus cantos. Contaban el pasado y el futuro con los mismos katunes, porque creían que el tiempo se repite como veían repetirse las rotaciones de los astros.

As both Mircea Eliade and B. Malinowski suggest, myth presents us with a potential alternative to (present) historical time, as it provides us with archetypal models of behaviour which are believed to have taken place and which are therefore, theoretically, recoupable:

Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the 'beginnings' ... it relates how something was produced, began to be ... is regarded as a sacred story, and hence a 'true history', because it always deals with realities.<sup>111</sup>

The function of myth therefore is to provide paradigmatic models from an earlier time, which serve as a means of 'awakening and maintaining consciousness of another world' and thus impact upon present and future time.<sup>112</sup> The specific repercussions of such an alternative view can be seen in the manner in which myth is utilised by this poet to evoke past traditions and thus transcend

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>111</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Myth & Reality: op. cit.*, pp. 5-6. <sup>112</sup> *ibid.*, p. 140.

current limitations. With regard to the fate of the society at Tikal however, the linear and definitive forces of history would appear to have superseded the power of myth and ultimately brought about its demise:

Pero el tiempo que adoraban se paró de repente.

Yet throughout this collection, Cardenal continues to link the question of history and historical time with that of myth. In 'Ardilla de los tunes de un katún' the poet also weaves together references to both past, present and future. It is then the responsibility of the poet to enunciate the prophetic possibility for change:

Y sí habrá alegría por la abundancia del pueblo (no aflicción) Mayapán será el lugar donde se cambie el katún 'Cuceh' quiere decir Revolución literalmente 'Ardilla' (lo que gira) Será entonces el fin de su mendicidad y de su codicia.

Yet the possibility of embracing the mythical is also undermined and questioned. We witness many instances of self-doubt throughout *Homenaje a los indios americanos*, for example, in the questions posed in 'Las ciudades perdidas'. In 'Oráculos de Tikal (de un Ah Kin de Ku)' Cardenal also employs the subjunctive to great effect, to convey a similar lack of uncertainty:

cuando venga el cambio de poder y se cambien también los Ah Kines, Sacerdotes-del-cultosolar las muchachas cantarán en los cenotes en las noches de luna llamando a los amados idos, y volverán los amados y podrán hablarse unos a otros los Ah Kines Sacerdotes-del-culto-solar y se escucharán los Chilanes con sus ocarinas volverá la música sonarán las sonajas en el cielo del Petén

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## puede que suceda, pueda que no suceda.

In 'Mayapán' the poet articulates this desire to recoup these forgotten civilisations by harnessing it to a potent symbol of modernity - the airplane:

- Si yo pudiera volar otra vez a Tikal en avión. -

It is almost as if he realises that although he may be able physically to re-visit the source of these great civilisations, he can never fully recover the grandeur and values witnessed therein. Consequently, 'Las ciudades perdidas' ends on quite a pessimistic note. The incongruity of the Pan American jet flying over the ruins bringing tourists to visit the Mayan ruins is highlighted by Cardenal's question:

# ¿Pero volverán algún día los pasados katunes?

Ultimately does this question signal a more enduring belief on the part of this poet in historical time? I believe that Cardenal's position is fundamentally ambivalent. On the one hand, he appears to identify with, and to a degree, embrace the enablement suggested by mythical time. Yet on the other hand, the travails of life under the Somozas coupled with the inherent injustice and prevailing commercialism of contemporary society appear to negate any aspirations for change which he may have entertained. Ultimately, it would appear that the poet's hopes and aspirations are confined to the sphere of the mythical, whereas reality is firmly harnessed to historical time.

Thus, Cardenal's construction of an alternative prism of temporality is effected by a return to *in illo tempore*, where preconceptions of the linearity of time are suspended. It is founded on the sustaining myth of a renovative and cyclical concept of time and is initially prompted by an attraction to a primordial, but ultimately higher and more integrated form of

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society which counters the degraded one in which he lives. In reality, Cardenal's view of these societies and cultures is romanticised and nostalgic but in a very significant way his evocation of an alternative space serves to resuscitate a sense of kinship and placement for this poet and for Nicaragua. By reconstructing the spiritual, cultural and linguistic heritage of indigenous America the poet has reclaimed an historical narrative that had been dislodged by the colonial experience.

# Challenging Form

Cardenal's elaboration of a new poetic discourse is sustained by two primary formal influences; namely 'exteriorismo' and Ezra Pound. 'Exteriorismo', which evolved in the 1950s, is defined by Cardenal in the following way:

El exteriorismo es la poesía creada con las imágenes del mundo exterior, el mundo que vemos y palpamos, y que es, por lo general, el mundo específico de la poesía. El exteriorismo es la poesía objetiva: narrativa y anecdótica, hecha con los elementos de la vida real y con cosas concretas, con nombres propios y detalles precisos y datos exactos y cifras y hechos y dichos. En fin, es la poesía impura.<sup>113</sup>

In other words, it is a montage of disparate elements all of which combine to produce an alternative discourse. Cardenal was at pains to distinguish this kind of verse from what he refers to as 'interiorista' verse:

Poesía interiorista, en cambio, es una poesía subjetivista, hecha sólo con palabras abstractas o simbólicas como: rosa, piel, ceniza, labios, ausencia, amargo, sueño, tacto, espuma, deseo, sombra, tiempo, sangre, piedra, llanto, noche ...<sup>114</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> Prologue to *Poesía nueva de Nicaragua: op. cit.*, p. 9. <sup>114</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10.

In an interview with Mario Benedetti, Cardenal, in an explication of 'exteriorismo' acknowledged Ezra Pound as a primary influence in this regard:

No es más que una aplicación de esas enseñanzas de Pound, en el sentido de hacer la poesía superponiendo las imágenes unas con otras, sin recurrir a ningún otro efecto de lenguaje, porque no se hace necesario.<sup>115</sup>

The influence of Pound and the Imagist movement were therefore fundamental to Cardenal's development of exteriorist poetry. In 'A Retrospect', Pound outlined the three basic tenets of the Imagist movement with regard to language and rhythm:

 Direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective.
 To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
 As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phase, not in sequence of a metronome.<sup>116</sup>

On another occasion, he suggested of Imagism:

... the Image is more than an idea. It is a vortex or cluster of fused ideas and is endowed with energy ... It may be a sketch, a vignette, a criticism, an epigram or anything else you like ... By 'direct treatment', one means simply that having got the Image one refrains from hanging it with festoons.<sup>117</sup>

The 'Cantos' merit further examination as they provide valuable insight into Pound's influence on Cardenal. Cantos XXXI to XXXIV, which examine the origins of American civilisation, are composed of multiple extracts from historical letters, from those exchanged

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>115</sup> 'Ernesto Cardenal - Evangelio y revolución', Los poetas comunicantes (Uruguay: Biblioteca de Marcha, 1972), p. 102.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>116</sup> Literary Essays of Ezra Pound (T. S. Eliot, ed.) (London: Faber & Faber, 1985), p. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> 'Affirmations - As for Imagisme', *Ezra Pound - Selected Prose (1909-1965)* (William Cookson, ed.) (New York: New Directions Books, 1973), p. 375.

between Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams, the second and third presidents of the US respectively. They are remarkable both in terms of their content and style. Pound's emphasis throughout is on the perennial struggle of man against a more exploitative, absolutist power. In terms of style and structure, Pound juxtaposes fragments from these letters as well as quotes from literature and other historical tracts to further his point of view. Cantos XXXIII and XXXIV are significant both from a formal perspective and because of the manner in which Pound elaborates his critique of North American society; in particular capitalism and social injustice in these poems, two themes which are central to any reading of *Homenaje a los indios americanos*.

The opening sequence of Canto XXXIII is remarkable, in that in Cardenal's mind, it could be applied to the Somozas:

Is that despotism or absolute power ... unlimited sovereignty, is the same in a majority of a popular assembly, an aristocratic council, an oligarchical junta, and a single emperor, equally arbitrary, bloody, and in every respect diabolical. Wherever it has resided has never failed to destroy all records, memorials, all histories which it did not like, and to corrupt those it was cunning enough to preserve ...<sup>118</sup>

Pound continues by juxtaposing different fragments which illustrate the evils of capitalism, from reports by factory inspectors in the 19th century, letters by individual ministers regarding child labour and proceedings of a particular court case together with some quotations in French. He ends this first canto by citing a report on the inflated and exploitative nature of the Federal banking system, and by quoting from specifically numbered pages of this report.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>118</sup> 'Canto XXXIII', *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber & Faber, 1964), p. 164.

Canto XXXIV is based on quotations from the diaries of John Quincy Adams, president of the US from 1825-9. It recounts not only the historical details of the period (revolutions, bankruptcy, attempts to control the African slave trade) but the challenges and uncertainties besetting the man himself (what can I / seventy-four years, verge of my birthday, shaking hand). The poet includes many ordinary details of the president's diary(Dined with/ Mr Webster upon salmon sent from New York) as well as Quincy Adams's genuine frustrations. What is interesting in terms of technique, is this juxtapositioning of the pragmatic and the poetic, and of historical and personal records of the period. We also note Pound's use of enumeration as he details some of the ways in which the state of Georgia confiscated lands and deprived the Indians of that region of their rightful inheritance:

wrongs of the Cherokee nation ... These are the sins of Georgia These are the lies These are the infamies These are the broken contracts ...<sup>119</sup>

On occasions the serious nature of the Cantos is punctuated by moments of real humour:

But two things I did learn from him (Pinto): That Frankin's [idea] of exempting husbandmen and mariners etc. from the depredations of war was borrowed from him and (secondly) that sneezing is a cure for hickups.<sup>120</sup>

The true genius of the 'Cantos' however, is the manner in which Pound sets out to extend the boundaries of literature in general, and of poetry in particular. In 'A Retrospect' he had the following to say about the nature of literary technique:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>119</sup> 'Canto XXXIV', *ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>120</sup> 'Canto XXXIII', *ibid.*, p. 166.

I believe in technique as the test of a man's sincerity; in law when it is ascertainable; in the trampling down of every convention that impedes or obscures the determination of the law, or the precise rendering of the impulse.<sup>121</sup>

Pound's collage of historical quotations and Chinese ideograms would prove to be hugely influential for Cardenal. An ancillary influence on Cardenal's formal innovations was the poetry of William Carlos Williams. Although I do not intend to explore Williams's influence in more depth at this stage, an influence Cardenal acknowledged, it is worth remembering that Williams constructed a montage of street signs, slogans and recalled conversations in his verse, all of which are in keeping with the central tenets of 'exteriorismo' and mirrored in the poetry of Cardenal.<sup>122</sup>

At this juncture however, I would like to examine in more detail some of these lyrical devices, inspired by Imagism and trends of 'exteriorismo' which Cardenal employs in *Homenaje a los indios americanos*. I have already outlined some of these in my earlier examination of 'Netzahualcóyotl', in particular his adept use of verbal tenses and colloquial language. I would now like to consider other stylistic elements by examining some other poems in more detail.

Initially, what is perhaps most striking about Cardenal's application of 'exteriorismo' is his incorporation of vernacular language and details normally extrinsic to poetry into his lyrical discourse. In 'Economía de Tahuantinsuyu', for example, he employs the technical language of economics to illustrate how the Inca, despite the enormous mineral wealth which surrounded

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> op. cit., p. 9. Some critics suggest filmic parallels to explain Cardenal's lyrical technique in *Homenaje a los indios americanos*. Robert Pring-Mill, 'The Redemption of Reality through Documentary Poetry', Introductory Essay to E. Cardenal, *Zero Hour and Other Documentary Poems*, (New York: New Directions, 1980), pp. ix-xxi and Jorge H. Valdés, 'Cardenal's Poetic Style: Cinematic Parallels', *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, Vol. XI, No. 1, (Autumn, 1986), pp. 119-29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>122</sup> Stephen White, Culture & Politics in Nicaragua: op. cit., p. 64.

them, established an equitable and just society unlike the materialist focus of today's world:

No conocieron el valor inflatorio del dinero su moneda era el Sol que brilla para todos el Sol sin inflación ni deflación: Y no esos sucios 'soles' con que se paga al peón (que por un sol peruano te mostrará sus ruinas).

This is also the poet's intention in 'Marchas Pawnees'. Here the poet includes an analysis of market shares in the motor industry, and refers to the work undertaken by the chemical and engineering plants of Dow and Boeing. His clear intention throughout is to contrast what he views as the destruction of the natural environment by these multinationals, with the rich culture which originally existed in the great prairies of Middle America. Emblems and symbols of the economic and military exploitation of North and Latin America are repeatedly articulated; Henry Ford, Dow Chemicals, Goodyear, Chiclets Adams, Avena Quaker, United Fruit Co., General Motors, Boeing Co.

Neon signs advertising road-side motels and cheap restaurants visible throughout America become the stuff of his poetry; (HAM & EGGS, CARLOS OCHOMOGO & HNOS, 'Artículos de toda clase -----Los Mejores Precios). On other occasions, he includes hurriedly recalled advertisements for the cinema:

# YO Y ELLAS EN PARIS \*\*\* con Tony Curtis y Janet Leigh \*\*\* sobre Solentiname.

Dorothy Lamour entrada: 0.50 quetzal.

In many of his poems, Cardenal intersperses sequences from historical books and documents and newspaper articles into the body of the poem, after the fashion of Pound. In 'Netzahualcóyotl' he quotes from indigenous texts and names some of these historical sources; such as the *Códex Borgia* and *Chilam Balam de*  Chumayel. In 'Nele de Kantule' he cites from the Historia de los Cunas. In 'Economía de Tahuantinsuyu' he acknowledges information gleaned from Louis Baudin's El imperio socialista de los Incas. In this same poem, he recreates, in typical telegrammatic form, a press release from Associated Press about share values and movements on the stock exchange. In 'Kayanerenhkowa', he cites historical documents describing the establishment of a peace treaty among North American Indians around the year 1450 and includes a quotation from a poem by Hiawatha. In 'Marchas Pawnees', he cites President Johnson's infamous quotation regarding an 'epidemia de paz' and then deliberately juxtaposes this with the Pawnees's expressed desire for peace and unity. In 'La danza del espíritu', Cardenal quotes extensively from historical texts which record the phenomenon of the 'Ghost Dance' which swept through much of the Native American population during the late 19th century. After years of deception and injustice on the part of the authorities, a Pauite Indian, Wowoka, had a dream of a future time when their lands and dead leaders would be returned to them and when the buffalo upon which they depended so much would return. According to this premonition, a cessation of hostilities and certain prescribed songs and dances could hasten these changes. Cardenal again acknowledges the source of this historical material during the course of the poem - dice Mooney. The poetic intention is always the same; to illustrate the unrelenting erosion of these communities and to highlight the values which underpinned Native American societies. On more than one occasion he repeats a quotation from the governor of Indiana, with clear ironic intent:

# si no fuera por la vecindad de los Estados Unidos.

He also employs swear words - *jodido, mierda, hijueputas* - a true assault on the aesthetic sensibility, together with words or phrases in English. Repeatedly Cardenal blends the traditional with the modern by juxtaposing elements of indigenous culture and philosophy alongside words of contemporary significance - *color de flor 'pop-corn', mini-falda, nazi.* 

To my mind, the most significant contribution to the poetic idiom in this anthology is Cardenal's incorporation of linguistic and conceptual ideas of the autochthonous cultures of America into his verse. He makes it truly accessible to the modern reader by defining and explaining the terminology intratextually, as we have already witnessed in relation to Darío. Note the following example from 'Nele de Kantule':

Ibelele relató las palabras de Dios los enemigos son, decía: 'Masalaiban' (oso hormiguero) y 'Masolototobaliel' (iguana) los que no creen en Dios.

And similarly in 'Netzahualcóyotl':

Educación universal obligatoria Las 2 materias de la enseñanza universitaria: Ixtlamachiiliztli ('dar sabiduría a los rostros') Yolmelahualiztli ('enderezar los corazones').

These definitions are contained either within parentheses or in italics (as used extensively throughout 'Netzahualcóyotl and in the Mayan poems) or in more detailed explications such as those of the  $wamp\acute{u}m$  in 'Kayanerenhkowa', *Tirawa* in 'Tahirassawichi en Washington' or *Wakan-tanka* in 'Grabaciones de la pipa sagrada'. What is clear throughout is Cardenal's obvious delight at the enunciation of the indigenous lexicon, for example, in 'Nele de Kantule' where he lists the rich-sounding words for familial relationships, acoustically much more pleasant than their Spanish equivalents. This is also significant in that we see how Cardenal, by employing the first person possessive adjective (*mi tía*), or the first person plural of the verb (*lo llamamos 'Diosayla'/estamos en el centro del mundo*) further enhances the link between himself and his indigenous ancestors.

The visual appearance of many of the poems is also significant. In some poems, as in 'Mayapán', Cardenal appears to be deliberately

attempting to recreate the shape of the hieroglyphics on the stelae:

y Tikal se llena de estelas, jeroglíficos textos bien labrados

> Calakmul, más estelas que Tikal Palenque

> > Copán

Yaxchilán

textos bien labrados en los altares en los dinteles textos textos

largos textos

#### textos

el poema meticulosamente grabado en la escalera de piedra hacia el cielo Fue cuando los astrónomos hondureños ... Más delicada la línea en Yaxchilán y Copán más nítido el detalle de la joya en el traje, los granos de la mazorca, el [peinado] el jeroglífico cargado de significado (de antiguos [maestros]) más suelto el movimiento de la danza en la piedra.

Other techniques which create a desired visual impact include the ideogram in 'Tahirassawichi en Washington', used to illustrate the ritual painting on the young Indian children in honour of Tirawa. In this way, he is emulating Pound in his use of Chinese ideograms. In 'Kayanerenhkowa', he recreates the image of a flock of migrating birds by using a succession of VVVVV. In another illustration of his utilisation of the techniques of popular media in the lyrical form, he employs capitalisation to great effect to emphasise certain key concepts; FLOR-CANTO, MAKE LOVE NOT WAR, LA FERTILIDAD, NO DEBÉIS LUCHAR, RESUCITARAN TODOS LOS MUERTOS.

As I have already suggested, the indigenous American tradition was rooted primarily in orality. Consequently, Cardenal employs many techniques assimilated from oral indigenous poetry, such as parallelism, enumeration and repetition. For example, in 'Cantares mexicanos', after the fashion of indigenous poetry, he utilises a succession of different metaphors to illustrate the ephemeral nature of human life:

Las plumas de quetzal se secan los mosaicos de plumas de colibrí se descoloran como las [flores los mosaicos de turquesa, de jade, de obsidiana y de nácar caen como flores. Los collares de caracoles y de jades se desgranan como sartas de flores de cacao ...

Likewise in 'Netzahualcóyotl', he contrasts the yearned-for permanence of the poems with the transitory nature of human life:

Que los cantos sean duraderos, las metáforas como la calavera de cristal de roca como la máscara de diorita.

In 'Marchas Pawnees', he simply reiterates the verse:

Fueron soñados esos cantos, dicen ellos fueron soñados esos ritos y esos cantos antiguamente, por sus antepasados.

Or note his almost verbatim inversion of a phrase in 'Oráculos de Tikal (de un Ah Kin de Ku)' to highlight the hesitancy of his conviction:

esto podrá suceder podrá no suceder. Or in 'La danza del espíritu', where he emphasises the interrelatedness of the Indian and natural cycles simply by repeating the word *primavera*:

Todos los años volvían en la primavera: subían, de sur a norte, con la primavera y su llegada era segura como la primavera.

This is also a feature of 'Tahirassawichi en Washington' where the poet enumerates in some detail (through the repetition of *cantamos*) this relationship between the Indians and the natural world and the manner in which they articulated this admiration and respect:

y cantamos a esos árboles más cerca vemos la línea de agua, y la oímos sonar y cantamos al agua que corre sonando. Y cantamos a los búfalos, pero no en las praderas el 'Canto de los Búfalos' lo cantamos en la choza porque ya no hay búfalos. Y cantamos las montañas, que fueron hechas por Tirawa. A las montañas subimos solos, cuando vamos a rezar. ... Y cantamos a la aurora cuando sale del oriente y toda la vida se renueva ...

In 'Cantares mexicanos' I and II Cardenal also emphasises the pertinence of Netzahualcóyotl's pronouncements about friendship and poetry for contemporary society by an equally effective use of the present and imperative forms:

Oíd las lamentaciones que hago yo, el rey Netzahualcóyotl

Mirad el maíz: muere y renace tiernecito después de las primeras lluvias enviadas [por Tlaloc. Si no hay en la olla sino polvo

es que estoy siendo molido como en piedras de moler por la [madre Cihuacóatl y revivirán mis huesos floridos! Quetzalcóatl me sacará de Mictlan. ('Cantares mexicanos I')

Mi canto es amistad hermanos. Sólo en las flores hay Hermandad. Abrazos

sólo en las flores.

Distribuyo mis flores y mis cantos a mi pueblo. - les riego poemas, no tributos. Que no cante yo en vano. ('Cantares mexicanos II')

Just as he uses the present indicative to recreate the immediacy of an historical moment, Cardenal frequently employs the future indicative to convey a conviction that change will take place, or to stimulate a certain degree of hope for the future political situation. He adapts a series of premonitions and predictions viewed in the Mayan Códices and imbues them with a contemporary significance:

El Katún del Arbol de la Vida será establecido. - Y un gobierno benévolo. ... El Katún Unión-con-una-Causa, el Katún 'Buenas condiciones de vida'. Ya no hablaremos más en voz baja.

Habrá buenos gobernantes para dicha del pueblo. Señores legítimos. Abundancia en las montañas, y bellas ceremonias.

There are several key issues which I have sought to explore in relation to Cardenal's *Homenaje a los indios americanos*. Throughout *Homenaje a los indios americanos*, Cardenal evokes archetypal and originary models of language, culture and society sourced in the autochthonous tradition. These enable the poet to construct alternative and potentially recoupable models of history, culture and time which refute the contemporary exempla and enable the creation of alternative models. The recovered indigenous tradition has also suggested a broader definition of the lyric and the poet. Clearly, Cardenal has located an historical precedent, which conflates the responsibilities of the historian/chronicler, spiritual and political adviser, with those of the artist. Thus, he is empowered to challenge and subvert conventional perceptions of intellectual and cultural expression and practices. A consequence of this interrogation of canonical parameters is that Cardenal is able to reclaim and reaffirm his position within an ongoing artistic continuum, own which originated in indigenous America. In addition, a historical narrative which had been supplanted by the colonial experience is reinscribed with a new, more contemporary significance.

As a collection, *Homenaje a los indios americanos* relies heavily on historical research and yet to suggest, as one critic has done, that Cardenal merely manipulates and distorts historical sources in order to create poetry, is perhaps too simplistic an assessment of the project undertaken by Cardenal in *Homenaje a los indios americanos*.<sup>123</sup> However, one remains cautious throughout of Cardenal's interpretation of this history. He is generally selective in terms of historical accuracy, preferring to furnish us on most occasions with idyllic absolutist illustrations of indigenous society, rather than providing a genuine picture of this historical reality.

During the course of this chapter I have also offered many examples of parallels between Cardenal's verse and that of the Náhuatl poets. Often it is not simply a question of a shared poetic language, but also evident are correlations in terms of lyrical technique, motifs and even symbolism. Clearly, Cardenal is articulating images and ideas common to all artists in Spanish America. But his engagement with the indigenous heritage of America has also afforded the poet a more extensive selection of metaphorical and lexical possibilities. In my view, throughout *Homenaje a los indios americanos*, Cardenal is engaged in a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>123</sup> Stephen F. White suggests 'Cardenal *et al* ... have defined an 'ars poetica' that entails consulting original sources and then artistically manipulating these sources to fictionalize history and thereby create works of literature', Stephen F. White, *Modern Nicaraguan Poetry - Dialogues with France and the US: op. cit.*, p.165.

deliberate and conscious retrieval of cultural precursors. As a collection it is sustained by the commonality of language and experiences which the poet has identified between past and present traditions. His objective is not only to valorise this past tradition but also to affirm the fluidity of cultural meaning which links him to this cultural tradition. In order to arrive at any clear understanding of this collection, the focus must shift therefore from an exclusive consideration of the nature of the resultant text to the ideological and artistic intentions of the author. Like Neruda and Guillén, Cardenal had embarked on a process of recuperation of sources and this reaffirmation of the positionality of the displaced indigenous tradition which we view in *Homenaje a los indios americanos* is crucial to his elaboration of a renewed sense of identity.

The tone of much of the *Homenaje a los indios americanos* is nostalgic. Throughout, Cardenal bemoans the demise of the societal structures and the sense of community and social justice evident in pre-Columbian societies. Modernity is persistently perceived as unproductive and negative. In this way Cardenal differs quite radically from both Guillén and Neruda. For Guillén the rich African identity and heritage which he celebrates is never allowed to subvert the significance of the contemporary Afro-Cuban identity. Similarly Neruda, although he initially looks to the majestic precedence of Macchu Picchu and the uninhabited landscape, also comes to celebrate the genuine expressions of solidarity and community which he experienced during his time in hiding in Chile. For Neruda, as for Guillén, contemporary exemplars come to equal those of elemental significance in the natural world, or those identified in pre-Columbian civilisations.

However, Cardenal also engages with the present reality, and perceives some hope in a recovery of spirituality and in the collective revolutionary objectives of the Sandinistas. This convergence of individual and collective meaning is, as I have suggested throughout, central to the process of decolonisation as it demands a transformation of aesthetic conventions. Subjective concerns are transmuted, as they are in the lyrics of both Guillén and Neruda, into those more pertinent to the collective society. For the most part Cardenal looks to a future political and spiritual utopia for any possibility of change. In many ways, Cardenal, although engaged in a process of recovery and recuperation similar to that elaborated by the other two poets never really manages to transcend the sense of dislocation and dispossession which defines his colonised condition.

## CONCLUSION

The retrieval and subsequent revalorisation of originary or popular models of culture, language and meaning undertaken by Guillén, Neruda and Cardenal form an intrinsic part of their discourses on post-coloniality. I have illustrated during the course of the previous three chapters how each of the poets sought to reaffirm the positionality of literary and historical narratives that had been displaced by the colonial experience. As this analysis documents, Guillén, Neruda and Cardenal are propelled by a need to subvert and interrogate conventional perceptions of poetry, language and self. As a result of their persistent interrogation of canonical assumptions and models, what we witness is an altered sense of history, time and language articulated in the verse of these three poets. In effect, they have created a counter-discourse that redefines and, to a large degree, refutes, their initial sense of marginality.

What I have attempted to illustrate in this examination of the poetry of Guillén, Neruda and Cardenal is the manner in which all three poets transcend this earlier sense of alterity and displacement to re-emerge with a new sense of self-reliance, into an altered sense of space.

The quest for a renovation of meaning and identity is centred primarily on issues of language and of the lyrical form. All three poets display a willingness to experiment with and articulate alternative modes of expression. They all display a concomitant preference for the spoken word and for the articulation of this word. Their attention to nomination, to an explication or inclusion of indigenous or popular phenomena, to a recovery of unspoken models of expression, are all indicative of a shared fascination with language and with originary models of speech and performance. This also illustrates and confirms the centrality of language in the process of decolonisation. By validating the indigenous or popular idiom within the context of the lyrical form, these poets not only re-establish a sense of linguistic heredity but also legitimise this alternative lexicon.

A desired expansion of lyrical conventions is also manifest in the variance of thematic interests which these poets address, many of which are normally excluded from the lyric. They share a concern for the democratisation of the lyrical forum that is underpinned by a common yearning for relevance and applicability. Thus the role and function of the poet in contemporary society is enmeshed with their revision of the lyrical form. All three poets attempt to obviate the traditional distance between the poet and his perceived audience, thereby re-appropriating the lyrical form for the collective experience. As a result, these collections of poetry are never wholly self-referential, but fully engaged with the material reality and propelled by a belief that the true essence of the lyric can, and perhaps must, be sourced in the quotidian experiences of ordinary people. This supplanting of the self by more pressing concerns of the community is often a curious feature of poetry composed during specific periods of political unrest. In the anthologies that I have chosen to examine, we can perceive a new sense of responsibility felt by each poet to reengage with the historico-political reality as issues of historical or political significance are persistently linked to the creation of a new national literary canvas. This conflation of the material and the aesthetic evident in their verse affirms a new maturity in the post-colonial discourse.

In different ways, Guillén, Neruda and Cardenal have consciously interwoven subjective concerns with more extraneous issues pertaining to the collective identity. In reassessing their lyrical and personal identities there is an appreciation of the manner in which the retrieval of self is linked with a retrieval of the wholeness of history and community. Consequently, the very nature of their lyrical voice is informed by both the collective voice and the material reality.

The poets achieve this reconciliation of public and private idioms and concerns by articulating the particulars of the historical and political narratives that have shaped them. Their attention is drawn repeatedly to the collective nature of the project of cultural decolonisation and sustained by the prospect of the re-integration of the poet into this community. This reconciliation of public and private self, evident in the work of all three poets, dislodges the sense of chaos, angst and dislocation that is palpable in earlier prose or verse. This is not to suggest that the essential nature of the poem or the poetic idiom is compromised by such an engagement with the material reality. Lyrical concerns remain crucial for all three poets to their revision of the poetic discourse.

It is important to note that the colonial experience is not always perceived as a wholly pernicious influence. Indeed, it was also viewed as a valuable and creative force. This may not always be as apparent in *Homenaje a los indios americanos*, as it is in the work of Guillén and Neruda, as Cardenal never really addresses relationships with the colonial centre in any satisfactory fashion. However, he does acknowledge lyrical influences which were central to his own evolution as poet.

The challenge for each poet appears to hinge on how he can articulate the positive contributions of the colonialist dialogue while, simultaneously affirming the positionality and validity of his marginal identity. Hence the counter-text which each poet comes to propose is centred on a reappraisal of the essential syncretism which defines him. It is also articulated in the enunciation of the differences which distinguish this syncretic voice from that of the colonial centre.

However, each poet's response to his alterity and to this project of redefinition is quite distinct. All three are engaged in a recuperative exercise, in a rehabilitation of displaced or unspoken models of language, culture and historical meaning. Each poet has also sought to uncover cultural or historical precedents, either in the popular tradition or in a more remote historical time, which can then be exploited to illustrate potentially alternative paradigmatic models of language, behaviour or society. Therefore, evident in the work of all three poets is an ongoing dialectic between past and present, as each seeks to identify a continuum of artistic practices or behaviour. Consequently, there is a conscious intermeshing of past and contemporary elements of symbolism and mythology evident in the verse of all three poets. Neruda and Cardenal in particular, engage in a rather intricate explication of myth and history. The individual journeys of redefinition undertaken by all three poets propel them beyond a purely academic study of inherited literary or cultural material to a more intense engagement with rudimentary definitions of selfhood and nationhood. Their recuperation and re-appreciation of indigenous or traditional narratives disguise a more pressing search, on the part of each, for roots and sources.

Neruda looked initially to the elemental splendour of the American landscape and, subsequently, to the language and collective endeavours of its contemporary inhabitants, to uncover such symbols of exemplary and archetypal significance. Guillén identified a similar originary model in the son, and sought to resuscitate this cultural model and imbue it with a contemporary significance. In addition, he re-evaluated primary models Cuban ethnicity in order to subvert racially-based discrimination which had been engendered by the discourse of colonialism. Cardenal also evoked models of language, society and culture from pre-Columbian or native American societies in Homenaje a los indios americanos. However, a crucial distinction between Cardenal and the other two poets lies in the manner in which the Nicaraguan poet engages with this past tradition.

All three poets articulate the positive nature of the cultural precedents, of exemplars of the collective spirit, of shared experiences of poverty and discrimination common to the past and present reality. Cardenal however is, for the most part, indifferent to any positive or affirming aspects of the colonial legacy. It is as if the colonial space has been excised from his discourse as he persists in a retrieval and valorisation of originary values from the pre-colonial narrative. Neruda and Guillén engage with their colonial past in quite a distinct fashion. They clearly acknowledge and affirm certain aspects of the Spanish legacy particularly with regard to language and to literary influences, but also in relation to ethnicity. But Cardenal, for the most part, fails to acknowledge issues such as hybridity and cross-culturality.

Consequently, Guillén and Neruda uncover alternative models which are transformed into enabling metaphors with which they can redefine the present reality. But in my view, Cardenal never really succeeds in transcending the sense of dislocation and dispossession which defines his marginalised sense. The past is persistently evoked as an oppositional equivalent to the present, resulting in the negation of the present reality. For the most part, he remains lodged in a nostalgic and, ultimately unsatisfactory, space and never really experiences the sense of anticipation, renewal or elation evident in the verse of both Guillén and Neruda.

However, in many ways Neruda's model of an unspoiled and, certainly in the early stages of the *Canto general*, a largely uninhabited landscape, is much closer to Cardenal's model than that of Guillén. Both Neruda and Cardenal are concerned with retracing and enunciating the historical narrative within the lyrical form. Cardenal's project of reaffirmation of lyrical models viewed in the indigenous tradition also mirrors Guillén's adaptation of the *son* to the contemporary lyrical form.

In conclusion, each poet has engaged in a conscious process of excavation of both self and poetics and has sought to celebrate and affirm an alternative poetic and historical self through which he is ultimately defined. These processes of excavation of the roots of their collective and individual identities have clearly prompted a complex response from each of these poets. This is mirrored in the alternating feelings of loss and of the recoupable evident in their verse, and in the evocation of an idiom sustained, for Neruda and Guillén at least, by an acknowledgement of the assimilative process that has occurred. Derek Walcott, summarising the complexities and challenges facing writers in the post-colonial context, suggested the following: They know that by openly fighting tradition we perpetuate it, that revolutionary literature is a filial impulse, and that maturity is the assimilation of the features of every ancestor  $\dots^1$ 

This homology identified between past and present traditions enables each of these three poets to re-establish and reinforce a sense of heredity which had been subverted by the colonial experience. Thus, what was precipitated by a sense of personal displacement on the part of each of these poets has evolved into a much more extensive examination of the nature of the national identity. Significantly, in my view it is precisely because of their inherent marginality, because of the sense of ex-centricity engendered by the colonial experience, that poets such as Guillén, Neruda and Cardenal are enabled to question, interrogate and ultimately transform their lyrical voices. Peripherality in my view has contributed greatly to their elaboration of a post-colonial discourse.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> 'The Muse of History', op. cit., p. 354.

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