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**La Habana as a Site of Disenchantment in the Work of  
Leonardo Padura Fuentes**

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## **Summary of the Contents**

This thesis establishes that disenchantment in the city of La Habana is a recurring theme in the narrative of Cuban author Leonardo Padura Fuentes. It involves a close reading of seven novels written and published between 1991 and 2009. Based chronologically on the publication of each of the seven novels analysed, each Chapter evaluates how the author represents a different contributing factor or factors to the disenchantment of the city of La Habana in his novels. Disenchantment in this thesis refers to the state of disillusion and disappointment felt by the inhabitants of the city of La Habana with the Cuban Revolution. His historical fiction shows a similar concern with political disenchantment. Disenchantment is most strongly felt by Padura's own generation; those who were born in the 1950s and educated solely by the Revolution. Although there have been several studies published on the detective fiction of Padura, to my knowledge no extensive study has yet been carried out which is specific to the theme of disenchantment and the city in the work of Padura, thereby making this thesis an original contribution to knowledge.

## Introduction

The central aim of this thesis is to show that disenchantment in the city of La Habana is central to the work of Cuban author Leonardo Padura. This study, which will involve a close reading of seven novels by Padura written between the years 1991 and 2009, aims to illustrate how disenchantment takes various forms in his narrative and how his novels can be read as a means to understanding the city of La Habana as a site of disenchantment. In order to clarify the aim of this thesis, I will offer a definition of disenchantment as it is applied in this work. Disenchantment in this thesis refers to the state of disillusion and disappointment felt by the inhabitants of the city of La Habana with the Cuban Revolution, as illustrated by Padura in his fiction. It implies that a feeling of optimism and belief in the revolutionary process once existed but has since been converted to a sense of loss, dissatisfaction and disbelief in the system. I will argue that this feeling of disenchantment exists as a central theme in Padura's novelistic representation of La Habana in his novels. This sense of disenchantment is most strongly felt by Leonardo Padura's generation; those who were born in the 1950s and educated solely by the Revolution.

Born in La Habana in 1955, Padura is of the first generation of Cubans to be educated fully by the Revolution. He worked initially as an investigative journalist for a literary magazine called *El Caimán Barbudo*. However, Padura's willingness to write about topics the authorities would rather keep out of the press did not go unnoticed and he was sent to work for another magazine *Juventud Rebelde*, where he would be under stricter watch (Pérez González 2012: 15). His first work of fiction, *Fiebre de caballos*, was a romantic novel, written in 1984. He continued to work in journalism and published his second novel *Pasado perfecto*, the first novel of the Mario Conde series *Las cuatro estaciones* in 1991. Bound by the ties of censorship, Padura was limited in his factual writings, as to how he could reflect in his work his vision of Cuba and La Habana. Pérez González points out that Padura opted as a journalist for a more cautious strategy for addressing Cuba's problems as a journalist

by writing about episodes and characters from the past.<sup>1</sup> While it is arguable that Padura maintains this strategy of focusing on the past to shed light on Cuba's present in his fiction, he always includes a present day protagonist in his narratives which serves to comment on Cuba's current reality.

From the time of Castro's famous speech in 1961 "Palabras a los intelectuales" in which he declared "Dentro de la Revolución todo; fuera de la Revolución nada", it was clear that only art that supported the Revolution would be tolerated. However, censorship was not severely tightened until the 1970s, which led to the exile of many Cuban intellectuals. This period, known as "el quinquenio gris", coincides with the emergence of the Cuban style of socialist crime fiction. It is also a period that Padura returns to repeatedly in his fiction and is one which plays a formative influence in his depiction of the development of a sense of disenchantment. This style of socialist crime fiction was promoted by the Cuban authorities as a propaganda tool which served to extol socialism over the evils of capitalism.<sup>2</sup> Padura, who openly criticised the limitations of the Cuban crime novel in his essay "Modernidad y posmodernidad: La novela policial en Iberoamérica", writes "En lo esencial, sin embargo, se trabajó sobre una retórica que se repetía de obra en obra y sobre un modelo que difícilmente permitía las innovaciones genéricas e, incluso, la profundización artística de los contenidos o la problematización veraz de los personajes" (Padura 1999: 48). Padura was one of the first Cuban writers to subvert Cuban socialist crime fiction. Rather than extol the Revolution, Padura's novels highlight its errors. In an interview with Magdalena López in 2006, Padura explains his motives for writing crime fiction: "[es] una novela que enseguida te conecta con lo peor de la sociedad. Te coloca inmediatamente en su lado oscuro. En el caso de mis novelas, donde lo reflexivo tiene mayor peso argumental, creo que el género permite la reflexión social e histórica" (López 2007: 166).

While a number of critics have written on Leonardo Padura, few have looked specifically at disenchantment and even those who do, have only done so in a very limited manner. Most literary critics who have published work on Padura have

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<sup>1</sup> For more on journalism under Castro see Juan Orlando Pérez González "Revolution Is Such a Beautiful Word! Literary Journalism in Castro's Cuba".

<sup>2</sup> Critics such as Simpson (1990), Braham (2004) and Wilkinson (2006) have examined this fiction.

focused on the Mario Conde series, particularly in relation to the genre of crime fiction. Stephen Wilkinson in *Detective Fiction in Cuban Society and Culture*, which traces the development of the detective novel in Cuba, dedicates three of ten Chapters to Padura's Conde series. Employing theories by Lukacs and Sartre, Wilkinson focuses on el Conde's preoccupation with existence and self identity. He also carries out a postmodern reading of the series, referring to theories by Lyotard. Wilkinson devotes one Chapter to sexual and political intolerance through a comparative study of Padura's *Máscaras* and the film *Fresa y chocolate* (1993: Gutiérrez Alea and Tabío). In 2011, Wilkinson published "Death, Socialism and the Death of Socialism in *El hombre que amaba a los perros*" in which he interprets Padura's 2009 novel *El hombre que amaba a los perros* as a novel which highlights the survival of the Revolution rather than the death of socialism. I argue for a different reading in my final Chapter, in which I interpret the novel as a negative critique of how communism was implemented in various countries and how this perversion of the utopian dream has led to a feeling of disenchantment in La Habana.

Other critics such as Franken (2009), Song (2009), Martín and Zapatero (2007), Braham (2004), and Pérez (2010) focus their analysis on Padura as a crime fiction writer, with the majority focusing mainly on the *Cuatro estaciones* tetralogy. Since beginning my research on the topic of disenchantment in the novels of Padura, only one critic has explicitly addressed this issue: García Talavan published her article "La Habana, ciudad del desencanto en la narrativa de Leonardo Padura" in 2011, although her study only considers a limited number of texts. This was the same year that the proceedings from the 2010 conference "Congreso de cine y novela negra" were published which included my article "Memoria y desencanto en las novelas policíacas de Leonardo Padura Fuentes". Manuel Martínez in "Imágenes de Ciudad" offers a comparative study of the representation of the city in García Márquez's *El amor en los tiempos de cólera* and Padura's *La novela de mi vida*. Employing Edward Soja's theory of thirdspace, Martínez interprets Padura's Habana as a "templo vivo que habla" (Martínez 2008: 78), as opposed to the silence of García Márquez's Cartagena de Indias. Martínez refers to Soja's book *Thirdspace*, in which he discusses the individual's relationship with space. Soja, like Jameson, Lefebvre and Bhabha, considers space as a political/social zone where power relations are put into play. In thirdspace, every element is radically open to

influences from other elements and therefore, according to Martínez, the concept of thirdspace can be used as a tool for analysing the dynamics of the city (Martínez 2008: 65-66). The focus of Martínez's study is nostalgia as a contributing factor to disenchantment in the city, which I also address in Chapter one (1.2.). Another article which addresses the topic of the city of La Habana in the work of Padura is Ángel Esteban's "A las duras y a las Paduras: La Habana, cielo e infierno" (2007). In this study, Esteban notes how La Habana is given a leading role in Padura's *Cuatro estaciones* tetralogy, focusing his analysis on *Máscaras* and *Paisaje de otoño*. Esteban argues that Padura's protagonists are a metonymy of the city and can be read as a representation of La Habana. My interpretation differs in that I do not consider his protagonists a metonymy of La Habana but rather part of La Habana's lived social space and as such the decay of their social environment impacts on the lives of the inhabitants of the city.

Cuban author and critic Amir Valle has written two articles on the theme of the new Latin American city as represented in crime fiction. The first, "Marginalidad y ética de la marginalidad en la nueva ciudad narrada por la novela negra latinoamericana" (2007), explores the representation of Latin American cities as sites of marginalization in the *neopolicial*.<sup>3</sup> He includes a brief reference to Padura's *Cuatro estaciones* as an example of how his work exposes state corruption. In his later "La nueva ciudad cubana (y/o La Habana otra) en la novelística negra de Leonardo Padura" (2012) Valle sets out how Padura has differed in his representation of La Habana from previous Cuban writers. Valle considers the publication of Padura's tetralogy a turning point in the representation of the city given its focus on the loss of both architectural and moral values; "una ciudad donde crece la fauna de la marginalidad por el simple hecho de que vivir es cada vez más un acto marginal de supervivencia" (Valle 2012: 5). Valle considers Padura's city to be real and "distinta a la ciudad de las postales y los políticos" (Valle 2012: 5). This "real" and often raw representation of La Habana by Padura is what lends itself to the study of the city as a site of disenchantment, as represented in all of the novels analysed. Like Valle, I also focus on the loss of moral values in the city in Chapter

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<sup>3</sup> The *neopolicial*, a term coined by Mexican crime writer Paco Ignacio Taibo II, is the Latin American style of Crime Fiction which tends to focus on the darker side of society in an effort to expose social injustice.

three (3.2.), particularly in the case of the newer generation of Cubans, whom I term the dollar generation.

As previously mentioned, censorship, including self-censorship has limited Cuban journalists' and writers' freedom to offer a true reflection of their experience of Cuba. In a country like Cuba, where opposition to the ruling government is not permitted, official discourse only reflects the version of reality put forward by the authorities. The *neopolicial* is in the words of Amir Valle: "la verdadera novela negra, esa que hurga en los pliegues secretos, ocultos o invisibles a conveniencia, de la sociedad latinoamericana actual" (Valle 2007: 100). Padura's fiction can likewise be read as interpreting Cuban society, to uncover its secrets and to debunk romantic ideals of socialism. In "La nueva ciudad cubana", Valle includes the following quote by Paco Tabio II which supports my reading of Padura's fiction as a reflection of Cuban reality:

Algo queda claro: al igual que para entender la Francia del siglo XIX había que leer las obras de Balzac, quien pretenda hoy conocer la sociedad latinoamericana, no debe leer los periódicos, ni consultar los libros de historia; debe leer la novela negra que se escribe en cada uno de nuestros países (Valle 2012: 1).

Disenchantment in this study is not just limited to political disillusionment with the Cuban Revolution, nor is Padura's work limited to crime fiction focusing only on the recent past. Through his historical fiction, Padura also portrays sentiments of disenchantment with the colonial authorities and the Spanish King Ferdinand VII, as felt by José María Heredia in the nineteenth century in *La novela de mi vida* (2002), while Leon Trotsky and his murderer Ramón Mercader are the disenchanted protagonists portrayed by Padura in *El hombre que amaba a los perros* (2009). Both characters, as imagined by Padura, are disenchanted with the Russian Revolution and Stalinism respectively. Their disenchantment is linked to that experienced by Padura's Cuban protagonists, as many of their feelings of disenchantment are a result of the failure of the socialist dream, as first imagined by Marx. A preview of the four Chapters which constitute this thesis follows in order to clarify the layout of this thesis and to offer a brief summary of each.

In Chapter One I will offer an analysis of Padura's tetralogy *Las cuatro estaciones*. I will refer to the work of Michel de Certeau "Walking in the city" as a means to understanding better how Padura's work can be interpreted in regard to his

representation of the city. De Certeau puts forward in his text that the city is not always used as it was designed by the authorities and that this unauthorized activity is only visible to the “walker” of the city who observes action that takes place at ground level. I argue that Padura’s protagonists act as guides to La Habana to highlight the other city, one which is not visible on a superficial level. In order to contextualize the author’s choice of the crime fiction genre, in section 1.1. I will offer a brief introduction to the history of Cuban detective fiction from the 1970s on. I will also discuss the significance of Padura’s decision to convert this Cuban form of state-sponsored socialist detective fiction into a tool for denouncing revolutionary failures. Section 1.2. focuses on the representation of the physical city in *Paisaje de otoño*. It explores the history of the city as a means to understanding its deterioration and inequalities in the present day narrative of 1989; subjects which are also responsible for the present state of disenchantment in La Habana. Many of the issues I will consider in this thesis first arise in the *Cuatro estaciones* tetralogy. For this reason I devote my first Chapter to this series and to exposing the various aspects of disenchantment which are presented within it and which Padura continues to develop in his later works.

In section 1.3. I will examine the notion of the heretic city as represented in *Máscaras* (2007), the third novel in the series. This section strives to answer questions of how government reaction to things regarded as heretical in the light of socialist orthodoxy has led to disenchantment. It will focus on the plight of the persecuted homosexuals in La Habana under the Revolution, which resulted in disenchantment not only for homosexuals but for all those who believed in an equal society. I will also examine how the worrying rise in delinquency in the city, as illustrated in the novel, is connected to disenchantment. I will discuss the changing role of religion since the beginning of the Revolution in 1959 to the present day. In Section 1.4. I will explore how Padura’s first novels from the Conde Series *Pasado perfecto* and *Vientos de cuaresma* set the tone of his work as one of disenchantment. In these novels, Padura introduces the reader to his generation, one that will be a central protagonist throughout his work, in conjunction with the subject of the city. I will explore the relevance of this generation to the theme of disenchantment in the city. I will also refer to Ricoeur’s theories on memory, time and narrative to support my interpretation of the novels. I will argue that Padura effectively reconstructs

human time, which in turn aids reader identification with his protagonists, rendering them more real to the reader. This allows for greater reader empathy with the feelings of disenchantment expressed by Padura's protagonists. Ricoeur's theory on the reliability of memory serves to support my argument that el Conde's blurred memories of a happier past are to be valued as true.

Chapter Two, "*La novela de mi vida; History and Disenchantment Repeated*" explores the history of Cuba in the early decades of the nineteenth century through the eyes of Cuban poet José María Heredia, as imagined by Padura. The colonial city of La Habana is juxtaposed with the revolutionary city at the turn of the millennium, as are the historical and the modern day protagonists. This is carried out through a multilayered narrative, where the modern day protagonist is the academic detective, who must delve 180 years into the past in an attempt to discover Heredia's last work of literature. The latter's story is written as an autobiography in first person narrative. In this Chapter, I will discuss the implications of the aforementioned juxtaposition of historical moments of La Habana in relation to disenchantment. I will examine Padura's literary strategy to parallel these two periods and his decision to use a real historical personality as a protagonist. The novel raises questions of national identity and I will refer to Benedict Anderson's theory on nation building, as presented in *Imagined Communities*, in order to assist my analysis of the novel.

Chapter Three, "Generational Disenchantment and 'la doble moral' in *La neblina del ayer*", introduces a new generation of Cubans to the reader, those who came of age in the 1990s. This generation is not disenchanted, like the previous generation is, because they never believed in the socialist dream to begin with. For this reason they are more disaffected than disenchanted. They came of age in the Special Period, a time when survival outweighed ideology. In this Chapter, I will offer a comparison between the two generations as exposed in the novel and attempt to analyse this generation gap through a study of sociological sources on the latter. In this novel, Padura puts criminality and mafia in the city centre stage, while also including descriptions of life in La Habana during the notorious mob years of the 1950s. I will explore how this period is of relevance in a novel which focuses on the newer generation of Cubans. In this novel, Padura offers harsh descriptions of areas of poverty and deprivation in the city, where drugs and prostitution are commonplace. I will address the topic of drug use and trafficking in the city as

presented in *La neblina del ayer* (2005), Padura's short story *Mirando al sol* (2000) and the movie *Malabana* (2001), for which Padura wrote the screenplay. I will also analyse the changes to the city of La Habana from the Special Period on, as presented in the novel, which reflect the sentiment of disenchantment of Padura's main protagonist Mario Conde.

Chapter Four, "Debunking the Socialist Dream: *El hombre que amaba a los perros*", is dedicated to Padura's latest published novel to date.<sup>4</sup> Taking into account Horkheimer and Adorno's theory of negative critique, as outlined by Pam Morris, which places value upon the ability of literary work to reveal oppressive and authoritarian elements in the existing social formation, I will evaluate a reading of *El hombre que amaba a los perros* as a negative critique of how communism has been implemented by various governments. I will assess how the failed socialist dream has resulted in disenchantment in the city of La Habana. This novel explores the history of communism from the Russian Revolution to the Spanish Civil War through to the present day narrative of Cuba in 2004. The novel explores three generations of disenchanted protagonists who in different ways have suffered the failure of the ideal of communism. Leon Trotsky, his murderer Ramón Mercader and *habanero* Iván are also connected by their love of dogs, hence the title of the novel. In this Chapter, I will suggest that the destruction of the city of La Habana, as exposed in the novel, is symbolic of the death/failure of socialism and that the latter is a principal reason for disenchantment in the city of La Habana.

The above brief description of the structure and content of this study highlights the originality of this research. Based chronologically on the publication of each of the seven novels analysed, each Chapter evaluates how the author represents a different contributing factor or factors to the disenchantment in the city of La Habana in his novels. Although there have been several studies published on the detective fiction of Padura, to my knowledge no extensive study has yet been carried out which is specific to the theme of disenchantment and the city his work. This area of study could be extended to a comparative study of other Cuban writers,

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<sup>4</sup> *Herejes*, Padura's latest novel is due to be published in 2013 but at time of writing has not yet been published.

especially the Nuevos,<sup>5</sup> the generation of Cuban writers among whom Leonardo Padura is classified, and also the following generation, the Novísimos.

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<sup>5</sup> See Carlos Uxó "Los Novísimos cubanos: primera generación de escritores nacidos en la Revolución" for more information on this generation of Cuban writers.

## Chapter One

### The Disenchanted City of Leonardo Padura's

#### *Las cuatro estaciones*

#### Introduction

Written between 1991 and 1998, Padura's detective fiction tetralogy *Las cuatro estaciones* effectively portrays the negative outcome of thirty years of socialism on the city of La Habana and its inhabitants. The four novels are set in 1989, a significant year in Cuban history as it saw the beginning of the downfall of the Soviet Bloc and with it the socialist dream on which the Revolution came to base itself. In practical terms, this period meant the end of the financial help through commercial agreements between Cuba and the USSR which the former relied upon so heavily, and therefore the start of the Special Period.<sup>6</sup> It also signified the ultimate failure on the part of the Revolution to bring to reality the promises of a brighter future for all, which were made over the many years of material struggle in the name of socialism. It was for many Cubans the straw that broke the camel's back, or more precisely, it was the straw that broke their faith in the Revolution. This Chapter will analyse the different ways in which the city is portrayed as a site of disenchantment in the four novels; *Pasado perfecto* (1991), *Vientos de cuaresma* (1994), *Máscaras* (1997) and *Paisaje de otoño* (1998). Each novel, set in a different season of the same year, includes a murder mystery that detective Mario Conde, with the help of his partner, Sergeant Manuel Palacios, successfully solve. While the action of the novels centres on the crime at hand in each instance, Padura simultaneously develops the metadiegetic of the tetralogy - the story of the detective's circle of friends, which serves to denounce their generation's disenchantment with the Revolution. Set in the urban space of La Habana, Padura's descriptions of the city, and the lives of those who inhabit it, serve as a negative critique of the actions and decision making of the Cuban authorities.

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<sup>6</sup> The Special Period or El periodo especial en tiempos de paz, was the name given to the devastating economic crisis in Cuba after the fall of the Soviet bloc which led to extreme poverty and mass emigration from Cuba. Starting in 1991, the crisis was most severe in the mid ninties declining at the end of the decade. See *Cuba in the Special Period* by Ariana Hernández Reguant.

In approaching the subject of the disenchanted city, as portrayed by Leonardo Padura, it is useful to refer to Michel de Certeau's Chapter "Walking in the City" which appears in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) and which discusses two means of experiencing the city. The first (experienced by the 'voyeur') is from a distance and, in the case of his essay, from a height. He describes the perfect view of the city as being obtainable from a high-rise building. He compares this view to a picture in that it is not alive, it is not real: "This panorama-city is a 'theoretical' (that is visual) simulacrum, in short a picture, whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices" (De Certeau 1984: 128). This panoptic view of the city does not take in what is happening in the everyday life of the city dwellers, whom De Certeau refers to as "the ordinary practitioners who live 'down below' the thresholds at which visibility begins" (De Certeau 1984: 128). This view can only be witnessed by the 'walker', who from ground level can better observe the other city, the one that is not used as planned by the authorities. The panorama-city is the one which is designed by urban planners and controlled by the authorities. The everyday practitioners inhabit and make use of the city as it was planned, but they also choose to use the city not as it was intended or as permitted by the 'panoptic administration'. According to De Certeau, not only do the users not remain within the planned rules of usage but their practices:

"have reinforced themselves in a proliferating illegitimacy, developed and insinuated themselves into the networks of surveillance, and combined in accord with unreadable but stable tactics to the point of constituting everyday regulations and surreptitious creativities that are merely concealed by the frantic mechanisms and discourses of the observational organization" (De Certeau 1984: 130).

Therefore what seems visible to the eye is merely a superficial vision, what De Certeau calls 'another spatiality'. He claims that "a migrational or metaphorical city thus slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city" (De Certeau 1984: 128). This theory is very appropriate in the context of La Habana, where illegitimate practices have become everyday occurrences. Padura's novels serve to highlight this ground level view of his city, one with which only an insider or in this case a *habanero* would be familiar.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> De Certeau's theory of analysing the use of the city can be applied to all of the novels I include in this thesis not only the *Cuatro estaciones* tetralogy.

### 1.1. Crime Fiction in Cuba: From Propaganda to *Denuncia*

Supported by the authorities and encouraged by literary awards, Cuban detective fiction became a widely read propaganda tool for the Revolution in the early 1970s.<sup>8</sup> The emergence of this state-sponsored crime fiction, which typically shared the socialist-good versus imperialist-bad dichotomy, coincided with the period of strict censorship known as “el quinquenio gris”. Bad revolutionaries were immediately suspects in the crime. Braham notes in her book *Crimes Against the State, Crimes Against Persons* (2004) that it was the popular aspect of the detective genre that legitimized it in Cuba as it was considered “a symbol of equality and identification with the masses” (Braham 2004: 21). Braham regards the intellectual humbleness of detective fiction as an attractive factor for the new socialist society as it contrasted with the modernist writing that had been published prior to the Revolution. She explains that illiteracy had been predominant in rural areas before the Revolution’s literacy campaign at the beginning of the Revolution. Braham argues that the countryside became associated with the guerrilla movement which translated as wholesomeness and virility and writes that: “ignorance was understood to be an integral part of manliness, while high levels of education or intellectual cultivation in a man signalled the possibility of effeminacy” (Braham 2004: 22). This rejection of the city by Revolutionaries is also noted by Lefebvre, who considers this a result of the peasant origin of revolutionary movements and who stated in an interview in 1987: “The antiurban movement was still in evidence after Fidel Castro came to power - they wanted to destroy Havana. The town represents corruption, the bourgeoisie, and imperialism” (Burgel 1987: 30). In the same way that the city was rejected, so too was the culture that had been associated with it: Modernism and formalism<sup>9</sup> became linked with decadence, homosexuality and political subversiveness. The Revolution’s answer to formalism was realism, which would “combat the aberrations typical of bourgeois culture” (Braham 2004: 23). Realism, in post revolutionary Cuba, was embodied in the detective novel which was considered an ideal form of creating pure realist prose without the “contaminating

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<sup>8</sup> See Braham (2004), Simpson (2000).

<sup>9</sup> Literature that emphasised experimental or escapist mechanisms was referred to as formalism by socialist critics (Braham 2004:22).

ornament from literary production, leaving only the virile discourse of revolutionary truth” (Braham 2004: 28).

Stephen Wilkinson, who has written extensively on this genre in *Detective Fiction in Cuban Society and Culture* (2006), summarizes the formula expounded by the first exponent of the Cuban detective novel, Armando Cristóbal Pérez in four points: Firstly, to present explicit comments on the life-or-death struggle between revolutionary Cuba and its enemies; secondly, to create a hero who is not an individualist but a team worker; thirdly “el poder del pueblo” must be emphasised in the work, and finally, the novels are intended to demonstrate the special nature of the new revolutionary society (Wilkinson 2006: 123-4). Wilkinson notes that a common feature of the Cuban socialist detective novel is reformation of a negative, counterrevolutionary character.

Amelia Simpson writes that publication of the novel *Enigma para un domingo* by Luis Rogelio Noguera in 1971 marked the beginning of the boom of the Cuban detective novel. However the launch of the “Concurso Aniversario del Triunfo de la Revolución” in 1972 by the MININT (Ministerio del Interior de la República de Cuba) stimulated the production of the genre to such a degree that “it exceeds that of any other Latin American country except perhaps Argentina in the same period” (Simpson 1990: 97). Simpson notes the policy for submission to the contest, as quoted by one of the 1973 judges Garzón Céspedes: “Detective genre works will be of a didactic nature and will further awareness, and prevention, of all antisocial and counterrevolutionary activities” (Simpson 1990: 97). Simpson also points out that the aims of the Revolution to modify the traditional detective novel, “a child of capitalism”, to support revolutionary aims, “weakens the effectiveness of the conventional narrative apparatus of detective fiction” (Simpson 1990: 100). By suppressing the personality of the hero and setting the novels in a socialist setting where private property is nonexistent, thus leaving the culprit with nowhere to hide, constraints on the rhetorical strategies normally employed in traditional detective novels resulted in an inferior and predictable work of fiction. A solution to this limitation was to set the novel in prerevolutionary Cuba or in a foreign country (Simpson 1990: 212). Nevertheless, in all novels the culprits are easily identified; they are either not integrated into socialism, unemployed, homosexual, promiscuous women or they are CIA agents. Wilkinson states that, apart from a couple of

exceptions, “no Cuban revolutionary police novel entirely overcame the problem of creating a form in which, following Gramsci, the author’s view springs organically from the text... The novels became repetitive, stale morality tales that above all ran the risk of predictability” (Wilkinson 2006: 153).

Leonardo Padura however, was one of the Cuban pioneers in breaking with the twenty-year-old socialist tradition of producing crime fiction which supported revolutionary rhetoric and ideals and is without doubt the most successful author of his time. Padura’s novels do not have heroes or heroines who fit the image of the *buen revolucionario*. On the contrary, it is the criminals who often turn out to be typically *buenos revolucionarios* in appearance, in that they work within the system and support the Revolution. Instead of praising the merits of the Revolution, as the Cuban socialist detective novel had done, Padura denounces its failures. He uses his novels as a space for writing a social chronicle of life within the bounds of the Castro regime in a manner which is clearly critical of its mistakes. Padura’s style of detective fiction, the *neopolicial*, resembles the hard-boiled genre which was created in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s by authors such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. Colmeiro, in *La novela policiaca española*, refers to the hard-boiled detective novel as *la novela policiaca negra* and the classic detective novel as *la novela policiaca clásica*. He notes that the main difference between them is that in the classic detective novel the detective’s role was to defend society from its aggressor, the criminal, whereas the hard-boiled novel “parte de una desconfianza total en la sociedad y sus instituciones. La constitución de la sociedad se considera intrínsecamente injusta e inmoral, basada en el dominio del poderoso sobre el débil, del rico sobre el pobre, a través de la explotación y la violencia” (Colmeiro 1994: 62).

Braham classifies Spaniard Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, who began writing his famous Carvalho series in Spain around the time of Franco’s death, as a contributor to the *neopolicíaco* genre, as the *neopolicial* is also called, and writes that the “Spanish *novela negra* comments on the failures of the socialist program in the early years after Franco’s death, as the hope for a new society was spoiled by economic chaos; an emerging drug culture and the corruption of democratic institutions contributed to a generalized cynicism amid the many political crises of the late 1970s and early 1980s” (Braham 2004: 3). Braham adds that “the *neopolicíaco* genre arose in times of upheaval, when epistemological and political

conditions were undergoing major transformations and outcomes were uncertain ... [and this] ... moved writers and intellectuals to rethink their ethical and aesthetic responsibilities and to question their position with respect to the academy, Western Culture and their readers” (Braham 2004: 3). Padura also began to write his *neopoliciales* at the start of the Special Period, a time of major change in Cuba, one which rendered the state-sponsored crime fiction obsolete.

In Cuba, until the fall of the Soviet Bloc in 1989, which led to the greatest economic crisis ever experienced on the island - the Special Period - censorship (often in the form of self-censorship) prevented Cuban artists from openly expressing criticism of the Castro regime, or even reflecting an honest image of life in socialist Cuba. The Special Period saw a loosening of censorship and a window for authors like Padura to express more freely their visions of social reality. While it can be argued that many of the mistakes made by the Revolution, which Padura addresses in his novels, had already been admitted by the Revolution (Wilkinson 2007: 212-213), there is no doubt that his novels do not present a favourable image of the day-to-day life of ordinary Cubans living in La Habana under the Revolution. Furthermore, Padura has undoubtedly become more overtly critical of the regime in his novels from his first crime fiction publication *Pasado perfecto*, in 1991, to his latest published novel to date, *El hombre que amaba a los perros* (2009), as this study will make evident.

## **1.2. Representations of La Habana in *Paisaje de otoño***

In *Paisaje de otoño* (1998), Padura takes the reader on a tour through the streets of his native city, La Habana. Crossing from one neighbourhood to another, the author invites the reader to discover the history of the city through its buildings and landmarks. Using at times the Cuban *guagua* as a means of transport, or a police car driven by protagonist Mario Conde’s right hand man Manuel Palacios, or simply moving on foot, Padura points out different areas of the city through el Conde’s individual perspective. Although certain areas of La Habana provoke the protagonist’s nostalgia for his youth, this nostalgia does not cloud the harsh reality of the present state of the city as one in ruins. The juxtaposition of past and present impressions serves to underline decay and disillusionment. Places that remind el Conde of his personal memories tend to lead to the underlying theme in Padura’s

fiction, that of a disenchanting generation, one which was brought up to believe that their hardships were temporary and that the Revolution would lead them to a happier and more prosperous existence.

The first image of La Habana offered to the reader is the view from Mario Conde's flat, in an area in the northern outskirts of La Habana, which is believed to be Mantilla, the area where Padura was born and where the author still resides. Detective Conde or el Conde as he is often called in the novels, is looking down on the streets of his *barrio*, where his family has lived since his great grandfather arrived on the island from Spain at the start of the twentieth century and built the first house in the area. This information about el Conde's family history is detailed in *Pasado perfecto* and *Vientos de cuaresma* and further recounted in the final section of this Chapter. The protagonist is waiting anxiously for the arrival of the approaching hurricane Félix, which he believes will cause the final destruction of the city and with it "ejecutar una purificación esperada y necesaria" (Padura 1998: 14). The hurricane could be interpreted as a metaphor for the Special Period and the city as the Revolution, which will be "purified" by the storm. El Conde describes his view of television antennas, clothes lines, pigeon lofts and water tanks as "una cotidianidad simple y agreste" (Padura 1998: 14). Similar to Michel de Certeau, who views the city of New York from the World Trade Centre, el Conde's view from above is superficial; he observes simple daily life. Nevertheless, el Conde is a native of La Habana and knows the truth that lies beneath the superficial view. El Conde is a "walker" of the city, and therefore is familiar with life in La Habana on ground level, below the superficial or postcard view of the city. The people he sees on the street are "...cargados de jabas y esperanzas, o con las manos vacías y las mentes llenas de incertidumbres..." (Padura 1998: 15). The *habanero* protagonist does not simply see people with or without shopping bags, el Conde knows that those who are lucky enough to be carrying full shopping bags can feel hope as opposed to those whose hands are empty and who therefore have to live with uncertainty as to where their next meal will come from. He also knows that in order to buy food, it is more than often necessary to stray from the authorized city route and to enter into the transgressive city, outside the view of the authorities. Here Padura's view of the city fits with De Certeau's theory of the two ways of experiencing city life. The imagery offered on the first pages of the novel provides a direct criticism of the failure of the

Cuban authorities to provide equally for all its citizens. The scarcity of food and provisions at affordable prices is sufficient preoccupation for the people el Conde watches; they do not have time to worry about the hurricane approaching the island, which is also an important symbolic protagonist within the novel. He imagines them as being indifferent even to death and lacking “voluntad de memoria ni expectativas de futuro” (Padura 1998: 15). The protagonist fixes his eyes on a red roofed construction which his grandfather had worked on a hundred years ago, an imitation English castle. He considers what he calls “[a]quella permanencia empecinada de ciertas obras” (Padura 1998: 15), a stubborn permanence of certain buildings, the only valid reason for existence. This reflection by Mario Conde on the importance of the durability of certain architecture is highly significant in a city like La Habana, where revolutionary policy toward the city, coupled with poverty, have caused the abandonment and lack of maintenance of most of the city’s architecture. Since UNESCO declared Old Habana a world heritage site in 1982, restoration has taken place on some of the most emblematic buildings of Old Habana, saving them from total ruin. However, this has been limited to the most touristic areas of the old city, and the rest of La Habana has been left to fall into ruins. This “permanencia empecinada” could also be interpreted politically as the Revolution, which after more than fifty years is still in control of the country.

Though a policeman, el Conde has many of the features of the hard-boiled detective. He is a divorced alcoholic who is unable to hold a normal relationship with a woman due to the demands of his work. However, he differs from his hard-boiled counterparts in that, despite being an excellent detective, most of his achievements are due to his gut feelings, or in his case, a pain in his chest, just over his right nipple. This rejection of empirical knowledge, on which the detective genre was traditionally based, could also be interpreted as a playful critique of the Cuban socialist detective novel, based on the tenets of socialist realism which rejected all “antirealist” literature.<sup>10</sup> He is anti violence and his real desire to be a writer and live by a beach is pure escapism and represents a desire for freedom. He is also, in his own opinion, the only person in La Habana who sees the beauty in the old buildings. He remembers how he used to always try to sit beside the window on the thirty

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<sup>10</sup> See Georg Luckács *Critical Realism and Socialist Realism in Realism in Our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle* (1963): 93-135.

minute bus ride from his house to college in order to study the buildings the bus passed by and discover the other city which existed on the second or third floor of these buildings and was not visible from the street. He mentions the streets Jesús del Monte and La Infanta, streets that lie between El Vedado and Centro Habana, constructed around the start of the twentieth century. He contrasts the beauty of these constructions to the dirty streets below; he personifies them, and imagines them to be alive, although their ailing condition has rendered them near death; he describes them as “otras almas en pena” (Padura 1998: 45). El Conde also describes in this sequence a quasi spiritual experience in which part of his body rises up and floats, as he opens a dialogue with the buildings: “[...] penetrando en misterios olvidados, en historias remotas, en sueños perdidos tras las paredes [...]” (Padura 1998: 45). Through this experience, where the author playfully pays homage to the magic realism that characterized the literature of the Latin American boom, he claims to have discovered from the bus window the most beautiful balconies in the city and offers a description of their designs: “...frontones esculpidos con los motivos más extravagantes, aleros bordados con ribetes de *cake* de boda, enrejados guardavecinos con los hierros tejidos por orfebres militantes en todos los barroquismos...” (Padura 1998: 45). El Conde fears the death of these buildings, weakened through neglect, by the hurricane forecast to hit the island and demolish this derelict beauty. He also contrasts the detailed description of their elaborate architecture with the present day squalor of these never maintained buildings: “[...] donde los vecinos se arracimaban en casas de solera y dignidad perdidas, degradadas por la necesidad a cuarterías huérfanas de agua, con baños colectivos y promiscuidades hereditarias” (Padura 1998: 46). The hurricane which is approaching the island could be interpreted, as stated previously, as a metaphor for the Special Period, connecting the city, with its ailing buildings, to the Revolution. The author poses the question: “¿Cuál podía ser el destino de aquella ciudad sino esa muerte violenta, fraguada por la prolongada agonía del olvido?” (Padura 1998: 46). Twenty years later it is clear that the worst economic crisis ever experienced in Cuba did not result in the abolishment of the Castro led Revolution, despite speculation that it would not survive the storm.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Antoni Kapcia discusses the reasons for the permanence of the Revolution against all the odds in his book *Cuba in Revolution* (2009).

Padura continues his tour of La Habana, starting at el Conde's barrio on the outskirts, continuing down the avenues, where the aforementioned buildings can be found, until he reaches the Malecón de La Habana, the city Promenade. From there he continues on to the area of El Vedado, built by the aristocracy and bourgeoisie to distance themselves from the lower-classes and immigrants who had settled first in Old and then Centre Habana at the beginning of the twentieth century. The journey described takes in a number of key points in the city and also serves as a form of summary of the themes that emerge in the series, such as political corruption and inequality. Historian Hugh Thomas in his book *Cuba: A History* offers a thorough history of Cuba and also of the history of the development of the city since 1792. He writes that in 1899, one year after independence from Spain: "The suburb Vedado was now the centre of social life, the favoured place for leaders of the rebel army to invest their money, though even the new houses there did not have panes in their windows. Old Havana was mainly the centre of business" (Thomas 2010: 295). Thomas also describes the architecture of the day in El Vedado as a mixture between impractical wooden houses of North American influence and the 'Catalan phase', which were houses inspired by the *art nouveau* movement preferred by the Barcelona bourgeoisie. El Conde visits the parents of murder victim Miguel Forcade living in a house with a garden in El Vedado dated to the 1920s. El Conde notes that although this house is "mordida de olvidos y desidias, clamando por el beneficio de una mano de pintura" (Padura 1998: 48) it is filled with valuable furniture, art work and ornaments. El Conde understands immediately that these valuables were placed in the house by the victim before he left Cuba. Forcade had worked at the Ministry of Expropriation and was undoubtedly corrupt.

The next area introduced in the novel is Vedado Nuevo, which el Conde considers the best place to live in La Habana. The mansions in this area were built in a futuristic style on very fertile land by the bourgeoisie in the 1950s to escape the low life "chusma que había llegado al mismísimo barrio del Vedado" (Padura 1998: 57). By now, Padura has mapped the extension of the suburbs of the city, which have expanded to accommodate the wealthier inhabitants and draw clear lines between rich and poor neighbourhoods. El Conde goes to Vedado Nuevo to visit Gómez de la Peña, an ex-minister whom he considers a suspect in the murder of Miguel Forcade. This ex-minister fell from grace after the economic measures which were taken by

him brought further ruin to the country. Despite his downfall, he still maintains the privilege of living in a mansion which was allocated to him as “justicia histórica” (Padura 1998: 64) after the triumph of the Revolution. Many mansions in this area were abandoned by the upper classes fleeing Cuba at the start of the Revolution and then expropriated and el Conde wonders to whom it originally belonged (Padura 1998: 57). In so doing, the author draws attention to the fact that the owners of these buildings still exist, despite their exile from Cuba. This also raises the question of what rights they or their inheritors may have to these properties should Cuba return to democracy. El Conde is disgusted by Gómez de la Peña’s open display of what is believed to be an original Matisse, *El paisaje de otoño*, bought illegally from the murder victim, Miguel Forcade, when he was working for the Ministry of Expropriations. He asks Gómez if he is not ashamed to live in such luxury when 85% of the island lives in poverty. Gómez’s response is that the whole neighbourhood is full of houses with similar luxuries obtained in the same fashion, where, according to him, “comen mejor que el sesenta por ciento de la población mundial y que el ochenta y cinco de la nacional” (Padura 1998: 65). Through this quote the author highlights that inequality still exists in La Habana, despite the long-standing duration of the Revolution. Furthermore, Padura makes clear that high-ranking supporters of the Revolution replaced the bourgeoisie after their flight and formed the new social elite. Ironically, the revolutionaries who promised equality for all Cubans are portrayed in the novel as the privileged upper-class that enjoy luxuries while the overwhelming majority of the islanders’ lives are based on a daily struggle for basic survival. This criticism is made time and again throughout Padura’s work.

Continuing with his investigations, el Conde finds himself in an area of personal nostalgia called Calle 23 or La Rampa which is a long road in the area of El Vedado leading downhill to the sea. During Batista’s regime, this area, strongly influenced by the United States, was built up with luxury hotels and skyscrapers. Batista also moved government buildings out of Old Habana, which was by now run down and inhabited mainly by the lower classes and immigrants, and set them up in El Vedado. Along with Havana Vieja it was the centre of night life, with clubs, casinos and prostitution included. The detective’s journey through the city is not only physical but also a journey through memory. For Mario Conde, la Rampa brings back memories of happy adolescent days of innocence, of first love and the

Beatles. Walking up and down la Rampa was almost a form of initiation into adulthood. In the late sixties, when el Conde was a young teenager, a shadow of the night life of the fifties was still active and the streets were still lit up with neon signs. However, by then the city was under the control of revolutionary forces which set up the *Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción* (UMAP), active from 1965 to 1968 “como correctivo formador del Hombre Nuevo” (Padura 1998: 68). Any youth who was considered a threat to the Revolution was sent to these concentration camps, and forced to work in agriculture. Raúl Castro, current President of Cuba, spoke about the UMAP in April 1965 as follows:

[...] en el primer grupo de compañeros que han ido a formar parte de las UMAP se incluyeron algunos jóvenes que no habían tenido la mejor conducta ante la vida, jóvenes que por la mala formación e influencia del medio habían tomado una senda equivocada ante la sociedad y han sido incorporados con el fin de ayudarlos para que puedan encontrar un camino acertado que les permita incorporarse a la sociedad plenamente. (Raúl Castro: April 1965).<sup>12</sup>

The above policy of reshaping Cuban youth to fit the ideal of socialist youth is what leads el Conde’s friend Andrés to proclaim that their generation was one of “mandados” in *Paisaje de otoño* (Padura 1998: 23). El Conde and his friends feel that they were not given the liberty to express themselves freely and enjoy their youth in their own way. The fact that for three years strict control and punishment over non-conforming youths was in place clearly marked the norms of what was acceptable or not within the boundaries of the Revolution.<sup>13</sup> In el Conde’s Habana of autumn 1989, la Rampa is not what it used to be. Instead of neon light, it is in the dark and the clubs have been closed. Padura makes use of a filmic style to contrast his past memories of the city, overlaying them with the present. His memory is key to bringing past versions of the city to life, as is evident in the following citation:

Y en aquella misma Rampa, que Heráclito de Éfeso habría calificado, dialécticamente, de diferente, encontró el Conde otra vez sus deslumbramientos de aquellos tiempos, ahora a oscuras, con los clubes cerrados, el Pabellón mustio, la pizzería abarrotada y la ausencia de aquella novia remota a la que solía esperar en la esquina de la tienda Indochina, donde ahora se vendían los que quizá fueron los últimos relojes soviéticos enviados desde un Moscú cada día más alejado y más inmune a las lágrimas (Padura 1998: 69).

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<sup>12</sup> Quote taken from <http://secretoscuba.cultureforum.net/t19851-unos-humanos-sin-derechos>  
Accessed 10/09/2010.

<sup>13</sup> . In the third section of this Chapter, I discuss how the UMAP also persecuted homosexual men who were later confined to forced labour camps in an effort to correct their sexuality.

The walking up and down of la Rampa becomes a metaphor for life in Cuba. Reaching the top of the hill translates in the novel as achieving success and progressing in life. However, el Conde considers this impossible in Cuba, therefore walking down the hill again is inevitable. Padura refers to the Greek king Sisyphus, who was condemned to the eternal punishment of having to push an enormous boulder up to the top of a hill, from where it would always roll back down again. In her book, *La caída del Hombre Nuevo*, Sonia Behar refers to Albert Camus' essay *Le héroes absurds*, based on the myth of Sisyphus. Camus' absurd hero "reconoce el carácter absurdo de su existencia" (Behar 2009: 47). She adds that in Sisyphus, Camus observes rebellion, freedom and passion as his rock has become his reason for living and what makes him hold on to life. Behar suggests that this absurd hero is what has taken the place of Che Guevara's "Hombre Nuevo", the perfect revolutionary man:

El Hombre Nuevo ha sido remplazado por un nuevo hombre que es una y muchas variantes del héroe absurdo de Camus, uno que busca, sí, pero no mirando al pasado, sino al presente. Ha dejado de aferrarse a lo que ya no existe, y se conforma con los retazos que le han quedado para con ellos crearse una nueva realidad (Behar 2009: 148).

While Behar's interpretation of Cuba's absurd hero offers some form of hope for change in the future, Padura's use of the Sisyphus metaphor to describe the constant uphill battle that is life in Cuba during the Special Period highlights the disillusion of a generation tired of being condemned to an eternal punishment for actions for which they are not responsible, as is illustrated in the following quote:

[...] la realidad no había resultado una cuestión de caprichosos y voluntarios ascensos y descensos, inconscientemente alternados, con mares y helados en las metas, sino una lucha por subir y no bajar, por subir y seguir subiendo, por subir y quedarse arriba, por los siglos de los siglos, con una filosofía trepadora de la cual ellos habían sido excluidos, definitivamente relegados - Andrés volvía a tener razón - y condenados todos - o casi todos - al eterno ejercicio de Sísifo: subir para tener que bajar, bajar para tener que subir, sabiendo que nunca se quedaría arriba, cada vez más viejos y más cansados... (Padura 1998: 69).

From the more refined area of the capital, el Vedado, we are taken to one which represents the marginalized areas of the city. El Conde visits his old school friend Candito el Rojo who lives in the area of Santos Suárez. Candito is often of help to Detective Conde in his investigations, thanks to his ability to provide him with invaluable information from his 'delinquent' acquaintances. El Conde describes Candito's dwelling as "una cuartería promiscua de Santos Suárez, con las paredes

desconchadas y las tenderas de la electricidad prendidas a los aleros como tentáculos venenosos” (Padura 1998: 82). <sup>14</sup>Candito learned as a child the value of space and to defend it using violence if necessary. Despite his delinquent and violent nature, Candito strives to find peace and positivity through religion, be it Adventist, Catholic or Yoruba, the west African religion brought to Cuba by the slaves in the sixteenth century. <sup>15</sup>Belonging to a religion, which is also frowned upon by the Revolution, also fits in with Candito’s rebellious nature.

Padura’s tour of the city takes the reader to another poverty stricken area, la Vieja Avenida del Puerto. This area has been historically impoverished since the first aristocrats on the island decided to move outside the city walls in the eighteenth century in order to live in a more European style city with a wide tree-lined boulevard they named El Prado. In *Máscaras* (1997), el Conde is told that the design of El Prado was a replica of Las Ramblas in Barcelona (Padura 1997: 136-137). This area is now known as Centro Havana. Old Habana, where the port is, was left to be inhabited by the lower class. In *Paisaje de otoño*, el Conde is in this area supposedly to find information related to his case in the Archivo Nacional, a place el Conde strongly dislikes as he believes that memories should not be reduced to a numbered page and filed away: “Una desidia malsana lo había invadido ante la revelación de tanto pasado muerto, de tanta existencia convertida sólo en actas, declaraciones, planillas, minutas, extractos, protocolos, registros, duplicados y hasta triplicados vacíos de pasión y de sangre” (Padura 1997: 118). Instead of working through the files, he takes a walk along what he calls “el tramo más inoble de La Habana” (Padura 1998: 116). He describes the cement blocks without balconies or any architectural details, which had been built for the sole purpose of housing prostitutes for the pleasure of the sailors passing through La Habana, the port workers or anyone else who dared cross into “pleno territorio apache” (Padura 1997: 117). After the Revolution, the former prostitutes were rehabilitated and allowed to live in what was previously their workplace. Conde describes the now residents of these buildings, which have had no running water for thirty years, as “...atrapados por un fatalismo urbanístico definitivamente cruel, gentes que al salir a la calle siempre debían ver ese

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<sup>14</sup> A “cuartería” is a dilapidated rooming house, described as a traditional but deplorable type of housing in Cuba (Luzón 1988:72).

<sup>15</sup> In the following section of this Chapter I examine religion under the Revolution and trace the changes in attitude towards religion on the island since the beginning of the Revolution.

mismo panorama oscuro y desolador...” (Padura 1998: 117). El Conde continues his walk as far as La Alameda de Paula, which used to be an elegant walkway in the eighteenth century but which is now “depreciado por los años y el olvido” (Padura 1998: 119) with a dried up fountain, decorated by lions; again the author reminds the reader that the city has been purposely abandoned by the Revolution.

The author’s descriptions of La Habana’s neighbourhoods serve to show the reader that divisions made in the planning of the city, in the separation of the rich from the poor, still exist thirty years after the triumph of the Revolution. He has also traced the earlier growth of the city from the colonial era, which is a topic to which he will return in *La novela de mi vida*, which will be discussed in Chapter two. This division of the classes is still visible, especially when urban space is considered. Certain areas of the city provoke the protagonist’s nostalgia for his lost youth, such as La Rampa. Nevertheless, this nostalgia is shadowed by underlying feelings of disillusion with the Revolution. El Conde believes that he is the only person in the city who cares about the abandoned state of the city’s architecture or the fact that it might soon be demolished by the approaching hurricane. Padura thus depicts a city in ruins, whose inhabitants are oblivious to the dilapidation. The reason offered in the novel as to why el Conde is the only inhabitant who cares about the ruin of his city is that the rest of the city has become accustomed to living among the ruins. The city has been abandoned since the beginning of the Revolution and a sense of acceptance of the fact that life under the Revolution equals ruin has been adopted.<sup>16</sup>

### **1.3. The Heretic City; Representations of La Habana in *Máscaras***

Set in the summer of 1989, *Máscaras* (2007), the third novel in the Mario Conde series, was written between 1994-95, harsh years for Cuba, still suffering through its Special Period. The bleak description of el Conde’s neighbourhood on an unbearably hot afternoon in the city in August, with desolate biblical references that Padura offers the reader as an introduction to the novel, gives an immediate insight into the hardships of living through the worst economic crisis ever suffered in Cuba. The first line of the novel - “El calor es una plaga maligna que lo invade todo” (Padura 1997: 13) - automatically draws the reader into an image of suffering which is the life of Mario Conde and the “barrio condenado” (Padura 1997: 13) in which he

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<sup>16</sup> In Chapter three (3.2.) I further explore the effects of living in a city in ruins has on its population.

lives. Other religious terms such as “martirio”, “odios infernales” and “ciudad hereje” on the first page of the novel reinforce what will be the religious tone throughout. Religion is not, however, one of the central themes of this work, but merely a clue which helps detective Conde to solve the mystery at hand. The central theme is, as the title suggests, masks; the disguise used to hide the true self and linked to the notion of covering up one’s true identity with one which, while false, protects the user from being a victim of prejudice, criticized or even incarcerated, as the case may be in a criminal investigation. Wilkinson notes in *Detective Fiction in Cuban Society and Culture* another important point with regard to the idea of the mask in any crime novel: “[...] disguise and the act of covering up are fundamental principles upon which the detective genre depends. The act of revelation is the consummation of every detective plot” (Wilkinson 2006: 218). However, it is not only the culprit in the plot of this crime novel who hides behind a mask, but rather all of the characters in one form or another and as suggested in the quote taken from Batman and chosen by the author as a prologue to the novel “todos usamos máscaras”.<sup>17</sup> The author’s choice of biblical vocabulary to describe La Habana as *la ciudad hereje*, is worthy of consideration. The word heretic itself has two senses, the first meaning is that of a religious outcast, one who holds religious beliefs in conflict with the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church; the second is that of a person who holds unorthodox opinions in any field, not merely religion. With both definitions in mind, we can firstly interpret the author’s heretic city as being one with a sinful nature, the delinquent city; and as is the case in this novel, the sodomite city, where homosexuality and transvestism are central topics. The second definition leads to an interpretation of the city as dissident, a city in conflict with the governing body and laws enforced by it. In the context of Cuba, the authoritarian nature of the state imposes its moral views on its citizens and intrudes into their private sexual life and private religious beliefs. These include a monolithic view of masculinity; one which enforces the macho role of men. This enforcement includes sexuality and for this

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<sup>17</sup> While unquestionably humorous, the use of a quote from a fictional character from a Hollywood blockbuster movie, when interpreted in the Cuban reality of the 1990s, the idea of everyone wearing a mask for everyday survival is far from laughable. I further discuss the use of the mask as a means of covering up double standards or “la doble moral” in Chapter three.

reason does not tolerate homosexuality. The state also imposes its views on religion and enforces one faith – that of communism. Following these possible interpretations of Padura’s heretic city, I will examine and discuss his representation of La Habana in *Máscaras*, firstly examining the theme of homosexuality, followed by various other forms of delinquency depicted in the novel, which render almost all the characters guilty of varying degrees of criminality. As mentioned previously, I will also discuss the changing role of religion on the island since the beginning of the Revolution.

In *Máscaras*, Detective Mario Conde is given the strange case of resolving the murder of a transvestite wearing a red dress found strangled in the woods. There are no signs of violence or of a struggle, yet two gold coins were found in the victim’s rectum. The victim is Alexis Arayan, son of Faustino Arayan, a high ranking diplomat. El Conde’s investigation leads him to explore the world of homosexuality and transvestism, an area foreign to him and his “machista-estalinista” upbringing, as the detective himself describes his own heterosexuality (Padura 1997: 141). Once again, Padura displays a concern with contextualising present attitudes with reference to the longer history of the island. With a certain level of distaste, he commences his investigations by interrogating Alexis’ housemate, Alberto Marqués, an ageing former dramatist and open homosexual. Through Marqués, el Conde gains an interest in, and is introduced to, Havana’s gay and transvestite scene. He also learns about theories of transvestism through literature lent to him by the dramatist. His initial disgust and homophobia change to acceptance and an understanding of homosexuality. Padura’s protagonist is representative of the typical Cuban macho educated by the Revolution to become the new man, the “Hombre Nuevo”. His homophobic attitude in itself can be read as a critique of the regime and its teachings. Before meeting Marqués, el Conde reads his file, which is the reader’s first introduction in the novel to the high level of surveillance and persecution of homosexuals in Cuba:

Aquel impresionante *curriculum vitae* era el resultado de las memorias escritas, conjugadas, resumidas y hasta citadas textualmente, de varios informantes policíacos, sucesivos presidentes del Comité de Defensa de la Revolución, cuadros del remoto Consejo Nacional de Cultura y del actual Ministerio de Cultura, de la consejería política de la embajada cubana en París y hasta de un padre franciscano que en una época prehistórica fuera su confesor y de un par de amantes perversos, interrogados por causas estrictamente delictivas (Padura 1997: 41-42).

The dramatist's extensive file includes statements from various sectors of the ruling hierarchy, from public bodies such as the police and government agencies to interviews related to Marqués' intimate private life. This violation of the private sphere is an indication of the level of control held over the population at a time in Cuban history when sexual and political intolerance was at its height. The CDRs (Comité de Defensa de la Revolución), set up in 1974, after an attempted assassination of Fidel Castro, play a vital role in creating a fine line between public and private control. The responsibility of the committees, made up of ordinary citizens, is the surveillance of the masses and their education in revolutionary ideology. CDRs are the eyes and ears of the Revolution and ensure the constant control of the population, by the population. El Conde, as a police detective and on different occasions in the series, interviews CDR members to gain additional information on his suspects.

Homosexuality did not have a place in Socialist Cuba, nor did it fit in with Guevara's ideal of el "Hombre Nuevo". Faustino Arayan's rejection of his only son on account of his homosexuality is another example in the novel of how the public passes to the private. As a diplomat, Faustino has to be an exemplary socialist/revolutionary citizen. His son's homosexuality is an embarrassment to him because, despite being legal in the year 1989, it is still not socially acceptable. This point is reinforced through Alexis' unhappiness and suicidal tendencies. In an effort to prove his theory that Alexis provoked his own death, Marqués tries to explain to el Conde why suicide is not a surprising outcome for a Cuban homosexual. The dramatist tells the detective that homosexuals on the island have been persecuted since colonisation by the Spanish who were disgusted by the natives' sexual practices: "[...] y les pareció cochino y bárbaro lo que hacían nuestros inditos sodomitas mientras se bañaban en apacibles riachuelos con un tabaco en la boca y una yuka en la mano [...]" (Padura 1997: 164). Marqués also refers to the persecution of gays by the Revolution in the 1960s, when gay men were arrested and sent to work camps by the UMAP, along with other rebellious youths, whose image did not fit with that of the "Hombre Nuevo":

[...] no olvide que en los años sesenta hubo aquí mismo algo que se llamó UMAP, las famosas Unidades Militares de Apoyo a la Producción, donde confinaban, entre otros seres dañinos, a los homosexuales, para que se hicieran hombres cortando caña y recogiendo café y que, después de 1971, se dictó una ordenanza, otra vez aquí

mismo, para que los policías como usted y los fiscales y los jueces la cumplieran, donde se legislaba jurídicamente sobre el ‘homosexualismo ostensible y otras conductas socialmente reprobables’... ¿Y usted es tan ingenuo que todavía puede preguntarse por qué un homosexual llega a pensar en el suicidio? (Padura 1997: 164).

Brad Epps interestingly points out in his article “Proper Conduct: Reinaldo Arenas, Fidel Castro, and the Politics of Homosexuality” that the slogan above the UMAP work camps, according to witnesses, was: “Work will make you men” (Epps 1995: 242). This slogan immediately brings to mind the Nazi slogan over the gates of their concentration camps: “Arbeit macht frei”, “Work will make you free”. Epps also notes how sexual politics in the Soviet Union left their mark on Cuba. Epps refers to Maxim Gorky’s article “Proletarian Humanism” (1934) where he presents fascism as fostering not only anti-semitism but also homosexuality. Gorky’s solution is: “Destroy homosexuality and Fascism will disappear” (Epps 1995: 238). Epps comments on the perverse irony of such a statement at a time when the Nazis had begun their campaign against Jews and homosexuals. Castro’s theory was that homosexuality was a direct result of capitalism and bourgeois decadence, and that along with capitalism, homosexuality would eventually wither away, especially if reinforced by political intervention such as UMAPs (Epps 1995: 238). Although UMAPs were officially closed in 1967, under national and international pressure from writers such as Graham Greene and Jean Paul Sartre (Epps 1995: 238), homosexuality remained illegal and punishable with prison sentences until 1979.

In *Máscaras*, Marqués refers to the year 1971, a drastic year for Cuban intellectuals and more so if they were homosexual. This was the year of the First Congress of Education and Culture which saw the beginning of strict censorship over all artists.<sup>18</sup> Any work which was not considered beneficial to the socialist project was deemed anti-revolutionary and cast aside. It was decided that homosexuality and art were not compatible and the Congress declared that it was not permissible for any homosexual to influence the youth through their artistic work. The final declaration of the Congress stated: “En el tratamiento del aspecto del homosexualismo la Comisión llegó a la conclusión de que no es permisible que por

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<sup>18</sup> This Conference is cited by several authors as an important point of change in the Revolution’s attitude to literature. See Sonia Behar, *La caída del ‘Hombre Nuevo’* (13), Also Stephen Wilkinson, *Detective Fiction in Cuban Society and Culture* (239). See also Reinaldo Arenas, *Antes que anochezca* (163).

medio de la ‘calidad artística’ reconocidos homosexuales ganen influencia que indica la formación de nuestra juventud” (Wilkinson 2006: 239). The central theme of the Congress was the education of Cuban youth in revolutionary ideology. Therefore, the main aim of all literature and art was to be educational. On referring to the publication of books in that same congress Castro stated: “la primera prioridad la deben tener los libros para la educación, la segunda prioridad la deben tener los libros para la educación, ¡y la tercera prioridad la deben tener los libros para la educación!” (Castro 1971). Thus began a second wave of persecution of Cuba’s homosexuals. Alberto Marqués’ testimony is representative of all homosexual artists at that time. Their work was censored, left unpublished or removed from libraries and book shops. Those who held public positions, like Marqués, were transferred to positions where they could have as little influence as possible on the population, as the following quote indicates:

Bueno, empezó toda aquella historia de la parametración de los artistas y me sacaron del grupo de teatro y de la asociación de teatristas, y después de comprobar que no podía trabajar en una fábrica, como debía ser si quería purificarme con el contacto de la clase obrera, [...] pues me pusieron a trabajar en una biblioteca pequeña que está en Marianao, clasificando libros (Padura 1997: 54).

In an attempt to make the detective aware of the hardship for homosexuals of living in a society where homosexuality is not accepted, Marqués shares his personal experience of persecution with el Conde. In order to get a greater understanding of Havana’s gay scene to help with his investigation into the murder of a transvestite, Mario Conde accepts the dramatist’s invitation to a gay party at the house of a friend of Marqués in the city centre. Marqués warns him in advance that what he is about to see will be disturbing, not because he is heterosexual and may be disturbed by open homosexuality but rather because of the sheer tragedy of the result of the repression suffered by the gay community. Marqués tells el Conde “[e]s sórdido, alarmante, descarnado, y casi siempre trágico, porque es el resultado de la soledad, de la represión eterna, de la burla, la agresión, el desprecio, y hasta del monocultivo y el subdesarrollo” (Padura 1997: 138).

Before this case, detective Conde had not had much contact with homosexuals, nor was he aware of the reality of life for homosexuals in Cuba. The case brings to his memory the story of the only open homosexual he knew in his *barrio*, Luisito. He remembers how Luisito was ridiculed and bullied by all the kids

in the area. He was discriminated against not only by the children but also by their mothers, who did not want their sons to be associated with “aquel niño distinto, invertido y perverso, enfermo del mal más abominable que se pudiera imaginar” (Padura 1997: 75). However, some of those same boys who attacked Luisito during the day, had sex with him at night as a form of sexual initiation: “después de experimentar con las chivas y las puercas, habían probado el boquete oscuro de Luisito” (Padura 1997: 75). The following quote from the novel indicates how these obvious homosexual acts were not considered as such because the other boys were the active partners, and Luisito the passive one, making him homosexual and the boys macho:

[...] para todos los que lo hicieron, la relación con Luisito había sido aceptada como una prueba de hombría alcanzada a punto de pene... Luisito sí, ellos no: como si la homosexualidad sólo se definiera por una aceptación de la carne ajena similar a la recepción femenina (Padura 1997: 75-6).

This interpretation of what is considered homosexual is not limited to Mario Conde’s neighbourhood. Reinaldo Arenas discusses this topic in his autobiography *Antes que anochezca* (1982). As an open homosexual, a writer and a dissident, Arenas suffered first-hand the brutalities of homosexual persecution in his country, including imprisonment. Arenas left Cuba in 1980 through the port of Mariel on the grounds that he was homosexual. He explains the process through which he had to pass in order to confirm his condition so as to be granted permission to leave the country. This commentary helps make sense of the attitude the other boys had towards Luisito:

Al llegar me preguntaron si yo era homosexual y les dije que sí; me preguntaron entonces si era activo o pasivo, y tuve la precaución de decir que era pasivo. A un amigo mío que dijo ser activo le negaron la salida; él no dijo más que la verdad, pero el gobierno cubano no consideraba que los homosexuales activos fueran, en realidad, homosexuales (Arenas 1992: 301).

From Arenas’ testimony we can understand that it was generally accepted nationwide that the active partner or penetrator is not considered homosexual yet the passive partner or receiver is. Arenas continues his account by describing the homosexuality test to which he was subjected; walking in front of psychologists to see if he was really a *loca*, a Latin American term for an effeminate homosexual male. Padura also refers to the Mariel boatlift. Luisito, like Arenas and thousands of other homosexual Cubans, left Cuba through the port of Mariel for Florida in 1980:

“[...] gracias a su indiscutible condición de homosexual y, por tanto, de escoria, antisocial y excluible, se le permitió abordar tranquilamente una lancha en el puerto de Mariel y salir hacia Estados Unidos” (Padura 1997: 76). Again, Padura points out that Luisito’s homosexual condition was undeniable, meaning that he was allowed to leave the country without question. It is suggested in the novel that should he not have had such stereotypical homosexual mannerisms he might not have been believed to be truly homosexual.

Anthropologist Roger Lancaster explains the different perceptions of homosexuality between the Anglophone world and the Latin American world in *Life is Hard*, a study of gender power relations in Nicaragua. He points out that in Anglo-American culture, a man gains sexual status and honour among other men through his sexual transactions with women. In Nicaragua, a man gains sexual status and honour through his active role in sexual intercourse, either with women or men. He explains that the term *cochón* signifies the passive male homosexual and the stigmatized homosexual. Traditional western parallels such as “bugger” “sodomite” or “faggot” refer to the active male homosexual and held the same stigma as the *cochón*. Lancaster goes on to state that Nicaragua’s sexual system, with its active-honour and passive-shame dichotomy, exemplifies rules governing male sexual relations not only for much of Latin America generally but also for cultures throughout the Mediterranean and the Middle East. According to Lancaster, this dichotomy stands opposed to the Anglophone world where homophobes show condemnation of all same-sex practices, active ones in particular (Lancaster 1992: 270). Lancaster’s study goes some way towards explaining discrimination towards the passive homosexual in Cuba as described by Arenas and Padura.

At the party, el Conde asks the girl he befriends for information on those present. Her reply is a page long list of various professions, ideologies and religions by means of which Padura makes the point that homosexuality cannot be bound to any one group of individuals and that it is far more widespread than Mario Conde might have imagined:

Y el Conde supo que en aquella sala de La Habana Vieja había, como primera evidencia, hombres y mujeres, diferenciables además por ser: militantes del sexo libre, de la nostalgia y de partidos rojos, verdes y amarillos; ex dramaturgos sin obra y con obra, y escritores con ex libris nunca estampados; maricones de todas las categorías y filiaciones (Padura 1997: 143).

The heretic city, as Padura names it, apart from being a space where homosexuality is still considered a form of heresy, is one of delinquency and crime. Almost all of the characters are guilty of heresy, if we understand it as an act of rebellion against the governing body. This delinquency is visible throughout the novel on varying levels, from lesser crimes, such as buying on the black market, to first degree murder. The sordid case of the murder of Alexis Arayan is welcomed selfishly by el Conde as it is the reason why he is given permission to return to full detective duties after being sanctioned for punching a colleague. As he stands next to Alex's remains in the woods at the start of his investigation, he mentally lists some of the most common crimes in the city and thinks about how thankful he is that crime is on the increase so he can be on the streets doing his job instead of being limited to office work in the police station: "por suerte en la ciudad se seguía robando, asesinando, asaltando, malversando con insistencia creciente, y para él, salvadora" (Padura 1997: 33). This listing of serious crimes is an indication of the high level of ongoing delinquency taking place in the city of La Habana.

Through the character el Gordo Contreras, Padura not only highlights crimes within the police force but also the criminality associated with tourism. El Gordo Contreras' job was to crack down on illegal money exchanges. In order to understand this job, knowledge of Cuban currency is needed. There are two currencies in Cuba; the Cuban peso and the peso convertible, which was introduced in 2004. The latter replaced the American dollar, which was the main currency used by tourists. Currently in Cuba tourists can only exchange their currencies for the peso convertible, which traded at the same rate as the American dollar until March 2011, when the exchange rate was reduced to \$1.00 to the peso convertible in order to attract more tourism to the island. Most Cubans are only paid in Cuban pesos, which trade at approximately twenty-five pesos for one peso convertible. Those who work as hustlers would have been paid in American dollars before the peso convertible was introduced in 2004. Therefore, illegal money exchange is common on the streets of La Habana, with Cubans exchanging illicit dollars to Cuban pesos and foreigners buying Cuban pesos for elevated rates. El Gordo Contreras explained his job to el Conde in the following quote:

Lo mío estaba en la calle, partiéndole la vida a los que estuvieron luchándole un fula a los extranjeros y eso lo hice bien, y tú mismo lo sabes [...], ahí no había negrito de

La Habana Vieja ni blanquito bisnero del Vedado ni jinetera de La Lisa que pudiera llegar (Padura 1997: 157).

Contreras has been fired from the police-force for corruption, although he denies all charges. He claims that any corruption that took place did not happen on the streets of La Habana, where he controlled the local hustlers. He insinuates that this corruption was on a higher level, from “gentes de arriba” (Padura 1997: 157), which included investments in foreign banks and foreign currencies. Again, as seen in *Paisaje de otoño*, corruption from higher government officials is denounced in this novel. Padura does not normally deal with issues such as *jineterismo*, or other tourism related crimes, as el Conde’s professional and personal circles do not generally mix with the tourism sectors. Yet, in this novel, a brief mention is given to the *jineteros/as* in the context of Contrera’s job, the term given to hustlers, or male/female prostitutes who make a living from foreign tourists. *Jineteros* often act subtly, and the tourist often does not know he/she is being hustled. Money does not always necessarily change hands but presents, meals out, nights in tourist hotels or bars are sufficient payment for the professional hustler.

Crime is also evident on a more everyday level; For instance the way Josefina, mother of el Flaco Carlos, Conde’s best friend since secondary school, always manages to prepare feasts for her son and Mario Conde. Although it is never spelled out in the text, the only possible way she can get such products is through the black market, as the ingredients she uses are not readily available in shops, nor can they be bought with the ration card. The black market in Cuba is enormous. Houses, cars, clothes and thousands of other products all change hands on the black market. Prior to 2012, when Raúl Castro implemented more liberal economic policies, houses and cars could not be bought or sold but could only be swapped. The Spanish term *permutar* is used to describe the changing hands of property. In theory, you could only swap your house for another; it would always remain the property of the Cuban state. However, in reality, the buying and selling of houses was all done on the black market. Likewise, illegal bars were set up around the city with all profits going directly to the owners. Since 2011, it has become legal to set up certain private enterprises, yet the taxes claimed by the government are often too high to merit the

initial investment required to set up the business.<sup>19</sup> In this first Chapter of the novel, Padura introduces the reader to a violent city of underground drinking involving thugs and brawls which serves to underscore the theme of the delinquent heretic city. At the start of the novel, el Conde is convinced by his best friend Carlos to visit the illegal bar of their mutual friend Candito el Rojo, who is selling beer bought on the black market. The detective has his doubts about going as it would put him in a precarious position professionally; he would also be participating in the buying of illegal goods and therefore committing a crime. Nevertheless, Carlos convinces el Conde to join him and both automatically pass onto the heretic list. While at Candito's house/illegal bar, an incident takes place where Candito's two "security men" intervene by stopping and taking down a client. It is not clear whom this client had intended to target, but it is suggested that he was about to make an attack on Mario Conde. The scene described is of extreme violence and brutality, yet is treated as an everyday occurrence. Candito summarizes it as "gajes del oficio" (Padura 1997: 25) and encourages everyone to continue drinking.

The reference to different areas of the city in the novel suggests that criminality is not limited to any one area but is spread across La Habana. In fact, the well-to-do neighbourhood of Miramar "el rostro más amable de la ciudad" (Padura 1997: 87), as Conde refers to it, turns out to be the home of Alexis' murderer, his father Faustino Arayan, who is the ultimate heretic, the real face behind the mask in the novel. He is guilty of several sins and crimes that range from the most serious one of murdering his own son to falsifying and exaggerating the events in the documents which led to Marqués' downfall. We also learn at the end of the novel that his reason for killing his son was because he had found out that Faustino had been a supporter of Batista. After the Revolution, Faustino had falsified some documents and persuaded false witnesses to state that he had secretly fought against Batista. This information guaranteed Arayan a positive future within the Regime.

Arayan's lifestyle, including his mansion, two cars, foreign luxuries and a maid, is reminiscent of pre-revolutionary Cuba. María Antonia, Arayan's black maid,

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<sup>19</sup> Padura has openly criticized the recent economic initiatives taken by the Cuban government regarding self employment stating that policies should be changed to reflect more encouragement in the form of subsidies for starting new businesses instead of discouragement in the shape of high taxes. See interview: [http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2011/02/12/actualidad/1297465205\\_850215.html](http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2011/02/12/actualidad/1297465205_850215.html)

reminds el Conde of a scene from the film *The Colour Purple*. She is a reminder of Cuba's long history of slavery which was not abolished on the island until 1886. I will further discuss the topic of slavery on the island in Chapter two but the fact that Arayan has a black maid demonstrates his hypocrisy and militates against him sharing any revolutionary ideals. Mario Conde feels uncomfortable in her presence and wants to flee from "aquel mundo de brillos y esmaltes" (Padura 1997: 40) which he finds embarrassing:

Aquella mujer en pleno año de 1989, arrastraba el atávico instinto de la servidumbre: era una criada y, lo peor, pensaba como una criada, envuelta quizás en los velos invisibles pero tensos de una genética moldeada por varias generaciones esclavizadas y reprimidas (Padura 1997: 40).

Arayan's mansion in Miramar would have been built in the 1950s and have housed very wealthy occupants, many of whom chose to leave Cuba after the Revolution. As mentioned previously, these houses were expropriated and passed on to high ranking revolutionary officials as a reward for their efforts in the revolutionary war. Mario Conde imagines that the previous owner's intention in building the mansion was "marcar una drástica diferencia entre dos mundos" (Padura 1997: 87). These two worlds are rich Habana and impoverished Habana. Despite revolutionary ideals, and as discussed in the previous section, this split between classes still exists in Cuba. Mario Conde compares Arayan's mansion to "la gruta húmeda y oscura donde vivía Alberto Marqués" (Padura 1997: 86) which serves to underline social divisions in the city. Padura further highlights the vast difference between some Cubans' living conditions and those of others through the character of Candito, who tells el Conde that, despite being born into poverty, he has never got used to living in such conditions. His dream is to live in a house and enjoy the peace that would entail as he says: "[..]y trato de adivinar por qué alguna gente vive en casas tan lindas y otros nacimos en un solar con peste a mierda, que además nos va a tocar para toda la vida..." (Padura 1997: 131). He adds that the young man living upstairs from him is a chemical engineer who has no choice but to remain living in the same building and in the same substandard living conditions. This raises the question of what it might take in Cuba to improve one's standard of living. Those who live in the mansions, Cuba's privileged, now are politicians and diplomats who once took part in the Revolution, fighting for the equality of all, and who have taken the place of the upper classes who fled after the Revolution. This inequality and injustice within the

heretic city, as Candito affirms, makes the struggle of everyday life even harder to bear and Candito, like many other Cubans during the Special Period, is moved to find solace in religious spaces.

The role of religion has changed since the beginning of the Revolution, as has the Revolution's position on the topic. Although never formally outlawed, practicing Catholics could not form part of the Communist party until 1992. Initially, Fidel Castro did not oppose the Catholic Church and praised their contribution to education during the Batista years. Many Catholic priests had also been imprisoned and tortured for their opposition to the dictator prior to the Revolution. However, by the end of 1959, the Catholic Church had voiced its opposition to communism provoking Fidel's change of heart toward the Catholic Church. The presence of the police outside churches turned religion into a clandestine affair. According to official figures, churchgoing percentages dropped from 70% to 30% after the Revolution (Chavez 2005: 208). In 1964, Holy Week was renamed Playa Girón week and devoted to mass voluntary labour. Licences to repair churches were refused and many had to be closed for safety reasons. This religious persecution was not limited to Catholics; in 1963, Castro accused Jehovah's Witnesses' of being a counter-revolutionary sect and, in 1969, condemned them for refusing to swear on the national flag, to work on Sundays or to "give adequate attention to weapons" (Thomas 2010: 1009). Two thirds of Baptist ministers were arrested at a convention in 1965, tried and found guilty of espionage (Thomas 2010: 1009). In 1990, Castro admitted that the religious had been treated unjustly and in 1992 amended the constitution banning religious discrimination. The Pope's visit to Cuba in 1998, celebrated with a mass held in La Plaza de la Revolución in La Habana, saw a surge in Catholic numbers (Sigler 2005: 208). In his article "God, Babalawos, and Castro", Bret Sigler claims that Cubans' growing dependence on religious groups for spiritual and physical fulfilment has angered Castro. Despite the new constitution, religious leaders still feel persecuted. One religious leader Sigler interviews says that it is not yet safe to be a Christian, adding that he lives as a foreigner and an enemy in his own country, going on to point out an elderly man in the church whom he claims is an undercover policeman. According to another religious leader, the government also tries to exert control over his church by grossly misrepresenting membership to downplay its impact on the island (Sigler 2005: 217-219).

The Special Period brought a change in Cubans' attitude to religion. Scarcity, uncertainty and political disenchantment led to a need for spirituality. Attendance rose in the few remaining churches and new ones were opened. Evangelical groups expanded and students formed religious groups. According to Hearn, many previously non-religious Cubans have filled the acute ideological vacuum caused by the disenchantment with revolutionary ideology during the Special Period by turning to God: "For many, their ideologies and associated values collapsed along with the Berlin Wall, and they were left empty, looking for shelter from the storm" (Hearn 2008: 144). It is also conceivable that the huge increase in churchgoers has been for more practical survival motives. In his book *Cuba, Religion, Social Capital and Development*, Hearn explains how, in the early 1990s, Christian and Afro-Cuban religious groups took on new social and political responsibilities: "Indeed, the resurgence of religious practice in Cuba appears to be directly related to the economic and psychological strains of the Special Period, providing stable structures of community and identity, and financial assistance from overseas religious nongovernmental organizations" (Hearn 2008: 9). Padura touches on this subject in *Paisaje de otoño* through his character Candito el Rojo, who swings from one religion to another without it causing him any theological dilemma. For Candito, the temple is a place of peace and this is reason enough for him to attend the church. Against el Conde's scepticism Candito explains:

Sí, y oyendo a la gente hablar de amor, de paz, de bondad, de limpieza de espíritu, de esperanzas de salvación, de sosiego, de perdón... Oyendo decir lo que no se dice en ninguna otra parte y dicho por gentes que creen en lo que dicen. Eso es mejor que vender cerveza o comprar piel robada para hacer zapatos, ¿o no? (Padura 1998: 87).

Candito's claim that positive words are only spoken with sincerity in church can be read as a subtle yet clear criticism of the long speeches for which Castro was notorious. This criticism implies a lack of sincerity and credibility with regard to the Regime after years of unfulfilled promises. Hearn discusses the phenomenon of religious overlapping in Cuba and how cases such as Candito's are commonplace. Interestingly, he points out how this overlapping can be a means of acquiring resources and resolving daily problems or how it can function as an important "bridge" for the flow of information and resources between worshippers. The latter also fits Candito's function as el Conde's informer in the novel.

Religious space is further dealt with in *Paisaje de otoño*, when the tradition of private altars is mentioned. When el Conde sees the altar with the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, San Lorenzo and la Virgen de Regla in the victim Miguel Forcade's parents' house in Vedado, he is reminded of the altar his own mother had in his family home, dedicated to la Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, patroness of Cuba (Padura 1998: 176). This virgin is also worshipped in Santería as Oshun, the Yoruba goddess of love, maternity and marriage. Hearn claims that Santería is practiced by at least 70% of Cubans. A syncretism of Catholicism and Yoruban traditions, its origin is dated back to the sixteenth century, when mutual aid organizations called *cabildos* were set up, in conjunction with Catholic churches, to evangelize, house and provide basic services for enslaved and free black Cubans. Catholic statues and images were typically used as substitute representations of forbidden African deities (Hearn 2008: 17).

In this section, I have highlighted Padura's representation of the city, focusing on the themes of the persecution of homosexuals and on delinquency in varying forms as depicted in *Máscaras*. The novel paints an infernal picture of La Habana from beginning to end. Padura's Habana opens with biblical references to suffering, and offers little hope at the closure of the novel when el Conde, in a depressed state, wonders if the current situation in his city would be more positive had the Revolution not made so many mistakes in the past (Padura 1997: 233). Padura introduces the theme of the mask to show how most Cubans hide behind the mask which covers their delinquent and anti-revolutionary behaviour, which over the course of the Revolution has ranged from going to church, or being homosexual, to buying food for survival on the black market. The rise in Cubans who have turned to religion reflects their disenchantment with the Revolution. The theme of censorship, or when writing literature becomes a crime, is also central to *Máscaras*. In the following section, I will discuss how censorship during "el quinquenio gris" is experienced by el Conde in *Pasado perfecto*.

#### **1.4 . Memories of La Habana: Use of Memory in *Pasado perfecto* and *Vientos de cuaresma***

Leonardo Padura's first novel in the Conde series, *Pasado perfecto*, is set in January 1989 and was written between 1990 and 1991. In this novel, Mario Conde is

in charge of the case of missing man Rafael Morín, head of Imports and Exports within the Ministry of Industry. This high priority case provokes el Conde to turn his memory back to his teenage years, when he was a prep school (*pre-universitario*) student. Morín married Tamara, the girl el Conde was in love with throughout his school years. The novel therefore involves two story lines; that of the mystery of Morín's disappearance in 1989 and secondly that of el Conde's teenage memories from the seventies, told in the first person. *Vientos de cuaresma* is the next novel in the series, set in the spring of that same year. In this novel, memory and nostalgia for teenage years are again present. In this case, the murder victim is a young teacher at the high school Mario Conde once attended, provoking, as in the previous novel, his nostalgia for his school days. In *Pasado perfecto*, el Conde searches in his past for the reasons for his generation's present disenchantment in a palimpsest, presented as a work of detective fiction, where the metadiegetic offers the reader an insight into Cuban reality as experienced by a group of friends, educated by the Revolution. At the beginning of *Paisaje de otoño*, the last constituent of the series, el Conde asks himself "¿Cuándo, cómo, por qué, dónde había empezado a joderse todo? ¿Cuánta culpa tenían (si es que la tenían) cada uno de ellos?" (Padura 1998: 26). In an effort to answer these questions, Mario Conde knows he has to write the testimony of his "gran experiencia generacional" which he starts to write at the end of the novel. He says he will call it *Pasado perfecto* and thereby closes the circle of the tetralogy.

Mario Conde is a thirty-six year old, twice divorced hard drinker whose life is governed by his job as a police detective. He is a frustrated writer, who despite having to leave university, for financial reasons, still does not understand how he ever became a policeman. Despite his hatred for the job, he is an excellent detective. He has no money, sentimental relationship or even family and his loneliness, along with his professional frustration, gives him anti-heroic qualities. El Conde does, however, have friends. His best friend since high-school is el Flaco Carlos and he and his mother Josefina are the closest thing to a family that el Conde has. They have a mutual dependency on each other and Josefina treats el Conde as if he were her son. Other friends in his circle are the same age as el Conde and were also his old school friends. The lives of Candito, Andrés, el Conejo and Tamara also play an important role in the tetralogy. Padura's characters are given personalities which are more often than not unattached to the main detective plot, rendering the author's version of

the genre a pastiche of both *telenovela* and *neopolicíaco*. In an interview with Magdalena López in 2006, Padura commented on the true-to-life nature of his characters in the series and how Cuban readers identified with them:

Mis personajes han dejado de ser personajes literarios para convertirse en personas reales. La gente los asume como seres con vida propia y me preguntan constantemente si Mario Conde se va a casar, dónde se va a casar, si se va a morir el Flaco Carlos, de dónde saca la comida Josefina, como si fueran personajes de la realidad. Eso es muy grato porque significa que ha habido una identificación entre lectores, personajes y literatura (López 2007: 167).

In their article “Spleen, Nostalgia and the Reconstruction of Human Time in Leonardo Padura’s *Las cuatro estaciones*”, Alejandro Zamora and Mélissa Gélinas draw on the work of Paul Ricoeur to explain how the author refigures human time through a thorough articulation of the narrative identities of individuals. They identify three strategies used by Padura to enable him to carry this out successfully: polyphonic narrative, the use of the detective pretext and the ironical subversion of the ‘detachment of the detective’ principle. They note that this thorough articulation of narrative identities, through a reconstruction of human time in present day Cuba, is one of the most innovative features of Padura’s detective fiction. Zamora and Gélinas draw on Ricoeur’s theory of human time found in *Time and Narrative* which indicates that human time is neither a phenomenological time (the inner time of each consciousness) nor a cosmological (objective) time: “It is the time of individual (or collective) life, action and suffering that can only acquire a figure of signifying dimension in and through the act of telling a story” (Zamora and Gélinas 2011: 3). This allows for reader identification with the characters and a realistic insight into the lives of el Conde and his generation, with the purpose of getting a clear picture of their disenchantment.

In the final novel of the tetralogy, *Paisaje de otoño*, el Conde decides to write the story of his generation. His motivation is memory which came to him along with the realization that despite the physical destruction of his city (as a result of the hurricane),<sup>20</sup> as long as memory exists so too does the world. In the last line of the novel, Padura writes “porque el fin del mundo seguía acercándose, pero aún no había

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<sup>20</sup> Hurricane Felix is threatening the city yet Padura also writes that the city’s destruction began long beforehand (1998: 159). This hurricane can be interpreted as a metaphor for the Special Period. It is implied that the city’s deterioration was a direct result of the Revolution’s mistakes.

llegado, pues quedaba la memoria” (Padura 1998: 260). The same novel begins with el Conde in a drunken, suicidal state questioning what he would leave behind if he were to jump off his roof. He imagines the answer to be “un olvido infinito” (Padura 1998: 15). The novel’s ending is a direct contrast to its beginning. Mario Conde’s realization of the necessity to write the testimony of his generation gives him purpose and hope for the future. *La memoria* is the simple solution to *el olvido infinito* which so depresses him at the start of the novel. This personal revelation inspires the now ex-detective to use his typewriter as a tool against *el olvido*:

Entonces colocó contra el rodillo aquella hoja de una blancura prometedora y comenzó a mancharla con letras, sílabas, palabras, oraciones, párrafos con los que se proponía contar la historia de un hombre y sus amigos, antes y después de todos los desastres: físicos, morales, espirituales, matrimoniales, laborales, ideológicos, religiosos, sentimentales y familiares, de los que sólo se salvaba la célula originaria de la amistad, tímida pero insistente como su vida (Padura 1998: 259).

El Conde decides that the title of this novel will be *Pasado perfecto*, the title of the first novel of the *Cuatro estaciones* series. Padura is thereby clarifying that the purpose of his writing of the series is the same as that of his protagonist. In his interview with López, the author further supports this.

De hecho, se ha caracterizado la narrativa cubana de los 90 con el signo fundamental del desencanto. Y de cierta manera allí se inscriben mis personajes, trasladados de una vivencia mía a la literatura. Trato de que a través de estas novelas haya un recorrido por el universo de los años 90 hasta los años 2003, 2004 (López 2007: 164).

*Pasado perfecto* is therefore a novel of nostalgia for lost youth, hopes and dreams. This nostalgia for a happy past underlines present disenchantment. For Mario Conde, nostalgia at times resembles an illness which causes him physical pain: “la aguda nostalgia que le provoca el lugar es tan compacta que le oprime las sienas y el pecho” (Padura 2000: 137). He has an inner conflict with his use of memory and has a tendency to reminisce about the past despite the pain this often causes him. His friend, el Flaco Carlos, calls him “un recordador de mierda” (Padura 2000: 22). Photos of the past, along with the music they used to listen to, help el Conde recall old feelings from his teenage years. The Beatles song *Strawberry Fields* particularly holds the power to transport the detective via vivid memories to that happy past: “quería negarse que aquella melodía era la bandera de sus nostalgias por un pasado donde todo fue simple y perfecto” (Padura 2000: 84). This perfect past is however, tainted by far from perfect memories.

In *Pasado perfecto*, El Conde recalls an incident that occurred in high-school. He had formed part of a literary group organized by his literature teacher, Olguita. Each member of the group submitted a piece of work to make up the first edition of their own literary magazine. El Conde had written an autobiographical story about the frustration of having to go to mass with his mother on Sunday mornings when all he wanted to do was to stay in bed or play ball with his friends on his only free morning. With great enthusiasm, the members of the group edited, printed and handed out the magazine to their fellow students. The following day they were called to the principal's office. El Conde remembers their innocence on imagining that they were to be rewarded for their efforts. Instead, they were all reprimanded for not writing anything to do with revolutionary ideals or “el espíritu de sacrificio que debe primar en las nuevas generaciones” (Padura 2000: 60). Olguita stood up and objected to “aquel método que tanto parecía a la Inquisición” (Padura 2000: 60) and resigned from the job. Padura's use of words such as sacrifice and inquisition here serve to highlight the atmosphere of repression that was dominant during the period of “el quinquenio gris”. El Conde remembers how the situation made him feel: “y yo quise morirme como nunca he vuelto a querer morirme en la vida, tenía miedo, no podía hablar pero no entendía mi culpa, si nada más había escrito lo que sentía y lo que me había pasado cuando era chiquito” (Padura 2000: 61). Padura's success in creating a narrative identity such as that of his protagonist Mario Conde, whose experiences and feelings reach the reader through his personal narrative, is as Zamora and Gélina suggest, how he manages to refigure Ricoeur's human time.

In *Vientos de cuaresma* (Padura 2001: 35), we learn that El Conde attended high-school between 1972 and 1975, years which coincide with “el quinquenio gris”. In the third section of this Chapter, I discuss in greater detail the introduction of the years of strict censorship from 1971-76, following Castro's speech at The First Congress of Education and Culture. This speech was prompted by the Padilla case. Heriberto Padilla, a writer and an open anti-revolutionary, was arrested in 1971 and imprisoned for his open criticism of the Revolution. He was released a month later after signing a confession that he had acted against the Revolution. This caused outrage among some international intellectuals who wrote of their disapproval of Padilla's treatment in a letter to Castro. Instead of relaxing the Cuban authorities' cultural policy, this had the opposite effect (Wilkinson 2006: 74-77). This dark

period for Cuban artists is known as “el quinquenio gris”. The topic of the harsh censorship inflicted on all artists becomes more comprehensible and real to the reader through el Conde’s anecdote, relating to his own experience of censorship as a schoolboy in Padura’s work of fiction.

El Conde’s conflict with his memories goes deeper than the love/hate, positive/negative feelings they produce. He also questions how real they actually are and to what extent they can be trusted as true memories. At the beginning of *Pasado perfecto*, the author introduces the notion of false memories with respect to his *barrio* and the changes it has undergone over the years.

La realidad visible de la Calzada contrastaba demasiado con la imagen almibarada del recuerdo de aquella misma calle, una imagen que había llegado a preguntarse si en verdad era real, si la heredaba de la nostalgia histórica de los cuentos de su abuelo o simplemente la había inventado para tranquilizar al pasado (Padura 2000: 19).

In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur addresses this topic of the reliability of memory as a true representation of the past. His conclusion would surely gratify the detective, who so longs for the sugar-coated image he holds of his beloved *barrio* to be true, yet doubts its authenticity. Ricoeur writes:

The constant danger of confusing remembering and imagining, resulting from memories becoming images in this way, affects the goal of faithfulness corresponding to the truth claim of memory. And yet... [a]nd yet we have nothing better than memory to guarantee that something has taken place before we call to mind a memory of it (Ricoeur 2004: 7).

The suggestion that el Conde’s nostalgia may be inherited from his grandfather’s stories about the *barrio* might put into question his reliability as a witness to the changes which have affected his *barrio* and therefore his city in recent decades. The author’s choice to place a question mark over memory as a reliable source can be interpreted as a means of questioning history itself as it too is a work of memory, one which could easily be irregular due to factors outside the truth, a point which will be further discussed in Chapter two. Despite definite examples of the clarity of his memories, el Conde admits to his use of a rose tinted selective memory which blurs out other more hurtful memories.

Despite the protagonist’s attempt to control his memories and his nostalgia, his efforts are frustrated by memories which he is incapable of forgetting. In *Vientos de cuaresma*, he compares his and his best friend el Flaco Carlos’ attitude to memory.

El Flaco Carlos prefers to forget the past to be able to survive in the present. El Conde says he has “un espíritu de redentor de la memoria” (Padura 2001: 170) and would play down the importance of el Conde’s memories. El Conde on the other hand knows that his friend’s attitude is healthier, but he is incapable of forgetting. There is a clear suggestion by the author in this novel that forgetting means forgiving. In the context of *Pasado perfecto*, this means forgiving those responsible for his present disenchantment and past repression: the Cuban authorities. The following quote offers an example of how, as a youth growing up in La Habana, his freedom was restricted: “Él, que había olvidado otras cosas, no podía perdonar sin embargo ese acoso perverso contra lo que más había deseado en aquellos años: dejarse crecer el pelo” (2001: 170). The negative unforgettable memory referred to on this occasion is of the repression suffered by el Conde and his generation at school: “A la distancia de los años, perdida hacía mucho tiempo toda la pasión, al Conde le seguía doliendo aquella tenaz represión a la que los había sometido simplemente por ser jóvenes” (Padura 2001: 170).

The murder victim in *Vientos de cuaresma*, Lissette Núñez Delgado, was a teacher at the high-school (el pre-universitario de La Vibora) el Conde and his friends had attended years before. In order to carry out his investigation, the detective has to return to his old school and face the inevitable nostalgia the place provokes in him. Again his nostalgia is treated by el Conde as if it were an attack on his peace of mind, which he prepares himself for mentally, before deciding that he is able to withstand the pain it causes:

El Conde se preparó y la esperó agresiva, dispuesta a pedir cuentas, a reclamar intereses crecidos con los años, pero un acecho tan prolongado había servido para limar todos los bordes ásperos del recuerdo y dejar apenas aquella sosegada sensación de pertenencia a un lugar y un tiempo cubiertos ya por el velo rosado de una memoria selectiva, que prefería evocar sabia y noblemente los momentos ajenos al rencor, al odio y a la tristeza. Sí, puedo resitirla (Padura 2001: 38).

The narrator gives examples of change within Cuban society and the city throughout the novel. This expected change is representative of the change of opinion el Conde and his friends hold of the Revolution. All that they had previously believed in proved itself to be untrue, thus nostalgia and memory are affected. The past is seen from a different perspective, which is that of an impoverished and disenchanted state. In such conditions, memories and the nostalgia for their high-

school years impact on el Conde to a degree which at times borders on physical illness, simply because they were positive times of hopes and dreams. His life in 1989 as a poor, frustrated, alcoholic and divorced police detective is a direct contrast to the happy teenager with aspirations of becoming a great writer. It is not only his own disastrous life which grieves him but also that of his closest friends. El Flaco Carlos, always energetic and joyful, was going to be an engineer and stay forever with his girlfriend Dulcita. In 1989, he is paralysed from the waist down due to having been shot in the Angolan War; he is now obese, unemployed and dependent on his mother to take care of him. Carlos' girlfriend defected after highschool with her family and now lives in the United States. El Conejo was going to change the world by rewriting history yet, in 1989, he has still not published a book and has dedicated his life to a chain of girlfriends, without settling down. Andrés wanted to be a baseball player and to be with his first love, a woman ten years his senior. Instead, he became a successful doctor, married a perfect girl and settled down with two children. Ironically, he is not at all happy with his life despite its apparent perfection. The juxtaposition of light-hearted teenage anecdotes with harsh mid-life reality could be used in any novel to depict the common theme of the realization of the loss of careless youth. Growing older and the feeling of not having achieved all that one expected to have achieved by a certain age are reasons for mid-life disenchantment. In this novel, however, the protagonist's mid-life disenchantment and that of his friends is not only with the self but also with the system. El Conde and friends were born in the mid fifties and educated entirely by the Revolution. They believed in the socialist dream and were willing to make the necessary sacrifices, with the understanding that it was a temporary measure. By 1989, after thirty years of waiting, disenchantment with the system is now inevitable. Padura explains in his interview with López that an important factor in his generation's disenchantment was the discovery of the truth behind Soviet socialism, upon which Cuban socialism had been based, a truth which came out during *glasnost*:

Redescubrimos la historia y nuestra percepción cambió. Comenzamos a sentir que nos habían engañado. Junto con ese engaño y con la crisis económica, mi generación experimentó un gran sentimiento de frustración. Teníamos treinta, cuarenta años, y nos enfrentamos con desencanto a una realidad en la cual todavía no habíamos conseguido la mayoría de las cosas a las que se aspira a esa edad (López 2007: 164).

In the final Chapter of this thesis, I will examine *glasnost* and USSR socialism in detail through my study of Padura's most recent novel, *El hombre que amaba a los perros* (2009).

In *Paisaje de otoño*, Andrés points out the different ways the Revolution has let each of them down. He claims that they are “una generación de mandados” (Padura 1998: 23) who never had any say over their own lives. “Desde el círculo infantil hasta la tumba del cementerio que nos va a tocar, todo lo escogieron, sin preguntarnos nunca ni de que mal queríamos morir” (Padura 1998: 24). Andrés clearly has a negative opinion of their fate under the Cuban authorities, explaining his decision to emigrate to Miami, which he communicates to his friends at the end of the novel. He tells his friends of the discrimination he suffered as a child because his father had defected and was thereafter considered “un gusano despreciable, viviendo en Miami” (Padura 1998: 247). He wants his children to be able to have the freedom to choose how to lead their lives and is afraid that if they continue living in Cuba they will become “la segunda promoción de la generación escondida” (Padura 1998: 249). Andrés gives an outline of the bureaucracy involved in gaining permission to leave Cuba, and his punishment from the authorities for wanting to emigrate is their demoting him from his position in the hospital to a local clinic until he receives his “carta de liberación” (Padura 1998: 250). Andrés' main criticism of the Revolution is its control over the Cuban population's lives. He points out in his rhetorical questions how el Flaco Carlos' paralysis is a direct result of this control: “¿Tú no fuiste a la guerra de Angola porque te mandaron? ¿No se te jodió la vida encaramado en esa silla de mierda por ser bueno y obedecer?” (Padura 1998: 24). Carlos was sent to Africa after finishing school to fight in the Angolan war.<sup>21</sup> Andrés also summarizes el Conde's life as one of “equivocación” and blames the detective's present unhappiness on the Revolution, suggesting that he knows that he did not choose his own future and only did what was expected of him: “Ese saber que algo torció el rumbo que uno debió coger, que algo te empujó por un camino que no era el tuyo” (Padura 1998: 249).

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<sup>21</sup> Some 15,000 Cuban soldiers were sent to Angola in 1975 following Angola's independence from Portugal, which resulted in civil war after the failure of the three main parties to govern together. One of the three parties was the Marxist based MPLA, which was supported militarily and financially by the USSR and Cuba. The MPLA gained control of the country and Cuban troops remained in Angola throughout the 1980s to consolidate the MPLA's control.

Another factor responsible for el Conde's failure to move forward in life is his attachment to his *barrio* or more precisely to the nostalgia of his *barrio*. This nostalgia is linked to his family history; el Conde's great-grandfather built the first house in the area on reaching Cuba after fleeing from the law in the Canary Islands. El Conde's grandparents, father, uncles and el Conde himself were all born on the same street where el Conde still lives. In *Vientos de cuaresma*, el Conde remembers the history of his *barrio*, once a village on the outskirts of La Habana, inhabited mainly by *canarios* who traded fruit in the capital. His street was one of the main fruit trading routes into the city. El Conde recalls the changes his *barrio* has undergone since his birth, when it had already become part of the city. He remembers the modernisation of the area in the 1950s, when it became more built up. In 1989, he also notes the lack of shops and bars that once gave life to *la Calzada* (Padura 2001: 84-85). El Conde's nostalgia for the way the *barrio* used to be is outlined in all four components of the *Cuatro estaciones* collection. Despite its current decay and el Conde's desire to flee, nostalgia has tied him to the area:

Porque él también necesitaba huir, aunque fuera incapaz de moverse de lugar. Demasiadas nostalgias lo ataban a la casa donde nació y donde vivía, al barrio en el cual creció y creció su padre y su abuelo Rufino, a los amigos que le quedaban y a los que jamás podría abandonar, a ciertas pestes y olores, a muchos miedos y euforias: su ancla estaba encallada de un modo en que casi no hacía falta ni saberlo: simplemente estaba trabada, sin más remedio, por una necesidad fisiológica de sentir que pertenecía a un lugar (Padura 1998: 251).

The above quote, taken from the end of the final novel in the Conde series, sums up el Conde's relationship with his memory and nostalgia. El Conde is a helpless victim of his nostalgia. It is uncontrollable; at times gratifying, but more often than not it is the cause of his sorrow and his inability to move on in life and, just as his decision to write the story of his generation is a homage to his friends, so too is his nostalgia: "No, no es mentira. Aunque sólo fuera como homenaje a la amistad, aquella nostalgia inesperadamente pausada valía la angustia de ser vivida, se convenció" (Padura 2001: 39). The theme of nostalgia for the city of La Habana, coupled with a love/hate relationship is also central to the next novel I wish to address, *La novela de mi vida* in Chapter two.

Disenchantment in the city of La Habana in Padura's tetralogy of the *Cuatro estaciones*, is made evident through reader identification with the personalities created by the author, who give testimony of their frustrations and disillusion with

the Revolution. Topics such as the persecutions of homosexuals, organized religion and the black market, have led, not only, to the disenchantment of the people of La Habana, but to the concept of the mask, which is also further discussed in Chapter three as *la doble moral*. Padura's portrayal of the physical city, which denounces its hypocrisies and its inequalities, also lends itself to an interpretation of the city as a site of disenchantment. Aspects of disenchantment, addressed in the tetralogy, are further addressed in his later novels, and will be highlighted throughout this thesis.

## Chapter Two

### *La novela de mi vida: History and Disenchantment Repeated*

#### Introduction

First published in 2002, *La novela de mi vida* is the first of Padura's novels in which detective Mario Conde is not a protagonist since 1991, when he was created. The novel however, can still be categorized as one of detective fiction, despite the fact that the protagonist is neither a member of a police force nor a private investigator. It is an historical detective novel that provides the framework for an evaluation of the current regime as compared to previous historical periods. The mystery to resolve is that of the whereabouts of nineteenth-century Cuban poet José María Heredia's last work of literature. The novel has three different time frames involving three generations of Cubans. Different narrative voices are used for the different sections, which are not related chronologically. The reader is first introduced to Fernando Terry whose story is told in third person narrative. Terry is the fictional academic detective of the present day narrative in search of Heredia's biography at the end of the twentieth century. The second time frame tells the life story of Heredia, told in first person narrative, as he writes his biography at the end of his life in the 1830s. The final time frame is that of Heredia's son, José de Jesús set in the early decades of the twentieth century, including the period of Machado's dictatorship. It is narrated by an omniscient narrator and it is through this story line that the reader discovers the fate of Heredia's final work. In this final time frame, the author illustrates an oppressed city which is suffering under the corrupt leadership of Machado. However, I will focus my analysis on the most prominent time frames developed in the novel which correspond to that of the two main protagonists Heredia and Terry.

While the characters Heredia and his son José de Jesús are based on real figures, Fernando Terry is completely fictitious. *La novela de mi vida* can be interpreted as an invitation to read Cuba's present through its past. This rereading of history is highlighted through the juxtaposition of Heredia and Terry, whose lives are paralleled and share similar destinies despite the 180 years that separate them. I will argue that Padura chose to write an historical novel that encompasses three different

times in Cuban history in order to show that the present historical period has much in common with previous regimes and systems. The theme of disenchantment is prominent in the novel and La Habana is again central stage in the development of the protagonists' journey to disillusionment. The disenchantment is also highlighted in the present day narrative of *finisecular* Cuba through Terry's group of friends, Los Socarrones. In *La novela de mi vida*, official history, which is the history written by supporters of the Revolution, and fiction are intertwined creating a haze over the boundary between fantasy and reality. This confusion serves to invite the reader to doubt and question official history. The novel also serves to question the notion of national identity and I will refer to theories from Benedict Anderson to support my reading of the novel as a critique of the use of literature for nation building purposes.

### 2.1. José María Heredia: Historical Background and Legacies

“¿Por qué no acabo de despertar de mi sueño? ¡Oh! ¿Cuándo acabará la novela de mi vida para que empiece su realidad?” (Jose María Heredia in Padura 2008: 23). In a letter sent from exile in New York in 1824 to his uncle Ignacio in Matanzas, Cuba, Heredia expressed his awe after visiting Niagara Falls. The spectacular waterfalls inspired the poet to write his most famous poem *Oda a Niagara*, which is now inscribed on a stone beside the Falls. The sight of the natural phenomenon stirred emotions inside the poet, which led him to the realization that he was not in control of his own life. He felt his life was a novel in which he was a protagonist. He could not decide on his own destiny. His life was being written by others and he was merely living the life chosen for him. It is interesting to note that the aforementioned frustration is similarly felt by el Conde and his friends in *Las cuatro estaciones*. Padura uses the above quote from Heredia as a prologue to *La novela de mi vida*. The Cuban edition of the novel includes an essay by Padura based on the historical research he collected over the three years he spent writing the novel. In this essay “José María Heredia: La patria y la vida”, Padura explains how this quote was his inspiration for writing *La novela de mi vida*, a novel in which he tries to explain why José María Heredia decided that his nationality had to be Cuban.

Porque, leída aquella dramática y agónica frase del poeta, se desató mi obsesión en la que viví durante tres años: escribir la novela de la vida de Heredia, en la cual,

como componente dramático principal, he debido explicarme por qué José María Heredia decidió que debía ser cubano (Padura 2002: 434).

The author points out that Heredia lived in Cuba for only six of his thirty five years, three of which were as an infant. Although he was born in Santiago, Cuba, his parents were Dominican born. His father was a civil servant to the Spanish Monarchy who considered himself *español de ultramar*. Heredia only lived three of his adult (teenage) years in Cuba, which justifies Padura's surprise at his loyalty to his country of birth. Perhaps the author admires and identifies with Heredia's love for his country, despite his criticism of it and his posterior exile from it. Padura questions what events could have taken place in the teenage poet's life on his return to Cuba to evoke in him a sense of patriotism to the still colonized island. He returned to Cuba at the age of fourteen, at the end of 1817, and lived there for less than eighteen months until April 1819, when he left again with his family for Mexico. On leaving, he was already harbouring feelings of "pertenencia a la tierra cubana" (Padura 2008: 436) at a time when the notion of being Cuban was as rare as the notion of Cuba as an independent country.

In those years, the slave trade was rampant due to the Spanish treaty with England in 1817 which abolished slavery. Cuban plantation holders were desperately trying to buy as many slaves as possible, while it was still legal. As a result, according to historian Hugh Thomas, between the years 1816 and 1820, 111,041 slaves entered Cuba, creating a substantial race imbalance on the island of 43% white to 57% black. Not all of the black community were slaves. Cuban slaves were given the right to buy their own freedom and that of their children or parents. In the cities, slaves were often freed by their owners due to the good relationship between both. In general, slaves held more rights in Cuba than other slave-using counties. For example, in the southern state of the USA, Louisiana, slaves had no rights at all. The option of buying freedom did not exist. Marriage between slaves was not allowed either. The better conditions for slaves in the Spanish colonies were due to the *Siete Partidas* of Alfonso the Wise, a collection of laws which gave Spaniards a detailed code for the treatment of slaves. These codes were implemented in the New World in the Spanish colonies, whereas the English held no such laws and treatment of slaves depended on the work required of them (Thomas 2010: 23). However, a new Slave Code was implemented in 1789, which coincided with the demand for slaves to

improve Cuba's competitiveness in the sugar market. Spain purchased slave ports on the African coast and Cuba thereby became self sufficient with regard to the provision of slaves and no longer depended on supplies from other colonies in the West Indies. The slave revolution in Haiti in 1791 meant the end of Cuba's biggest sugar rival, France, and the road to immense wealth for sugar planters on the island. Many planters were founders of the Cuban liberal economy and their new found wealth made it possible for the Cuban administration to finance itself and no longer depend on grants from Spain. The first public library was opened, along with new infrastructure, schools, hospitals and asylums (Thomas 2010: 48). In *Historia de Cuba 1492-1898 formación y liberación de la nación*, Torres-Cuevas describes this new generation of Cubans as *La generación del 92*, one which "constituye la primera expresión totalizadora y original de un quehacer político, intelectual, científico, económico y militar cubano" (Torres-Cuevas 2007: 129). He lists their main economic proposals as:

Libre comercio de esclavos; aumento de la esclavitud para resolver las necesidades de fuerza de trabajo y eliminación de todos los obstáculos que impiden su explotación intensiva; mejoramiento y perfeccionamiento en la utilización de las tierras y la aplicación de la más moderna técnica; desarrollo tecnológico de la manufactura azucarera; desarrollo científico del país; libertad de comercio no sólo con los puertos españoles sino también con los de otros países (Torres-Cuevas 2007: 129).<sup>22</sup>

It is clear from the above quote that slavery was paramount to economic success on the island and that while economic independence from Spain was at the heart of their agenda, patriotism and *cuba-libre* slogans by no means formed part of their proposals. The large-scale arrival of slaves to Cuba coincided with Heredia's stay on the island. The poet was shocked by the ever increasing slave trade and longed to see the international abolition properly implemented. The independence of Cuba would have meant the end to slavery through a constitution. This is one of the main reasons why the notion of independence was never seriously entertained in Cuba despite independence revolutions that had taken place around the same time across the Latin American continent. *Criollos* and *peninsulares* both became very wealthy from the sugar market, which relied heavily on slave labour. Given the high percentage of slaves on the island, slave owners feared a revolt similar to that of Haiti. Antoni

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<sup>22</sup> *Historia de Cuba 1492-1898* is co-written by Torres-Cuevas and Loyola Vega. Torres-Cuevas wrote on Cuban history from 1492-1868 and Loyola Vega from 1868-1898.

Kapcia notes in his book, *Cuba in Revolution*, that Cuban creoles required the protection of the Spanish military to protect them from the possibility of revolt. Kapcia also highlights that there was a majority of *peninsulares* among the Cuban white population due to the influx of Spanish refugees to the island after the *criollo* rebellions in Latin America and the slave rebellion in Haiti (Kapcia 2009: 9). While *peninsulares* were normally a minority in Spanish Latin America, which evidently contributed to a desire from the creoles for better rights and independence from colonial rule, in Cuba the comfortable economic situation many creoles enjoyed, coupled with the fact that they were a minority, explains the delay in Cuban independence from Spain.

Padura notes that a major influence on Heredia's *independentista* ideals originated from his own personal experiences. His father died in 1820, impoverished after lifelong dedication to the Spanish crown as a faithful civil servant. His widow had to ask Mexican friends for financial help to give her husband a decent burial. Pensionless, she was then forced to return to Cuba with her children to be taken in by her brother Ignacio. This unjust and ungrateful attitude of the Monarchy further influenced Heredia's rejection of the Spanish crown. The same year, 1820, was also significant in Spanish history as it saw the reinstatement of the 1812 Constitution. Following an uprising by Riego, a liberal Captain from the Coruña garrison who along with liberal officers marched on Madrid and imposed a constitution on King Ferdinand VII, the latter saw no alternative but to approve the constitution which was also applied to Cuba. From that point on, it was to be regarded as a regular province of Spain. The results were promptly evident. According to Thomas, monasteries were (temporarily) abolished, political prisoners were freed, and newspapers were quickly founded and filled with radical articles and editorials. Exiles returned from the US and secret societies, especially Masons, proliferated. Thomas writes: "The cork drawn, it was amazing how many radicals there seemed to be among the lower ranks of the Cuban oligarchy and the poorer white population of Havana" (Thomas 2010: 62). The constitution implied an immediate abolition of slavery, causing many Cuban deputies to argue for a delay in the application of the ban, while Fr Félix Varela, an abolitionist priest whose ideas strongly influenced Heredia, argued for the contrary; an immediate application of the ban of all slavery in Cuba, along with compensation.

It was this Cuba that Heredia returned to in 1821. Padura notes in his historical essay on Heredia the young poet's enthusiasm at the new liberty brought by the constitution, naming it in his poetry "el Libro sagrado". He even hailed King Fernando VII for defending civil and national rights and making way for a democratic system (Padura 2008: 442). Padura points out in his essay that the fact that Heredia's family did not come from a slave trading background and the fact that they did not own land or businesses, gave the poet the freedom to express a desire for independence. Meanwhile, most of his contemporaries were compromised by moral, or more importantly, economic issues: "se aferran a las ventajas que aún obtienen de la corona y optan por no correr el riesgo de una guerra civil que puede convertir a Cuba en un nuevo Haití" (Padura 2008: 449). Félix Varela's situation was similar to that of Heredia in that he shared no economic interests that would bind him to Spain. Their cases, however, were rare and most of the classes who had any political power were ironically imprisoned by slavery and saw no other alternative to sacrificing "la nación a la plantación" (Padura 2008: 451). It is interesting to note that Cuba, at this point in time, did not depend economically on Spain, and therefore was in a position to be an independent and self sufficient country. Yet, the fact remained that independence would have meant an end to slavery.

As mentioned above, Padura writes that his inspiration for the novel derived from a quote from a letter Heredia sent to his uncle in which he asks when his own life would begin and the novel of his life would end. Padura writes that his aim in writing the novel was to discover why Heredia chose to be Cuban and not any of the other possible nationalities he could have chosen, given that in his short life he had lived in so many different countries. Padura does not however explain why he chose Heredia as his historical protagonist. Without doubt, his historical background, his exile and fall from grace amongst his contemporaries make him an interesting personality, yet after carrying out historical research it is necessary to investigate further how Heredia is remembered inside and outside Cuba. Cuban literary critic Max Henríquez Ureña compiled two volumes entitled *Panorama histórico de la literatura cubana* in 1962, republished in 2004. In the prologue, Ángel Augier names Heredia and Varela as the inaugurators of the Cuban literary tradition, one which is closely linked to political history: "Dentro de una tradición cultural ya permeada del aliento revolucionario que inauguraron Varela y Heredia, la literatura en Cuba no

dejó de actuar como causa y efecto en el proceso de formación de la conciencia nacional cubana” (Augier 2004: 8). Author of *Invencción de la Habana*, Emma Álvarez Tabío concurs with Augier and considers Heredia the most representative figure of “una clase media ilustrada que asume la iniciativa histórica y emprende una definitiva transformación cultural” (Álvarez Tabío 2000: 33). She also adds that Heredia’s poetic technique of using national landscapes as patriotic symbols strengthened national identity in an effort to take possession of “el espacio insular, un territorio que no sólo es físico, tal y como aquéllos lo representaban, sino también espiritual [...] Quizás se deba a Heredia esa identificación seminal entre paisaje y nacionalidad que luego será recurrente en la cultura y el pensamiento cubanos” (Álvarez Tabío 2000: 33). In *Historia de Cuba 1492-1898 formación y liberación de la nación*, Torres-Cuevas notes Heredia’s role in the Soles y Rayos conspiracy and his later support of the independence movement through his poetry: “De todos los involucrados en la conspiración, el que dejó un sello imperecedero con su obra poética fue José María Heredia” (Torres-Cuevas 2007: 141). He quotes a verse from one of Heredia’s most famous anti-colonial poems, *Himno del desterrado*, and dedicates two pages of his book on the history of Cuba to further fragments from the same poem. Eusebio Leal, a Cuban historian who has become best known for his work alongside UNESCO in restoring Old Havana to its former glory, names Heredia as *El gran poeta* and also quotes *Himno del desterrado*:

¡Dulce Cuba! En tu seno se miran,  
 en su grado más alto y profundo,  
 la belleza del físico mundo,  
 los horrores del mundo moral.  
 Te hizo el cielo la flor de la tierra:  
 más tu fuerza y destinos ignoras  
 y de España en el déspota adoras  
 el demonio sangriento del mal.

(Leal 1988: 71)

Salvador Bueno, another Cuban literary critic who also wrote on the history of Cuban literature, discusses Heredia in his *Historia de la literatura cubana*: “Sus valores históricos y políticos están a la par de sus méritos poéticos” (Bueno 1963:

61). The five above mentioned historians and literary critics all seem to agree on the link between literary culture and political history. All five have lived and published in Cuba, with the exception of Álvarez Tabío, who lives and has published in Barcelona. Outside Cuba, historian Hugh Thomas makes but one small reference to Heredia in his very thorough *Cuba: A History*. He mentions Heredia's flight from Cuba, in 1823, along with that of Fr Felix Varela, in his section on post-constitutional Cuba under autocrat Dionisio Vives. English historian Antoni Kapcia also makes a short reference to Heredia in his book *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*. Here Kapcia discusses the result of persistent exile from Colonial Cuba on Cuban literature in the early nineteenth century, describing it as a "final obstacle" (Kapcia 2005: 47) to the development of literature within Cuba at the time. A similar problem still exists in Cuba today, as writers who express dissent are forced into exile in order to continue working as artists.<sup>23</sup> Other obstacles mentioned are the limited opportunities for publication of prose and poetry and the preference among the elite for newspapers rather than creative publications. He considers Heredia's case outstanding and interestingly notes Heredia's fame outside Cuba, as he also wrote poetry in French as much as in Spanish and therefore became part of the French Romantic cannon (Kapcia 2005: 47-8). North American based literary critic, Eduardo González, focuses on the parallels between Heredia and Martí in his book *Cuba and the Tempest*. He highlights their parallel states as exiled poets, the influence Heredia had on Martí and refers to him as "the man most responsible for eulogizing Heredia in the patriotic-poetic afterlife" (González 2006: 180). Indeed, this final example of how Heredia is remembered by González, as a parallel figure to Martí, could further be extended to Castro's vision of Martí and thereby complete a circle.

The Castro-led Revolution based their visions of a *Cuba libre* on Martí's, who in turn, extolled Heredia as the father of patriotic poetry and nation building culture. If Martí was the inspiration and heroic figure on whom Castro chose to base his Revolution, Heredia was Martí's inspiration and served him as a patriotic figure, a prime example of *cubanía*. Heredia and Martí's lives have many parallels both as patriotic poets and exiles. Another notable parallel is the long length of time both

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<sup>23</sup> See the documentary *Habana: Arte nuevo de hacer ruinas* by directors Borchmeyer and Hentschler for writer José Antonio Ponte's testimony.

lived outside Cuba. As Padura highlighted in his essay on Heredia, the poet lived outside Cuba for thirty of his thirty-five years. Martí was in exile for twenty four years and hence only lived eighteen of his forty-two years on the island (Kapcia 2005: 53). The resurgence of the memory of Martí came to a peak one hundred years after his birth, in 1953, as an image of nationalism and *cubanía*. Fifty years after independence, *Cuba libre*, the heritage of Martí and the old *cubanía* were now a source for oppositionist struggle against the corrupt Batista regime. Batista had also made reference to Martí in his election rhetoric. Kapcia writes: “It was from this well that Castro and the rebels took their political waters” (Kapcia 2005: 65). At the time, Castro was portrayed in the international press as a national hero and compared to Martí in heroic terms. The following was published in an article in the *New York Times* before the Revolution came to power describing Heredia as: “The most remarkable and romantic figure... in Cuban history since José Martí” (Thomas 2010: 656).

The 26<sup>th</sup> July movement was organized from prison by the Castro brothers, after their failed attack on the Moncada barracks, on the same day in 1953. Its first manifesto was Castro’s defence speech from where the famous line “history will absolve me” was taken. Kapcia writes in his book *Cuba in Revolution*: “The major characteristic of the speech, however, was its constant reference to Martí, echoing the whole movement’s emphasis on, and identification with, the national hero” (Kapcia 2008: 21). The historian goes on to describe the nature of the movement’s declarations as being consistent with the tradition of radical nationalism from Martí and that, as a result, the movement’s followers expected Castro’s politics to continue in line with Martí’s (Kapcia 2008: 21). Indeed, examples of Martí’s politics were used to justify single party politics and avoid general elections which might divide the *patria*. Cuban history had proven how Martí had been successful in uniting different Cuban parties into one power, the PRC, in order to overthrow the Spanish in the war of independence (Kapcia 2009: 71). Hugh Thomas notes how Castro and the rebels “were suffused by a heroic picture of their own actions in the tradition of the Cuban revolution against Spain”. Thomas adds that Castro saw himself as Martí “the man of heroic phrases as well as deeds, speaker and soldier, enemy of tyrants par excellence, incorruptible renewer” (Thomas 2010: 542). Given Padura’s invitation to view specific figures as parallel personalities, the Heredia-Martí-Castro

link should not be overlooked, nor should Heredia's role in Cuban history, despite the minor references made to him by non-Cuban historians.

## 2.2. Inventing Cuban National Identity

During the period of the 1820-30s, in most countries of Latin America, literature was being used as a tool for inventing a national identity. The purpose of these literary projects was often to make the masses aware of the history of their newly independent nations in an effort to unify the population under one identity/nationality in order to create a modern nation such as France, Britain or North America. Menton writes in *La nueva novela histórica de la América Latina 1979-1992*: “La finalidad de la mayoría de estos novelistas fue contribuir a la creación de una conciencia nacional familiarizando a sus lectores con los personajes y los sucesos del pasado” (Menton 1993: 36). Writers and intellectuals hoped to shape the national social order through their literature and strengthen the political argument of the liberals against the conservatives. This dichotomy has become known as civilization versus barbarism, the former referring to the liberal intellectuals who resided in the cities and the latter referring to the *caudillo* style landowners who wanted to retain their local power. A prime example of this genre of fiction is Sarmiento's *Facundo* (1845) which Philip Swanson in *Latin American Fiction: A Short Introduction* considers the cornerstone text of Latin American literature, “due to its political content rather than its literary qualities” (Swanson 2005: 3). Swanson notes how independence was:

“more immediately significant for the few rather than the many and had little real meaning for the ordinary, indigenous, or the mixed race masses, who, even after independence continued to suffer under a system of extreme social hierarchy, a semi-feudal agricultural sector, racial division and in some cases, even slavery”(Swanson 2005: 4).

Liberal thinkers, such as Sarmiento, hoped to create stability and modernity in their new countries by fostering national identity through their didactic novels and by arguing that progress was only achievable by following the European political model.

Padura's choice of creating the character of Heredia in his fiction points directly to the origins of nation building in Cuba and raises questions of how this developed. In his book, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson explores the topic of nation building arguing that nationality is a "cultural artefact of a particular kind" and that its creation began at the end of the eighteenth century in the age of Enlightenment and Revolution (Anderson 1991: 4). He also claims that the printing-press played a vital role in the creation of imagined communities. He uses the example of Spanish Latin America to prove his hypothesis. Before independence from Spain, the continent was separated into administrative units which later became the new independent nations. Due to Spanish economic policies, which forbade competition with the mother country, "even individual countries could not trade with each other" (Anderson 1991: 53). Anderson adds that the "very vastness of the Spanish American empire, the enormous variety of its soils and climates, and, above all, the immense difficulty of communication in a pre-industrial age, tended to give these units a self-contained character" (Anderson 1991: 52). Descendants of the Spanish, born in the Americas, were known as creoles or *criollos*. They did not share the same rights and privileges as Spanish born Spaniards, *peninsulares*, yet thanks to their education "they had readily at hand the political, cultural and military means for successfully asserting themselves" which was a potential threat to Spanish sovereignty (Anderson 1991: 58). However, because the *peninsulares* denied the creoles' rights purely based on the location of their birth, considering them not Spanish and differentiating themselves from the American-born creoles, this resulted in people all over the American continent considering themselves as "Americans", since this term denoted precisely the shared fate of extra-Spanish birth (Anderson 1991: 63). However, it was not until the arrival of print-capitalism in the second half of the eighteenth century that the administrative units could begin to be imagined as nations. Anderson regards the newspaper as a decisive factor in the creation of nationalism in Latin America. Individual units published their own news, which belonged to the region. They were read by creoles, but not by *peninsulares*, who would read the metropolitan newspapers. At the same time creoles were conscious of the existence of newspapers from other units, although they might not read them. News from other units perhaps reached another unit months later and was re-told in the local newspaper:

In this sense the “failure” of the Spanish-American experience to generate a permanent Spanish-America-wide nationalism reflects both the general level of development of capitalism and technology in the late eighteenth century and the “local” backwardness of Spanish capitalism and technology in relation to the administrative stretch of the empire (Anderson 1991: 63).

Anderson compares this to the unity of the thirteen colonies in North America who were “relatively tightly linked by print as well as commerce” (Anderson 1991: 64). However, despite Cuban creoles suffering the same inequalities as other Spanish American creoles, the obvious geographical limitations an island inevitably suffers, and the fact that the printing-press also saw the publication of Cuban newspapers, Cuba did not become independent from Spain until 1898. Does this mean that Anderson’s argument regarding the importance of the printing-press did not apply to Cuba? I would argue that the printing press most definitely played an important role in Cuban independence but rather than through local newspapers, Cubans acquired a sense of *cubanidad* through literature, especially poetry. Without doubt the slave issue was the primary reason for a delay in Cuban independence, yet a rise in nation-building literature, which coincided with the trend in the rest of the already independent Latin American nations from the 1820/30s on, strongly enforced a feeling of nationalism among Cuban creoles and the *mestizo* and black populations.

Pioneer amongst the most influential nation building writers was José María Heredia, who, as I mentioned earlier, was later extolled by the more internationally famous figure José Martí. In *La novela de mi vida*, Padura develops the theme of nation building through Heredia’s contemporary Domingo Del Monte. In the present day, the latter is remembered for his role as a patron of literature and for his famous *tertulias*. He is also associated with the *Conspiración de la escalera* which took place in 1844. Thomas writes that in Matanzas, Cuba, over four thousand people were arrested over this alleged conspiracy against the Spanish Crown (Thomas 2010: 127). Del Monte was sent into exile and died in Madrid in 1853. Yet Padura develops the character of Del Monte as a friend/enemy of Heredia’s and depicts him negatively. He is envious of Heredia’s success as a poet; he marries the girl Heredia loved from a distance; and betrays him when Heredia is in exile. In the following quote, Padura offers a cynical portrayal of Del Monte and the notion of inventing a national identity through literature:

Está usando las tertulias que hace en su casa para lanzarse en su proyecto. Ha puesto a escribir a todos y ha repartido los papeles. Unos van a rescatar a los indios cubanos

para tener un pasado anterior a los españoles; otros escriben de los campesinos para inventar una tradición; otros de los horrores de la esclavitud para crear una moral anti-esclavista; otros sobre las costumbres de La Habana para crear el espíritu de una ciudad; otros sobre la historia para demostrar que somos distintos a España... Cuando todo eso exista se podrá inventar la imagen de un país y hasta se podrá prescindir de tus versos... Pero nada de eso es lo peor. Porque además de crear ese país, lo van a subir sobre el pedestal de una mentira (Padura 2005: 367).

Padura's view, as expressed here, clearly supports Anderson's theory of nationalism as a cultural invention. According to the novel, Domingo del Monte invented a history of Cuban literature which was hitherto non-existent in an effort to increase a sentiment of national pride on the island. The concept of obstructing historical truth is a recurring theme in the novel and will be further explored in the following section.

### 2.3. Historical Fiction and Inaccuracy

Despite his efforts, Fernando fails to find Heredia's lost biography. This detection failure could be interpreted as proof of the "impossibility of historical accuracy" (Scaggs 2005: 139). In his book, *Crime Fiction*, Scaggs considers the failure of William, the detective protagonist of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, a link to the impossibility of historical accuracy (Scaggs 2005: 139). Like William, Fernando has to rely on historical documents to help him uncover the truth of the past. However, if historical documents have been manipulated, historical accuracy is not possible. In *La novela de mi vida*, it is Heredia's son José de Jesús who is responsible for manipulating documents vital for Fernando to discover the whereabouts of Heredia's work. The nineteenth-century poet had written his autobiography for his illegitimate son, whom he never met. Heredia fell in love with Lola Junco in the months prior to his exile. It should be noted that this love affair between Heredia and Lola Junco is purely fictional and invented by Padura. Lola's family opposed their relationship as Heredia did not belong to a prosperous family and that opposition grew after the discovery of his involvement in an independence conspiracy. Heredia fled Cuba without the chance to say goodbye to his beloved, whom he had planned to marry. Lola's family kept her hidden throughout her pregnancy and the baby was brought up to believe he was Lola's brother's son and never found out his true family history. On Heredia's death, his wife and children moved back to Cuba. Heredia's mother was given the biography but decided not to

follow her son's instructions of passing the papers on to his illegitimate and first born son. She held on to them until her death and instructed her grandson, José de Jesús, to keep them in his possession until one hundred years after Heredia's death. Despite financial hardships, José de Jesús never published his father's biography for fear of the possible consequences. He also destroyed two very important letters Heredia had written. The first letter had been sent to the legal authorities in charge of the Soles y Rayos conspiracy case. In this letter, written in 1823 in an effort to be pardoned and marry Lola, Heredia recanted his role in the conspiracy. According to José de Jesús, the publication of this letter would not have created a favourable image of the patriotic poet: "susurró que había quemado la carta para tratar de borrar de la memoria de los hombres la espantosa debilidad mostrada por su padre en aquel dramático momento de su vida" (Padura 2008: 109). The second letter had been sent to Fr Félix Varela to thank him for his help in the publication of his novel *Jicoténcal*. Heredia, unsatisfied with the quality of the work, wished it to be published anonymously. *Jicoténcal*, which tells the story of Hernán Cortés' conquest of Mexico, is considered the first Latin American historical novel and the first historical novel written in Spanish (Menton 1993: 35).<sup>24</sup> The omniscient narrator of José de Jesús' storyline explains how Heredia's son justified his decisions on how to proceed with the manipulation of his father's history on the grounds that this is the very nature of history itself. He feels no remorse on destroying important biographical information which could potentially change not only the image held of Heredia but the history of Latin American literature:

A José de Jesús le tranquilizaba el convencimiento de que la historia se escribe de ese modo: con omisiones, mentiras, evidencias armadas a posteriori, con protagonismos fabricados y manipulados, y no le producía ninguna turbación su empeño en corregir la historia de su propio padre: los dueños de poder lo hacían constantemente y la verdad histórica era la puta más complaciente y peor pagada de cuantas existieran (Padura 2002: 51).

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<sup>24</sup> It remains unknown who actually wrote it. In his essay *Jicoténcal, primera novela histórica en castellano* Luis Leal concludes that Fr Félix Varela is the author. In her book *La caída del Hombre Nuevo* Sonia Behar refers to another study by Leal in conjunction with Rodolfo J. Cortina in which Heredia is dismissed as a possible author of *Jicoténcal* due to the frequent use of language of French influence and the over use of the subjunctive mood, both literary characteristics strongly criticised by Heredia. Behar rejects Leal and Cortina's arguments given Heredia's actual use of *lenguaje afrancesado* in his poetry and argues that Heredia cannot be eliminated as the possible author solely on the basis that there is an excessive use of the subjunctive mood (Behar 2009: 117).

The comparison of historical truth to a badly paid prostitute is an open critique of traditional historicism by Padura. In the acknowledgements of *La novela de mi vida*, Padura also admits to the unclarity in his novel between fiction and reality and writes:

Aunque sustentada en hechos históricos verificables y apoyada incluso textualmente por cartas y documentos personales, la novela de la vida de Heredia debe asumirse como obra de ficción ... Así, todo lo que Heredia narra ocurrió, debió ocurrir en la realidad, pero siempre está visto y reflejado desde una perspectiva novelesca y contemporánea (Padura 2008: 21).

This statement implies that Padura recognizes that regardless, of the thoroughness of his historical research in order to write the novel, it is impossible to trust historical documents. Padura highlights the difficulty of trusting contemporary interpretations of historical documents as it is impossible to read and interpret past documents as they would have been read or interpreted in the past. Therefore, the present day historian cannot wholly understand the context surrounding historical documents and therefore cannot possibly carry out an accurate interpretation. Padura himself plays with history, just as his character José de Jesús does. He based his novel on a real character, yet rewrote his biography adding fictional elements. The fact that he chose to write Heredia's story in a first person narrative autobiographical form points to the subjectivity of the biographical genre and questions its use as a reliable method of reading history.

The influence of the historical novel in Latin America is easily recognized in *La novela de mi vida*. In his book on this topic, Menton offers a brief summary of the development of the historical novel in Latin America. He divides the evolution of this genre into four stages. The first is the Romantic Historical Novel, which prevailed throughout the nineteenth century. He names *Jicoténcal* (1826) as the first such novel. The main aim of these novels was the “creación de una conciencia nacional familiarizando a sus lectores con los personajes y los sucesos del pasado” (Menton 1993: 36). Daniel Balderston points out in his introduction to *The Historical Novel in Latin America* that the birth of the Latin American novel coincided with the creation of the historical novel in the early years of the nineteenth century by Sir Walter Scott. The success of the historical novel throughout Europe most likely also had an influence on nineteenth century Latin American writers, who showed a preoccupation with the literary construction of an historical past. Balderston concurs with Menton in that these writers were in the process of creating

a national past and adds that this creation was linked with the concerns for national organization (Balderston 1986: 9). The second stage of Latin American historical novels lasted from 1882 until 1915, under the influence of modernism. The central aim of the modern historical novel was a recreation of the past as a means of escapism. The following stage focused on the search for a national identity and was written between 1915 and 1945. Centre stage in these novels was the debate around civilization versus barbarism. The final stage is that of the New Historical Novel, which Menton dates from 1949 with the publication of Alejo Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo*. This novel is summed up by Menton as "la lucha por la libertad y la justicia social" (Menton 1993: 38). There is a rise in the publications and success of the new historical novel from 1979. This is largely due to the disenchantment of Latin American intellectuals, who had believed socialism to be the only solution to social injustice. Violations of human rights in Latin American countries, such as Chile, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, and the "subsequent failure of socialism" led writers to look to the past either "escapando de la realidad o buscando en la historia algún rayito de esperanza para sobrevivir" (Menton 1993: 52):

Es decir, el derrumbe de los gobiernos comunistas de Europa oriental y la fragmentación subsiguiente de la Unión Soviética, la derrota electoral de los sandinistas y el papel cada día menos significativo de Cuba como modelo revolucionario han creado una tremenda confusión entre aquellos intelectuales latinoamericanos que desde los veinte han confiado ciegamente en el socialismo como única solución para las tremendas injusticias sufridas por sus compatriotas (Menton 1993: 52).

Menton outlines six characteristics of the new historical novel. Padura's *La novela de mi vida* only shares two; metafiction and the fictionalization of an historical figure. However, he points out other common characteristics of this genre which would formalize Padura's position as a new historical novelist. Menton notes that "en algunos casos la representación del pasado encubre comentarios sobre el presente" (Menton 1993: 45). Heredia and Fernando's parallel lives clearly invite the reader to consider the similarities between the severity of colonial rule in Cuba and the repression of Castro's regime almost 200 years later. Menton also mentions the wide range of "novelas autobiográficas apócrifas" (Menton 1993: 45) published in the era of the New Historical Novel. Padura's invention of Heredia's autobiography, written for the benefit of his illegitimate son, is another example of this trend.

However, it is the work of Alejo Carpentier, father of the *nueva novela histórica*, which seems to have had the greatest influence on Padura. Between 1988 and 1993, Padura wrote *Un camino de medio siglo: Alejo Carpentier y la narrativa de lo real maravilloso*, an extensive analysis of the work of Carpentier. Given Padura's expertise on Carpentier, and the latter's significant role in the New Historical Novel in Latin America, it is important to investigate his possible influences on *La novela de mi vida*. Seymour Menton points out the parallelisms Carpentier creates in *El siglo de las luces* between the French Revolution of 1789 and the Cuban Revolution in 1959 (Menton 1993: 39). Carpentier, like Padura, chose two points in history, some 170 years apart, to highlight the similarities between the two periods. Another point of commonality with Padura is Carpentier's generational concern. In the introduction to the novel, Carpentier explains his reasons for focusing on these periods:

Creí encontrar una gran identidad entre las preocupaciones de aquella época (el siglo XVIII), y la de los hombres de este siglo. En los últimos años del XVIII se hablaba de las mismas cosas que hablaban los hombres jóvenes entre las dos guerras mundiales. Hablaban de la necesidad de una revolución que renovara totalmente la sociedad. Clamaban por libertades y deberes que serían las mismas que anhelaban los jóvenes de mi generación (Carpentier 1985: 46).

While it cannot be said that Heredia's generation claimed en masse the need for a Revolution to free Cuba from colonial rule, Heredia was involved in the Soles y Rayos movement in Cuba in the 1820s. During the short time that the constitution of 1812 lasted, masonry lodges, such as the one to which Heredia belonged, became very popular and were the site for secret independence groups to meet. As explained earlier, independence was not longed for by the majority of the white population due to their economic interest in the continuity of slavery. Should Cuba become an independent republic, slavery would have been abolished in the new constitution. Despite being a minority, there did exist an independence movement in Heredia's day and the period of the constitution brought an air of change to the island. 180 years later, at the end of the millennium, Fernando Terry returns to a disenchanted Habana, one that has lived through the Revolution and where the right to protest is still forbidden, as it was 180 years previously. The similarity between the method of comparing two historical periods used by Carpentier as a means of criticizing the governing regime and that of Padura is undeniable.

*El siglo de las luces* also shares other similarities with *La novela de mi vida* such as the role of Masonry in the French Revolution, and Carpentier also describes in detail the structure and rituals of the masons. Where Carpentier is most likely to have had an influence on Padura however, is in his choice of historical personality on which to base his novel. While Heredia is known as Cuba's first romantic poet, and its first nationalist poet, Heredia is not a major historical personality. He is not known internationally outside academia specialized in Cuban or Latin American poetry. For *La novela de mi vida* to have become an international success, the author could have chosen a more world famous Cuban personality such as José Martí or Fulgencio Batista. Carpentier did write once on Christopher Columbus in *El harpa y la sombra* (1979) but otherwise, like Padura, has chosen less famous historical personalities as protagonists for his novels. In the introduction to *El siglo de las luces*, Carpentier explains the reason why his preference lies with lesser known historical subjects:

¿Por qué personaje ideal? Porque creo que los personajes históricos, pero no demasiado históricos, son personajes ideales para una novela. No se puede hacer una gran novela cuyo personaje central se llame Napoleón, o se llame Julio César, o se llame Carlomagno, porque o bien se achica el personaje con las exigencias del relato novelesco, o bien, por un prurito de fidelidad, no se colocan en su boca las palabras que realmente dijo, y entonces se transforma el gran hombre en una especie de monumento, con facultad de movimiento, pero que pierde fuerza. En cambio, un personaje histórico que se puede situar netamente en una época, que es el protagonista de una acción —acaso secundaria pero muy significativa—, es un personaje que tiene las ventajas de la autenticidad, la verosimilitud, y un margen de libertad para moverlo (Carpentier 1985: 44).

Carpentier's ideas on not so famous historical personalities became a trend in Latin American historical novels. Balderston notes, in his introduction to the collection of papers he edited on the historical novel in Latin America in 1986, that few recent Latin American novels have focused on major historical figures, yet he makes no mention of Carpentier. He highlights the interest of novelists in the crises of conquest, independence, national organization and populist revolts and how attention has not been placed on the important players such as Cortés, Bolívar, San Martín or Hidalgo. Instead, writers have tended to choose protagonists who held an ambiguous role in the crises, such as Camila O' Gorman or Lope de Aguirre. Balderston gives the examples of Reinaldo Arenas' *El mundo alucinante* (1966), Miguel Otero de Silva's *Lope de Aguirre: Príncipe de la libertad* (1979) and Abel Posse's *Daimon* (1978) (Balderston 1986: 11). All of the aforementioned novels were published years

after Carpentier's *El siglo de las luces*, thereby strengthening Menton's claim that Carpentier was a pioneer of the *nueva novela histórica* in Latin America.

*La novela de mi vida* is not the first of Padura's novels where a real character is placed in a fictional novel. *Adiós Hemingway*, the author's first novella after the Conde series, has Mario Conde return to investigation, after eight years of retirement from the police force, at the request of his former work partner Manuel Palacios. The discovery of a body on Finca Vejía, Hemingway's residence in Cuba from 1939 to 1960, after a storm uprooted a mango tree on the property leaving the remains of a body visible, is the mystery el Conde needs to resolve. Now converted into a museum and a popular tourist attraction, it was at Finca Vigía that Hemingway wrote two of his most famous novels; *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Old Man and the Sea*. The museum is closed down while the investigation takes place, allowing el Conde complete access to the former residence of his literary hero. Somewhat similar in structure to *La novela de mi vida*, the narrative present of 1997 jumps to Hemingway's life in 1958. In *Adiós Hemingway*, Padura mixes facts relating to Hemingway's life with the fictitious mystery of the body under the mango tree in his garden. This body turns out to be that of an FBI agent who had been spying on Hemingway due to the writer's knowledge of secret information regarding the Nazis. The agent was killed by one of Hemingway's loyal workers, with whom he had a paternal relationship. El Conde associates Hemingway's later suicide and the electric shocks he received at a clinic in the US with this murder. El Conde also blames the FBI for wanting to kill Hemingway's memory of the delicate information he held on who supplied the Nazis with petrol around the Caribbean Gulf during World War II.

As evident from this brief summary, apart from some structural similarities, *Adiós Hemingway* and *La novela de mi vida* are very different works of fiction. While both make use of fact, *Adiós Hemingway* is a short novella that does not suggest any major criticism of the Revolution, nor does it offer much of a reflection on post revolutionary Cuban reality. In fact, *Adiós Hemingway* could in some ways be compared to the propagandistic crime fiction of the seventies and eighties, where FBI agents were typically the villains. Nevertheless, it does offer an insight into the Batista years, the period in which the novel is set and when Hemingway resided on the island. *La novela de mi vida*, on the other hand, offers the reader a detailed account of colonial Cuba and the life of protagonist José María Heredia that would

have required extensive research by the author. More importantly, on indirectly comparing the two periods, Padura offers a criticism of the Revolution and an insight into Cuban reality not only at the end of the millennium but during the most notorious period of intellectual persecution in the 1970s, “el quinquenio gris”.

#### **2.4. Cuban History Repeated: The Parallel Story of Two Disenchanted Poets**

The present day narrative of *La novela de mi vida* is set in La Habana in 1998 and tells the story of Fernando Terry, who has returned to Cuba for the first time, after eighteen years in exile, in search of Heredia’s missing work, believed to be his autobiography. The existence of this work is based solely on the writings of a Mexican journalist who published a report shortly after the poet’s death that Heredia had been writing his life story. Once a poet and university lecturer in the University of La Habana specializing in the poetry of Heredia, Fernando lost his position after being accused of knowing of his friend Enrique’s plans to leave Cuba illegally. He was led to believe at the time by the investigating police that he had been betrayed by one of his friends from his literary group, los Socarrones. Fallen from grace and unable to trust his friends, Fernando saw no alternative but to leave Cuba through the port of Mariel. He finally settled in Madrid, after spending some time in Miami and New York. On returning to La Habana, Fernando realizes that his city has changed and that his memories are in conflict with reality. Over the years in exile he had imagined having a cup of coffee in la cafetería de Las Vegas, a landmark café in the city centre, the first place he decided to visit on his return.<sup>25</sup> His disillusion on finding this space of nostalgia closed down leads to his realization that: “apenas había empezado la guerra entre su memoria y la realidad” (Padura 2002: 26). This struggle between his nostalgic memories and the present day reality peaks on his reencounter with his former group of friends. Fernando Terry shares many of the same characteristics as detective Mario Conde. These similarities include age, literary aspirations, having studied the same university degree and a shared love for

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<sup>25</sup> In *La neblina del ayer* which I focus on in Chapter three, Padura playfully uses intertextuality to further connect Terry and Conde’s generation. Mario Conde notices a man standing outside what used to be the Las Vegas coffee shop looking as lost and confused as Mario Conde is due to the changes undergone in the city of La Habana in the post Special-Period decade.

La Habana, along with a critical attitude towards the Castro regime. They belong to the disenchanted generation of Cubans, those who were educated by the revolution and once believed in the socialist dream. In the *Cuatro estaciones* tetralogy, Mario Conde's group of disillusioned friends recognize their condition as a disenchanted generation. They serve as a criticism of the regime and highlight its failures. In *La novela de mi vida*, Padura follows a similar pattern by creating los Socarrones, Fernando Terry's literary group. These friends met up regularly in the seventies, full of aspirations and inspiration, to discuss their literature. The present day narrative shows the result of political repression, especially during "el quinquenio gris" and the years of struggle through the Special Period on Fernando's former friends, with the stories of many of them reflecting specific weaknesses or failings of the Revolution. Of the eight friends, two have already died. Victor was killed in an explosion in the Angolan war. He was sent over as a reporter for a Cuban newspaper. Described as the best of the Socarrones, Victor left for the war without question or fear: "Con treinta y dos años voló en pedazos y dejó en quienes lo amaban la sensación de una pérdida irrecuperable y una pregunta terrible: ¿adónde podría haber llegado aquel hombre que irradiaba ternura, sensibilidad y talento?" (Padura 2008: 58). This highlights the tragedy and sadness of the unnecessary loss of a young talented man who was killed in a war in a country which had no further connection to his own than the political beliefs of its leaders. In the Conde series, the Angolan war is also responsible for the paralysis of Conde's best friend, el Flaco Carlos, and is also a motive for resentment on Conde's part towards the revolution.<sup>26</sup>

Another key criticism of a Castro regime policy finds expression in the story of Terry's homosexual friend Enrique. He is the second deceased member of the group. He was knocked over by a Soviet Kp3 truck and it is not clear whether Enrique committed suicide or died accidentally. The fact that a Soviet vehicle caused his death is symbolic of the result of Soviet influence on the island. Enrique had obvious motives for suicide. The persecution of homosexuals in the first decades of the revolution as discussed in Chapter one, led Enrique to plan his escape from Cuba. He was arrested and imprisoned for eighteen months for attempting to leave Cuba illegally. After serving his sentence Enrique's life never returned to normality.

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<sup>26</sup> See Chapter one (1.2.) for more on Cuban involvement in the Angolan war.

Unable to either find employment in his field of work or publish a book, as well as being discriminated against due to his homosexuality, Enrique felt trapped:

Si me agarran tratando de montarme otra vez en una lancha, me pueden meter preso no sé ni cuántos años. Si presento un libro a una editorial, no me lo publican cuando sepan quién soy. No me van a dar un trabajo en nada que tenga que ver con lo que estudiamos... Además, como soy maricón y ya no me escondo para serlo... Estoy preso en las cuatro paredes de esta isla (Padura 2008: 171).

Tomás is a university lecturer occupying the same position Fernando would have held, had he not been accused of not reporting Enrique's plans to leave Cuba illegally. Fernando remembers his time working at the university as the happiest days of his life: "vivió como un príncipe, convencido de que su fulgurante estrella no se apagaría nunca" (Padura 2008: 36). This nostalgic memory of a life of abundance as a university lecturer is contrasted with the present reality lived by Tomás.

¿Tú has comido picadillo de cáscaras de plátano? ¿Tú has ido en bicicleta de tu casa a tu trabajo, todos los días, durante cuatro años? ¿Y has tenido miedo de que tu hija termine metiéndose puta? ¿O sabes lo que es reírse las gracias y servirle de chófer a un extranjero comemierda que hace lo mismo que tú pero gana cien veces más dinero que tú? (Padura 2008: 333).

His angry outburst at Fernando, who laments having to live in exile, denotes his frustration for having to suffer through the Special Period. Fernando escaped the hunger and hardship of the crisis and his complaints to Tomás on having to live outside Cuba are considered insensitive and inappropriate. The above quote denounces not only the physical hardships engendered by the depravations of the Special Period, such as hunger and exhaustion, but also its psychological effects. Tomás describes being subjected to the humiliation of having to assume a happy façade and feign rapport with a client he disrespected in order to survive. His fears that his daughter will turn to prostitution are juxtaposed with his own humiliation at having to forfeit his university career for a job as a driver for tourists.

Miguel Ángel, or el Negro as his friends call him, was an exemplary *revolucionario*. From a young age he took passionately to politics, supported by his communist parents who had been tortured and imprisoned during the Batista years. Despite his strong political beliefs, Miguel Ángel never made any political reference in either of the first two books he published. Given his unconditional support for the revolution, Fernando believed he could have become very successful. However, Miguel Ángel was struck by a sudden disenchantment that closed off all possibilities

of success in Cuba. He lost his job on the grounds that he was “perestroiko y revisionista” and became known as a “potencial enemigo” when it was discovered that he had published articles abroad “que cuestionaban su anterior postura de creyente convencido” (Padura 2008: 57).

Álvaro, along with Miguel Ángel, are the only *Socorrones* that Fernando initially wanted to see on his return to Cuba, as they were the only two he fully trusted. Fernando’s first reaction on his reencounter after eighteen years with his best friend was of shock. Álvaro had aged considerably due to poor diet, lack of sleep but especially cheap alcohol. The alcoholic poet, once the host of the literary group meetings, had written two books of poetry in which the poet’s depression and suicidal state of mind were evident:

Fernando encontró en ellos una fuerza irreverente, entre demoníaca y escatológica, y supo que eran el testimonio doloroso y sincero de un hombre incapaz de suicidarse de un solo golpe, pero que sabía matarse lenta y aplicadamente, como si moldeara la ansiada llegada del fin (Padura 2008: 53).

Conrado is always referred to as *lépera* by the Socarrones, which in Cuba means astute or shrewd. He is the most successful professionally of the group, owning a “casa en Miramar, auto japonés climatizado, reloj suizo de oro, mujer y dos amantes, ropa elegantemente informal y un envolvente aroma de colonias indelebles” (Padura 2008: 55). He turned his back on Fernando and Miguel Ángel once they were under suspicion and considered enemies of the Revolution. He visited Fernando in Madrid two years before his return to Cuba, but it later transpired that Conrado had travelled several times to Madrid over the years but had been unwilling to risk being associated with Fernando. His ambition and success suggest that in order to live comfortably in Cuba, a ruthless display of loyalty to the Revolution must be a priority. This character also serves to expose the economic inequalities in Cuba. These inequalities are also seen in the *Cuatro estaciones* tetralogy, where high ranking officials live in the mansions once owned by the Cuban oligarchy prior to the Revolution.

Arcadio, like Conrado, has also found success through the revolutionary system. He has published eight volumes of poetry and has been well rewarded for his efforts. Fernando remembers Arcadio’s former inspiration for his verses, which “pretendían establecer una comunicación inteligente con la realidad del país o con la

más visible de su propia cotidianidad, apacible y pautaada” (Padura 2008: 53). He notes how Arcadio’s inspiration moved with time from the reality of his country to topics such as his inner feelings, the subject of solitude and man’s journey through life. Álvaro considers Arcadio a coward for choosing to no longer focus his poetry on “la desgarrante cotidianidad de la vida” (Padura 2008: 53). Again, it is implied that Conrado, like Arcadio, has been successful because he always maintained himself on the right side of the Revolution. When it was no longer safe to comment on “la realidad del país” (Padura 2008: 53), without being written off as a *contra revolucionario*, Arcadio simply changed his subject matter and wrote on a safe, non political topic.

Fernando’s story is paralleled by that of the poet José María Heredia, told in the first person narrative. As already discussed earlier, Heredia, although born in Santiago de Cuba, spent most of his childhood travelling around Latin America with his family due to his father’s position as a civil servant of the Spanish crown. He returned to Cuba in 1818 at the age of fourteen and the city of La Habana became the space both for his growth into adulthood and his development as a poet. Padura’s account of this period of the poet’s life could be described as a *Bildungsroman* with La Habana as its central stage.

Heredia is taken by his friend Domingo del Monte on a journey of discovery through the real Habana, “la ciudad verdadera” (Padura 2002: 32). His discovery of the secrets of the real city are on a par with his journey to adulthood. Domingo takes Heredia to a brothel where the young poet enters manhood by losing his virginity. Heredia’s adventures in the capital offer a description of life in the city 180 years prior to the present-day narrative. He describes a magical vibrant city with its own particular smell and light and the fly-by-night way of life of the *habaneros*: “allí se vivía con una lujuria y un desenfreno tal como si al día siguiente fuese a llegar un huracán” (Padura 2002: 32). With references to prostitution, political corruption, street violence and gambling, Heredia’s much loved Habana is depicted as a happy playground for all of the worst vices. This depiction of La Habana of 1818 is reminiscent of La Habana in the 1950s, sharing precisely the kind of problems that the Revolution strove to wipe out. Indeed, although such activities are outlawed in the present day narrative of 1998, the contemporary city still shares similarities with Heredia’s Habana. Heredia explains that the business of prostitution “prosperaba

más en la isla que la fabricación de azúcar” (Padura, 2008: 45). He makes reference to the “esclavas fleteras” (Padura, 2008: 45) from Heredia’s time and explains how they were sent to work as prostitutes by their owners, who, in exchange, would let them save part of their earnings in order to be able to buy their own freedom. This condition of buying freedom through prostitution reminds one of the current situation in Cuba with the *jineteras*. Many of these women prostitute themselves to foreigners in order to get out of Cuba and thereby gain their definitive freedom. It should be noted that this is not only a phenomenon whereby women sell themselves to tourists in exchange for money, gifts, meals and a possible invitation out of Cuba. Male *jineteros* also partake in this activity. Until January 2013, Cuban citizens still had to apply for a *permiso de salida* to the Cuban authorities to be able to travel abroad. This process was long and expensive and impossible for the majority of Cubans, unless they had connections abroad or were married to a foreigner. The final decision was made by the authorities, which resulted in the proliferation of the *balseiros*, massive illegal and dangerous escapes from Cuba on rafts to Miami, as we saw attempted by Enrique. Once again, from this example, a notion of the repetition of history without improvement or evolution can be perceived.

Heredia sometimes refers to the future of Cuba in his biography, a technique Padura cleverly uses to point out the repetition of history. Due to the limitations on the level of criticism the author can make without being censored, Padura uses Heredia’s opinions on themes such as democracy, exile and the use of literature to comment on contemporary politics. Heredia admits, in hindsight, his innocence in believing that King Fernando VII of Spain had agreed to re-establish the Constitution of 1812 for the good of his people. Now mature, at the age of thirty five, Heredia claims that the only certainty he has is that “sólo en democracia y bajo un Estado de leyes el hombre puede alcanzar su dimensión más plena” (Padura 2008: 95). He then remembers how King Fernando VII abolished the Constitution a few years later, which was followed by a period of repression led by Tacón:

Porque el rey español, como lo hicieron todos los déspotas de la historia, y como estoy seguro que lo harán los sátrapas por venir, apenas realizó oportunistas cambios políticos para ganar tiempo y reparar los barrotes de su Estado opresivo y volver a segar los leves espacios de libertad concedidos (Padura 2008: 95).

This quote could be read as a direct criticism of Castro and his socialist Revolution. Initially the Revolution was accepted with euphoria by the majority of Cubans, who

believed that the Revolution would bring freedom and equality to all. Initial political policies, such as the literacy campaign, free health care and universal employment supported revolutionary rhetoric, but later policies, which were an attack on basic human liberty, such as homosexual repression, suffrage, political opposition, the closing of borders prohibiting emigration, clearly reduced freedom on the island and perpetuated the Castro dictatorship. It also suggests that history will continue to repeat itself even after Castro.

Heredia's disillusionment with the Spanish Crown culminated in his exile and death sentence for his involvement in the conspiracy movement known as *Soles y Rayos de Bolívar*. This movement was led by José Francisco Lemus, a colonel in the Colombian Army of Independence, and organized mainly by Masons throughout Cuba (Thomas 2010: 66). The King Heredia had supported and praised for his apparent constitutionalism turned out to be an oppressor. Heredia's attempts to withdraw his support for the independence movement were not sufficient for him to be granted the freedom to remain in his own country. His frustration parallels that of Fernando Terry, who strove to be pardoned and to be reaccepted as a *buen revolucionario* after he lost his university position during the enquiry into his involvement in his friend Enrique's failed escape from Cuba. The investigating police considered Fernando's case extremely serious, given his position as a university lecturer with "una responsabilidad laboral y moral de alguien que trabaja directamente en la formación de las nuevas generaciones" (Padura 2008: 37). After being suspended from his university position, Fernando was employed as a proof reader for a magazine until he made the fatal mistake of presenting a report he had written to his boss in which he suggested how the design and quality of the magazine might be improved. He had made this effort in an attempt to prove his interest in his work and his dedication to the Revolution. Three days later he was given an appointment with the boss. The sight of an antique tobacco box on the magazine director's desk, once owned by a famous sugar and tobacco planter, alerted Fernando to his mistake and his professional doom. He compared the humiliation experienced at that meeting to what Heredia must have felt during his meeting with Miguel Tacón, the Spanish governor who granted Heredia permission to return to Cuba for a limited stay in 1836:

Mientras el cuerpo se le anegaba en sudor, las náuseas fueron cediendo, sus piernas recuperaron su capacidad de andar y recordó que estaba en la vieja calzada de la Reina, la misma que, para su gloria el tirano había ampliado y modernizado, siglo y medio antes, el sátrapa Miguel Tacón, con quien José María Heredia había sostenido una entrevista quizá tan degradante como la que él acababa de tener con el director (Padura 2008: 169).

Again, in the above quote, the author parallels the oppression of colonial rule with that of the Revolution. This experience led Fernando down a slope of paranoia and fear.

After this, Terry worked unofficially for a carpenter who made platform shoes to sell on the black market. He lived in constant fear of being denounced to the authorities by the president of the CDR<sup>27</sup> in his block for not having a job and of being accused of being lazy or antisocial, which automatically implies *contrarrevolucionario*.

“El temor a afrontar nuevos problemas rozaba un paranoico delirio de persecución y había llegado a ser tan agobiante que Fernando sólo abandonaba su casa para meterse en el taller de carpintería y jamás había vuelto a visitar una biblioteca, un teatro, una sala de conferencias” (Padura 2008: 273).

Imprisoned by his own fear, Fernando distanced himself from his friends and any form of socializing to the point where he felt like “un exiliado en su propia tierra” (Padura 2008: 274). Three months later he saw no alternative but to leave Cuba through the port of Mariel.<sup>28</sup> Fernando’s pre-exile experience is paralleled by that of Heredia, who experienced similar emotions before his exile: “hastío, asco, desesperación, rabia y dolor se amontonaron en mi espíritu, y se revolvían con el miedo y la vergüenza” (Padura 2008: 227). On his death bed, Heredia reflects on the hardship of life in exile and again refers to the future of Cuba and sympathizes with any future exiles whose lives may be controlled by political powers:

Yo no sé si en el futuro otros hombre sufrirán igual condena que la mía y vivirán por años como desterrados, siempre añorando la patria, eternamente extranjeros, lejos de la familia y los amigos, con mil historias inconclusas y perdidas a las espaldas,

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<sup>27</sup> Comité de Defensa de la Revolución, see Chapter one (1.3.) for more information on CDRs.

<sup>28</sup> In 1980 a bus driver drove his bus into the walls of the Peruvian embassy seeking political asylum. Those aboard the bus also seized the opportunity and refused to leave the embassy. As a result Castro temporarily opened the borders and allowed certain Cubans the freedom to leave Cuba. The designated port of departure was the port of Mariel, west of La Habana. See Reinaldo Arenas’ *Antes que anochezca* (2008: 297).

hablando lenguas extrañas y muriendo de deseos de volver: si así fuere, desde mi lecho de muerte los compadezco, pues padecerán el más cruel de los castigos que pueden prodigar quienes, desde el poder, ejercen como dueños de la patria y el destino de sus ciudadanos (Padura 2008: 337).

This quote is a direct commentary on the present situation for many Cuban exiles living outside Cuba who are not permitted re-entry to their own country.

The poet's opinions on the country are of national importance according to Cristóbal Aquino. A mason of the same lodge as Heredia's son José de Jesús, Aquino was responsible for safeguarding Heredia's papers until they were to be published in 1939, one hundred years after the poet's death. Under threat by Machado, Aquino knew the lodge would be searched by Machado's secret police. He removed the papers and handed them over to Ricardo Junco, lawful heir of the papers. Aquino is "la única persona viva que los ha leído" and claims that Heredia's biography "tiene que ver con lo que es y lo que no es este país" (Padura 2008: 354). Despite Aquino's efforts to convince Ricardo Junco, great grandson of Heredia's impossible love Lola Junco, of the value of the papers, Junco did not share Aquino's moral values and sold them to his cousin, Domingo Vélez de la Riva, who in turn would have had the papers destroyed to save his own political career. Included in the papers was unfavourable information on Domingo del Monte, Vélez de la Riva's great grandfather, which would reflect badly on the family should the papers ever be published.

The parallelism between the two poets of exile, their lost loves, betrayal by close friends and disenchantment reaches a point of visual contact in the novel which unites them even further outside of the obstacle of time. At the beginning of the novel, Terry watches a man on board a tourist yacht who, from the Malecón de La Habana, is leaning over the edge facing the city. He notices how this man does not seem to fit in with the rest of the tourists who are enjoying the music and festivities on board. This man raises his head and catches Fernando's eye. They stare at each other until the boat is out of view. This sad stranger, who had somehow caught Fernando's gaze, made him think of how Heredia must have felt on his final voyage away from the island, when he was forced to leave Cuba for the last time:

Alarmó a Fernando y le hizo sentir como una rémora capaz de volar sobre el tiempo, el dolor que debió de embargar a José María Heredia aquella mañana, seguramente fría, del 16 de enero de 1837, cuando vio, desde el bergantín que lo devolvía al

exilio luego de una lacerante visita a la isla, cómo las olas se alejaban en busca precisamente de aquellos arrecifes, el último recodo de una tierra cubana que el poeta ya nunca volvería a ver (Padura 2008: 28).

This experience is retold through the words of Heredia at the end of the novel when the poet describes in his biography that last journey out of Cuba, and how he felt as his boat left the port of La Habana. Fernando's experience is mirrored as Heredia describes how he felt on seeing a man watching his boat from land:

Descubrí a un hombre, más o menos de mi edad, que seguía con la vista el paso del barco. Por un largo momento nuestras miradas se sostuvieron, y recibí el pesar recóndito que cargaban aquellos ojos, una tristeza extrañamente gemela a la mía, capaz de cruzar por encima de las olas y el tiempo para forjar una misteriosa armonía que desde entonces me desvela, pues sé que fuimos algo más que dos hombres mirándonos sobre las olas (Padura 2008: 413).

The above "encounter" of the two poets emphasizes the notion of time standing still and the permanence of the control the authorities of Cuba have over the lives and destinies of its people. Their lives and experiences, almost identical, despite the almost two centuries that separate them, suggest that nothing has fundamentally changed in Cuba despite independence or even the Revolution. The poet of the late twentieth century receives the same punishment as the poet from the early nineteenth century.

The juxtaposition of Cuba at the end of the second millennium with colonial Cuba 180 years earlier serves as a criticism of the current situation and as a means to examine the roots of Cuba as an independent nation. Heredia was one of the first *independentista* poets to voice his opinions through his poetry. Hailed by Martí, Heredia became a symbol of nationalism in Cuba. His use of Cuban landscapes and nature led the way for creating a sense of national identity. Nation building is critiqued in the novel through the negative depiction of one of Cuba's most prominent patrons of the arts, Domingo del Monte. The novel suggests that Del Monte invented a history of Cuban literature in order to fortify Cuban national identity. In suggesting that the latter is based on a lie, it can be interpreted that all nationalist discourse is based on untruths, including Castro's. Despite being extolled by Martí for his patriotism, Padura does not depict Heredia as a national hero. He paints a picture of a young passionate man who lived to regret his over excitement at the idea of independence, which only led to his exile and separation from the woman he wanted as his wife and their son. His misfortune and disenchantment is mirrored

by that of Fernando Terry who suffers a similar fate almost two centuries later and under a government whose manifesto was based on Martí's ideas for an independent Cuba. *La novela de mi vida* points out the disenchantment of those who have suffered the realities of modern day Cuba. The experiences of Fernando's friends highlight the repression of the Castro regime. Economic dependence on slavery was the principal reason for Cuba's commitment to Spain during the nineteenth century. Independence and the establishment of a constitution would have signified freedom and equality for all. Padura gives examples in his novel which show that in present day Cuba, neither freedom nor equality for all exists. In a country where the official history is only written by followers of the Castro regime, Padura invites his readers to question the truth of all that is written.

## Chapter Three

### Generational Disenchantment and *la doble moral* in

#### *La neblina del ayer*

#### Introduction

Written and set between 2003 and 2004, *La neblina del ayer* sees the return of Mario Conde, fourteen years after his retirement from the police force. Padura had previously resuscitated his most popular protagonist in his novellas *La cola del serpiente* and *Adiós Hemmingway*, both published in the same volume in 2001. In *La neblina del ayer*, Padura revisits the world of el Conde and his friends in the decade after the Special Period and introduces el Conde's latest friend and associate, el Yoyi. The latter serves as a representation of the new generation of Cubans, those who were born from the late seventies on and came of age during or after the Special Period. Padura presents a comparison of el Conde's generation with this new generation of Cubans and offers an explanation for the differences between both. The new generation displays little sense of morality or core values. They live by their own personal code of ethics, which is unquestionably egotistical and individualistic. This new generation clashes directly with el Conde's and both generations are foreign to each other. The disenchanting city of La Habana is again centre stage in this novel, as the author introduces the reader to the darkest and most dangerous areas of the city, never before explored in Padura's previous novels. As discussed in my introduction to this thesis, following De Certeau's theories on the use of the city in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, I will show how Padura's protagonist Mario Conde reveals the city which is outside of the panoptic view. El Conde, while walking in the city of La Habana, discovers underground areas where the city space is not used by the city's inhabitants in the manner in which it was planned to be by the authorities. El Conde too is in turn guided by other walkers of the city to areas which had until then been invisible to him. Through Yoyi, el Conde experiences a side of his city with which he was previously unfamiliar. Raw descriptions of poverty and hopelessness serve as proof of the failures of the Revolution. Criminality in the city is further explored in this novel and linked to this newer generation. In Chapter one, I discussed the heretic city as one of transgression

and corruption, where most of the citizens of La Habana were guilty of some form of heresy, albeit as a means to survival. The concept of criminality for survival is also present in this novel, yet there is a deeper dimension to criminality which I will explore in detail. I will also examine the factors which have led to such change among citizens of the same city.

*La neblina del ayer* can be read as a history of criminality in the city. It explores criminality from the heyday of organised crime on the island in the 1950s during the Batista dictatorship up to the present day mafia controlled underworld of the city. Padura offers a parallel between present day organized crime and the notorious mob years where drugs and prostitution were rampant. In a novel filled with nostalgia for times long gone, the author remembers an era of abundance, one which was wiped away by the Revolution. In its place, Padura depicts a disenchanted, hungry city in shambles, one where criminality and prostitution are still commonplace, provoking the inevitable question: what positive factors did the Revolution actually bring for Cuba? I will explore the role the Special Period has had on the social changes in the city which have led to such a wide generation gap. The theme of a new generation of Cubans linked to criminality and set in post Special Period Cuba has also been addressed by Padura in the short story *Mirando el sol*, from the collection *La Puerta de Alcalá y otras cacerías* (2000) which I will also refer to in this Chapter. I will also examine the same topic as represented in the film *Malabana* (2001) written by Leonardo Padura and directed by Guido Giansoldati. Both the short story and the film deal with the issue of the drug trade on the island and have as protagonists the new generation of young Cubans. The former focuses more on drug users while the latter centres on the drug traffickers. This generation, while disaffected, is not as disenchanted as el Conde's generation as they never in fact believed in the revolution.

### **3.1. Habana's Generational Divide: The Disenchanted and the Dollar Generations**

I will provide a brief synopsis of the novel before I go on to look at the generational differences reflected in Padura's work. The year is 2003 and fourteen years after his retirement from the police force, Mario Conde is now a second hand

book dealer. He roams the city in search of private libraries in the hope that the owners are willing to sell him their literary treasures. He then resells the novels through his associate Yoyi, who owns a book stall in la Plaza de las Armas, the first square built in the city in the sixteenth century, which is now famous for its book fair. Yoyi, also known as el Palomo due to his protruding chest bone, uses the book stall as a front for his other illegitimate businesses. Mario Conde does not get involved in el Palomo's illegal dealings, although he is aware that his young business partner has other economic interests that fund his relatively comfortable lifestyle. These include car rentals, buying and selling furniture and antiques, and a construction business, which are all illegitimate. It is through his job that el Conde meets brother and sister, Dionisio and Amalia Ferrer, who live in a rundown mansion in the neighbourhood of el Vedado, that houses the greatest private library el Conde has ever witnessed. The siblings, who are in their late sixties, are visibly hungry (Padura 2005: 18) and despite their promise to their dying mother not to sell the books, hunger pushes them to make a deal with el Conde and Yoyi to liquidate the literary goldmine they have been sitting on for over forty years. In a cookery book found in this library, el Conde finds a picture of Violeta del Rio, a bolero singer from the 1950s, in a cut out from a newspaper dated 1960. The bolero is a sad love song which has its origins in Cuba and was very popular in cabarets in La Habana in the 1950s. El Conde's weakness for boleros has already been established in previous novels; he tends to sing them when he falls in love. Through Violeta del Rio, Padura introduces the period of Batista's dictatorship in the 1950s to the novel. When Dionisio is murdered in his library, two days after el Conde and Yoyi begin business with the Ferrers, Mario Conde and Yoyi automatically become prime suspects in his murder. El Conde's instincts, which have helped him to solve many mysteries in the past, alert the former detective that Violeta del Rio is in some way connected to Dionisio's murder. So begins el Conde's investigations into the murder of Dionisio Ferrer, in order to prove his own innocence. He delves into the pre-revolutionary past of his city in an attempt to solve a murder committed forty-three years after Batista was overthrown and the commencement of the Castro-led revolution. Padura hereby connects the pre-revolutionary city to post-Special Period La Habana, plausibly inviting the reader to discover a comparison between both periods, where *la ley de la selva* dominates the city.

The notable generation gap between Yoyi and el Conde highlights the changes undergone by the Revolution during the course of its period in power in Cuba. The Special Period is undoubtedly the most significant contributor to social change within Cuba since the early days of the Revolution. Extreme hardships suffered during the decade of the nineties led to the disenchantment of those who had once supported the Castro led regime. Most, like Padura's generation, had been educated by the Revolution to believe in the superiority of socialism over the evils of capitalism. As previously established in Chapter 1.3., when Andrés lists how the Revolution had negatively affected their lives, el Conde's generation worked hard and made sacrifices in the name of socialism, with the conviction that they would one day be compensated and live to enjoy the rewards of their efforts. The Special Period, for many, was the nail in the coffin for the socialist dream, as the reality of the total economic dependence Cuba had had on the Soviet Union became evident. However, this disenchantment was already on the horizon for many Cubans in the decade prior to the Special Period. Persephone Braham notes, in *Crimes Against the State, Crimes Against Persons*, that in 1986, five years before the ultimate fall of the Soviet Bloc, the "economic crisis, a growing black market, deteriorating relationships with the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc countries and the apparent failure of government policy to improve the *conciencia* of many Cubans provoked the initiation of the 'Rectification Campaign'" (Braham 2004: 54). This was an effort by the Cuban government to restore faith in those citizens who were rapidly becoming disillusioned with the Revolution. Kapcia, in his book *Cuba A Revolution*, considers the discontent of "leading UJC (Young Communists Union) activists who began to dissent by openly seeking to emulate Gorbachev's Soviet reform process of *perestroika* and *glasnost*" (Kapcia 2009: 41) to be the key factor in provoking the campaign of "Rectification of Past Errors and Negative Tendencies", given that their dissent was seen by the government as a clear threat to its power. Braham points out one positive result of those rectifications, which saw "a movement to restore the work of homosexual writers to its rightful place in Cuban literature" (Braham 2004: 54). A volume of Virgilio Piñera's short stories was published in 1987 and Lezama Lima's *Paradiso* was reprinted there for the first time since 1966 (Braham 2004: 54). Kapcia values the triumph of Cuban troops in South Africa in 1988 as a significant boost to Cuban national moral (Kapcia 2008: 42), yet the crisis of the nineties soon ended any hopes of recovery for those who were already disenchanted by the

Revolution. Both Braham and Kapcia list in their books some of the most significant changes to revolutionary policies that came about as a result of the crisis, known in Cuba as *El periodo especial en tiempos de paz*. These include a relaxation of some aspects of political control. Members of religious organizations were allowed to join the Partido Socialista Popular in 1991; the use of dollars was legalized in 1993; and in September of the same, year for the first time since 1968, the legalization of a limited category of self-employment (*cuenta-propia*) was implemented (Kapcia 2008: 158). Both the legalization of dollars and self-employment has resulted in a two-tier economic system in Cuba. Those who have access to dollars, either from remittances or through work in the tourism sector, can buy food and other goods from the so-called TRDs (*tiendas de recuperación de divisa*). Apart from those who work legally in state run hotels and restaurants, many have made a career of *jineterismo* or tourist hustling, which is rampant in typical touristic areas. Although illegal and punishable with prison sentences, the Cuban authorities have been unable to eradicate *jineterismo* given how lucrative and attractive a business it can be, while at the same time it increases Cubans' chances of legal emigration by marrying a foreigner. Cubans, who do not have family living abroad or jobs in the tourism sector, rely solely on their state income, paid in Cuban pesos, which averages from twelve to eighteen pesos convertibles, or CUC, which hold roughly the same value as US dollars, per month. Those without dollars also rely on food supplies from the rationing card or whatever limited variety of goods are available to purchase at the *bodegas*, shops which sell goods in Cuban pesos. While these measures, taken from 1990 on, were initially temporary and implemented to cope with the state of emergency known as *el periodo especial*, they were never reversed.

Yoyi's generation is the dollar generation, the generation which came of age when the dollar was legalized and the Cuban population was subsequently divided into the haves and the have-nots. Braham notes that while some of these measures were considered positive, a negative result of the Special Period was that "crime and juvenile delinquency increased drastically, especially prostitution, theft and black market activities" (Braham 2004: 54). Set ten years after the legal introduction of dollars to the Cuban economy, Padura illustrates the difference in life styles between those with dollars and those without in *La neblina del ayer*. The murder victim, Dionisio Ferrer, offers one example of this gulf in living standards. Ferrer fought as a

young man for the Revolution against Batista. He worked all his life as an exemplary *revolucionario*, and admits that he has sacrificed a lot for his country and is still unwilling to get involved in illegal activities in order to make a quick dollar. El Conde is surprised at his innocence when negotiating the value of his library; Dionisio calculates its value in Cuban pesos while el Conde considers the same figure in dollars, approximately twenty-five times more than Cuban pesos.

Aquí donde usted nos ve, mi hermana y yo nos hemos jodido mucho por este país, mucho. Yo me jugué la vida aquí y hasta en África. Y aunque me esté muriendo de hambre no voy a hacer algo así... Por mil ni por diez mil pesos. Veo que nos entendemos - admitió el Conde, conmovido por la ingenuidad del épico Dionisio, que pensaba en pesos mientras él calculaba en dólares (Padura 2005: 24).

Dionisio represents the generation of Cubans who came of age in the 1950s and, despite living through so many years of hardship, still holds some faith in the Revolution. Dionisio proudly went to war in Cuba for the Revolution against Batista and again to the Angolan war, a fact that links him with el Flaco Carlos and with Victor from *La novela de mi vida*. El Conde views him as an epic revolutionary, a dying breed of Cubans who have lost touch with the reality on the streets. He and his sister are visibly hungry, yet neither has become involved in the black market economy due to their strong sense of revolutionary values.

Yoyi el Palomo is the polar opposite of Dionisio and shows little sense of pride in his nation. He is drawn to U.S. culture and longs for the day when he can leave Cuba “hacia cualquier parte, Madagascar incluida” (Padura 2005: 39). He likes to mix English words in his sentences and regularly calls el Conde “men”. He is an excellent businessman, a true capitalist, trapped inside a communist country and el Conde is convinced that “cuando cumpliera su sueño de irse de Cuba llegaría a ser un comerciante exitoso” (Padura 2005: 39). His quote “Time is money, remember, y yo tengo que atender a mis negocios” (Padura 2005: 256) sums up Yoyi’s character and what he stands for in the novel. He also differs greatly from the generation of the seventies, which in the novel is represented by el Conde and his friends, whom Yoyi cannot understand. El Conde was born in the fifties and came of age in the seventies. He was educated wholly by the Revolution and was brought up to believe that collective hard work and sacrifice was the only way forward. Yoyi, on the other hand, has never even heard of the “Hombre Nuevo” (Padura 2005: 90). Evidently, he has

never shown an interest in socialist ideology and has never believed in the Revolution. Unlike el Conde's generation and the previous one, Yoyi never fought for the principles of the Revolution nor did he witness its better days. The following conversation between el Conde and Yoyi highlights the wide generation gap between the two. Yoyi, born twenty years after el Conde, never lived the socialist dream and although el Conde admits it is over, he laments the fact that it was never fully realised.

Oye men, tú y tus amigos son increíbles: el Flaco, el Conejo, el negro Candito con su locura de Jehová y toda esa paja... Parecen marcianos, coño, te lo juro. Yo los veo y me pregunto qué carajo les metieron en la cabeza para ponerlos así...

Nos hicieron creer que todos éramos iguales y que el mundo iba a ser mejor. Que ya era mejor...

Pues los estafaron, te lo juro. En todas partes hay unos que son menos iguales que los otros y el mundo va de mal en peor. Aquí mismo, el que no tiene billetes verdes, está fuera de juego y hay gentes ahora mismo que se están haciendo ricos, a las buenas y a las malas...

Conde asintió, con la vista perdida entre los árboles del patio.

Fue bonito mientras duró.

Por eso ahora ustedes están tan jodidos: demasiado tiempo soñando. Total ¿para qué? (Padura 2005: 43).

Through Yoyi, Padura shows how the dual currency has created a divide in Cuban society and how this in turn has undermined socialism on the island. El Conde nostalgically admits that the dream is over, to which Yoyi responds that el Conde's generation are to blame for their current situation of "jodidos". Yoyi thereby implies that his dollar generation have a better quality of life than el Conde's as they know how to acquire the "billetes verdes". In her article, *The New Cuban Capitalist*, Juliana Barbassa also concurs with Yoyi in stating that the rules have changed in Cuba and that it is necessary to earn dollars rather than support the Revolution in order to have a comfortable lifestyle.

The dollar, tourism and private enterprise, and inequality – are pushing through. Described by Castro as necessary evils, these small allowances to capitalism are taking root and seeding change at every level of Cuban society. The advent of the dollar and private enterprise means that the worker's paradise now has winners and losers. Staying close to the party line and putting in hours in a state-owned company for a peso salary no longer guarantee a good living. This is a new game, and the one with the most dollars wins, whether the money comes from hard work or relatives abroad (Barbassa 2005: 17).

Amelia Rosenberg Weinreb, in her book *Cuba in the Shadow of Change: Daily Life in the Twilight of the Revolution*, labels the current era in Cuba as late socialism, "a

confluence of socialist bureaucracy with a social, economic and cultural turn towards capitalist modes of consumption and production” (Rosenberg Weinreb 2011: 3), and compares it to that of post Soviet bloc countries in the 1990s. Yoyi’s generation have adapted more successfully to late socialism than that of el Conde because they hold no nostalgia for a socialist utopia, given that they have never experienced anything similar, as they became adults at the same time as quasi capitalism became legalized on the island. In the following quote from the novel, Padura points to the advantage Yoyi’s generation holds over el Conde’s in the current cut-throat Habana, where cynicism combined with being street-wise are essential for survival.

A pesar de ser veinte años más joven que el Conde, éste le reconocía al Yoyi, con una pizca de envidia, la posesión de un cinismo esencial y una pragmática sabiduría de la vida que él jamás había poseído y, por lo visto, jamás llegaría a poseer, a pesar de que aquellas cualidades le parecieran cada vez más necesarias para subsistir en la selva de la vida criolla del tercer milenio (Padura 2005: 38).

Although Yoyi considers el Conde and his friends “marcianos”, he is nevertheless drawn to el Conde and enjoys spending time with him. He deems el Conde to be “el único tipo legal con quien trato en éste y en todos mis negocios” (Padura 2005: 89). In this quote, Yoyi describes the cut-throat atmosphere in the corrupt city of La Habana, where nobody is to be trusted as individual gain takes precedence over all moral values.

Tú sabes, uno vive en una selva. Desde que sales del cascarón estás rodeado por buitres, gente empeñada en joderte, sacarte dinero, tumbarte la jeva, en denunciarte y verte escachao para ellos ganar puntos y subir un poco... Hay una pila de gente que está por escapar, por no complicarse la existencia, y la mayoría lo que quiere es ir echando, poner agua por medio, aunque sea pa’ Madagascar. Y al carajo lo demás... sin esperar mucho de la vida (Padura 2005: 90).

Sociologist Katrin Hansing discusses the effects of the Special Period on Cuban youth in her article “Changes from below: New Dynamics, Spaces, and Attitudes in Cuban Society”. She also identifies this generation as being “products of the Special Period, as the post-Soviet time of austerity and opening to foreign investment is officially known. Their main point of reference is the economic crisis and its many social contradictions” (Hansing 2011: 18). She makes reference to the phenomenon of *la doble moral*, “which refer[s] to a dual set of behaviours and opinions – one for public, the other for private consumption” (Hansing 2011: 18). In Yoyi’s quote above, he refers to the risk of being reported by those who want to see you in trouble with the authorities in order to have an advantage over you. In a

system where the vast majority are involved in criminality of one form or another, the act of reporting somebody else's illegitimate activity, despite also being guilty of counterevolutionary actions, is an ideal example of *la doble moral*. Hansing notes how “the level of corrupt, manipulative and opportunistic behaviour not only towards the state but also among people themselves has taken on worrying proportions” (Hansing 2011: 19) and that in all sectors of Cuban society “cheating, stealing, bribing, lying, and cutting corners have become facets of everyday life” (Hansing 2011: 19). However, Hansing states that, although the consequences of *la doble moral* have greatly affected the social and moral fabric as well as the work ethic of Cuban society, these “are especially visible among Cuban youth” (Hansing 2011: 19). The explanation Hansing gives for this generation's behaviour is that they have simply and uncritically adapted practices they have grown up with, such as seeing “family members and others leave their professional jobs to find more lucrative work in the hard-currency tourist industry, get involved in some form of illicit business, constantly say one thing but do another, or make the difficult decision to leave the country for good” (Hansing 2011: 19).

In *La neblina del ayer*, Padura also makes the suggestion that the rise in criminality, especially among the younger generations, is connected to the level of illegitimate activity this generation has been exposed to as children. In the novel, el Conde asks his ex-partner in the police force, Manolo, to what he attributes the rise in criminality in the city. His response supports Hansing's argument that criminality has become part of everyday life in Cuba.

No sé, debe de ser que hay demasiada gente que no quiere pasar más trabajo en la vida y buscan la vía fácil. Hay muchos, demasiados, que han crecido viendo a medio mundo dedicado a robar, falsificar, malversar y ya les parece de lo más normal y lo hacen como si no hicieran nada malo (Padura 2005: 112).

Hansing gives examples of young Cubans who prefer not to go to university, given the lack of economic motivation in studying for a degree, when they can earn more money working in illegal businesses. Padura's character, Yoyi, has a degree in civil engineering which hangs on the wall in his house “a la paciente espera, decía el laureado ingeniero, de que escaseara más el papel sanitario y se decidiera a utilizar en aquella función el crujiente pergamino universitario que no le había reportado demasiadas satisfacciones sociales y ninguna ventaja económica” (Padura 2005: 38). In the tetralogy of *Las cuatro estaciones*, examples can be seen of how el Conde and

his friends used to dream of their future jobs and professional ambitions in the seventies when they were at prep-school (*pre-universitario*). The way in which they valued their education is contrasted here with the lack of interest Yoyi and most Cuban youth have for “the state’s long-time propagated revolutionary values - education for all, patriotism, political participation, social responsibility and solidarity” (Hansing 2011: 19). In the novel, Yoyi tries to convince el Conde that he and his generation wasted their time believing in the Revolution and that the only solution is to go against revolutionary ideals in order to achieve a better life for himself and his family. Yoyi favours independence from the paternalistic state. He explains why he does not want to hold down a conventional job when he can enjoy all the benefits of being self-employed, albeit, illegally:

Mira, hoy mismo: con este negocio, sin moverme de mi casa, durmiendo el mediodía con aire acondicionado y sin robarle a nadie, estoy ganando más dinero que si trabajara el mes completo como ingeniero, levantándome a las seis de la mañana y fajándome con una guagua (si pasa la cabrona guagua) comiendo la gandofia que dan en los comedores y resistiendo a un jefe empeñado en destacarse a costilla de los demás a ver si agarra un cargo con el que pueda viajar al extranjero (Padura 2005: 44).

This makes clear that el Yoyi’s rejection of conventional employment is directly related to the poor working conditions associated with any given state job. He also points out the *doble moral* of a typical Cuban boss, whose own personal ambitions are prioritized over fair working conditions for those under him. This negative aspect of working within the system in Cuba is also examined in Chapter four, when protagonist Iván describes his experience of working with ambitious and corrupt bosses.

The Cuban government has acknowledged the lack of ideology and level of corruption on the island and especially among Cuban youth. In her article, *Cuba’s Generation Gap*, Michelle Chase notes how the leadership “has long expressed concern over the seeming political apathy and materialism of the island’s youth” and she lists the measures taken by the authorities in an effort to combat disaffected youth such as higher-education initiatives; the development of new fields to pull young people into employment; and the creation of a brigade of social workers made up of socially disadvantaged youths who serve as stopgaps in problem areas (Chase 2008: 10). Chase carried out research on the topic of the new generation of Cubans in La Habana in 2008 and concludes that “many of them were clearly not invested in

the same way as their parents or grandparents. Most were disaffected with the revolution's historic leadership and anxious for better employment and consumption" (Chase 2008: 10). Chase discovered that the main reasons for the lack of revolutionary solidarity of the younger Cuban generation is due to "cynicism over Cuba's heavy dependency on the Soviet Union and the effect of its collapse; the painful legacy of the Angolan conflict, private memories of which bear no resemblance to official discourse; and the crucial importance of south Florida and, to a lesser extent, Spain, as sites of emigration in the 1990s". Chase affirms that "this is above all a generation shaped by the catastrophic Special Period" (Chase 2008: 11). While Chase's article focuses mainly on the ideological apathy of Cuban youth, she fails to note the important role the *doble moral* and the implementation of dual currency leading to a two-tiered economy has had on the disaffection of the younger Cuban generation. José Azel, in his book *Mañana in Cuba*, refers to a survey carried out on the Cuban population by the NGO Freedom House in 2008. He notes how the findings of the survey highlight that Cubans are more concerned about economic worries than political freedom. The survey found that "Cuban youth are the most disillusioned segment of the population, they are also apathetic to political issues and do not see themselves as capable of organizing a movement for change" (Azel 2010: 6). Azel also finds significant that all but one of the thirty respondents under the age of thirty expressed a desire to leave the country (Azel 2010: 6).

Cuban academic, María Isabel Domínguez, has carried out research on generations of Cubans over the past five decades. In her article "Generaciones y mentalidades: ¿Existe una conciencia generacional entre los jóvenes cubanos?", she discusses the differences between past generations and the Cuban youth of today. She commences her analysis with the generation of the 1950s, those who came of age during the triumph of the Revolution. Domínguez notes the high proportion of youth involved in the revolutionary organizations and how this generation "imprimió cambios significativos en las prácticas políticas, la convocatoria a la participación popular, la concepción sobre la toma del poder y la creatividad, energía y optimismo que caracterizó la etapa" (Domínguez 2000: 5). This description of an energetic, politically active and revolutionary youth contrasts directly with the present day Cuban youth, as described in *La neblina del ayer*, and in the research carried out by the aforementioned academics. Domínguez writes that the following generation was

characterised by “una activa participación en la definición del cambio social”, which the author notes was a typical characteristic of the generation of the 1960s internationally. In the Cuban context, the elimination of the upper classes allowed for “una mayor igualdad entre los jóvenes” (Domínguez 2000: 6).

The following generation examined by Domínguez is that of el Conde, the generation of the seventies. El Conde often remembers with nostalgia his high-school days, which took place during this period. Domínguez considers this to be the last generation to be “socializada masivamente en la actividad social” (Domínguez 2000: 7). El Conde’s generation is also characterized by the growth of the Cuban economy due to Cuba becoming a member of the socialist bloc’s trading network, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA or COMECON) after the failed Zafra of 1970. Domínguez lists some of the results of this alliance such as “la concentración urbana, los altos niveles de escolaridad y calificación, movilidad social ascendente a partir de la combinación- educación superior- empleo urbano calificado- mayor nivel de vida, y elevadas expectativas” (Domínguez 2000: 7). El Conde grew up in a period of positive economic change, where he and his friends had the opportunity to receive higher education followed by a promising career, although they lamented not having the freedom to choose for themselves what career they should undertake. They worked towards and looked forward to their futures. Again el Conde’s generation contrasts directly with Yoyi’s, given the lack of interest the latter generation have in higher education, due mainly to the absence of economic compensation for holding a university degree. According to Domínguez, the generation of the eighties were not as fortunate as the previous one. A slowdown in the Cuban economy, coupled with the high percentage of highly educated youths led to the “efecto de tapón”, where the older generations occupied the positions to which the younger generation aspired, yet the low recirculation of the work force hindered job opportunities for the young (Domínguez 2000: 8). This discontent among the eighties generation of Cuban youth reached unexpected levels in the nineties, given the drastic effects of the fall of communism in Europe, which saw an end to the COMECON in 1990 and the total collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Domínguez highlights that, despite the fact that all of Cuban society was affected by the economic crisis, it had a more profound impact on the youth that came of age in the nineties (Domínguez 2000: 11) which she describes as a generation “signada por

el escepticismo juvenil, la distancia hacia las instituciones y el predominio de la pasividad y la apatía política” (Domínguez 2000: 14). Domínguez considers the main obstacles for the youth in this decade to be “una reducción de las oportunidades de inserción educativas y ocupacionales y la débil capacidad de la inserción formal para satisfacer las necesidades de consumo y las expectativas de nivel de vida que aportan” (Domínguez 2000: 12). She indicates that this generation’s need to look for work in order to satisfy individual aspirations led them to “vías alternativas, violatorias de normas morales y jurídicas” (Domínguez 2000: 12). While Domínguez subtly suggests the increase in criminality among those who came of age in the nineties, she does not attribute the causes of this increase to anything other than the lack of job opportunities available during the crisis. She fails to make any mention of the two-tiered economy brought about by the introduction of the dual currency which other academics such as Hansing, Barbassa and Rosenberg Weinreb consider one of the principal reasons which led the young to “vías alternativas, violatorias de normas morales y jurídicas” or in other words, a life of criminality, in the eyes of the Revolution.

### **3.2. Drugs and Mafias in La Habana: The Past Echoes in the Present**

The novels of Padura Fuentes serve to reflect the reality of Cuba, at odds with that of official discourse. In *La neblina del ayer*, Padura focuses on one such area of criminality, which is drug use and drug trafficking. That which the novel presents as a reality in contemporary Cuba, is something denied by government leaders. In a speech given at the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) summit in Chile in January 2013, Raúl Castro affirmed that there were no drugs in Cuba: “... quiero aclarar que en Cuba no hay droga... Solo un poquito de marihuana que se cultiva en una maceta en cualquier balcón de cualquier ciudad de Cuba. Pero droga no hay ni habrá” (Castro 2013).<sup>29</sup> However, in Padura’s *La Habana*, not only do drugs exist but there is also the suggestion of the existence of drug-mafias controlling the trafficking of drugs behind the scenes. During his investigation of Dionisio’s murder, el Conde contacts Juan el Africano, an ex-informer of his from when he was a police detective. El Africano lives in a part of

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<sup>29</sup> Quote taken from Havana Times 29/01/2013 <http://www.havanatimes.org/sp/?p=78908>, see also <http://cafeuerte.com/cuba/noticias-de-cuba/politica/2532-Raúl-castro-en-cuba-no-hay-droga-solo-un-poquito-de-marihuana>

the city which has always been notoriously dangerous and where el Conde believes a friend of Violeta del Rio, Elsa Contreras, now lives. This depressed area is made up of two barrios, Atarés and Jesús María. El Conde hopes to receive information from Violeta's old friend regarding the mystery of her death, which el Conde links to the death of Dionisio Ferrer. On this occasion he needs el Africano's help to locate her, due to the criminal and underground nature of the neighbourhood, el Conde knows that only a local will be given information on the whereabouts of any member of the community. Padura offers the reader an insight into the Dantesque Habana rarely explored by outsiders, one which seems not to have experienced any positive outcome from the Revolution. Prior to his journey to what el Conde describes as the inner circles of the Inferno, he had visited China Town with Yoyi. Shocked by how this part of the city had deteriorated since el Conde had left the police force fourteen years beforehand, Yoyi then warned him that "los dominios del Barrio Chino eran apenas los primeros círculos del infierno ciudadano" (Padura 2005: 228). The following description of this infernal area of the city of La Habana depicts the reality of post Special Period poverty and highlights the fact that ghettos do exist in socialist Cuba and that equality for all Cubans is more myth than truth.

Respirando una atmósfera de peligro latente, avanzó por un laberinto de calles intransitables, como de ciudad posbélica, plagada de furnias y escombros; de edificios en equilibrio precario, heridos por grietas insalvables, apoyados en muletas de madera y carcomidas por el sol y la lluvia; de latones desbordados de desperdicios, como montañas infectas, donde dos hombres, todavía jóvenes, hurgaban en busca de cualquier milagro reciclable; de jaurías de perros deambulantes, invadidos de sarna y sin capacidad estomacal para cagar en la calle; de bulliciosos vendedores de aguacates, escobas, palitos de tendedera, pilas de linternas, inodoros de uso y leña para cocinar; y de aquellas mujeres endurecidas, afiladas como cuchillos, todas ataviadas con las bermudas de licra cada vez más ajustadas, ideales para resaltar las proporciones de sus glúteos y el calibre de un sexo exhibido orgullosamente. Una sensación de estar atravesando los límites del caos le advirtió de la presencia de un mundo al borde de un Apocalipsis difícilmente reversible (Padura 2005: 228-9).

Here, Padura describes a city reminiscent of one which has been the scene of a war battle. In the documentary *Habana: Arte nuevo de hacer ruinas*, Cuban dissident and writer Antonio José Ponte also compares the physical state of the city in ruins to a post war city which has been recently bombed. Ponte believes that the Cuban authorities have purposely left the city in ruins to remind the population that the country is at war with imperialism and that at any time a war can begin again. Ponte argues that the city in ruins also serves to keep the morale of the inhabitants of La

Habana low so that they will not be inclined to fight for the freedom of their city.<sup>30</sup> Padura's apocalyptic description of this area of the city serves to highlight a disenchanting and decaying city; one which offers no positive outcome and where the mistakes made by the Revolution are most explicitly in evidence.

El Conde is guided further through the lower rings of the Inferno by his equivalent to Dante's Virgil, el Africano. The ex-detective is taken to another area some streets away where he and the readers are introduced to another contemporary problem that attracts no official comment – homelessness. El Conde discovers some of the city's homeless residing in the ruins of an old building, and el Africano explains that most of the homeless are from the east of the island and work in the city as bicycle-taxi drivers. Although el Conde is native to the city of La Habana, he was not aware of the level of poverty experienced by so many, and finds this revelation hard to believe. Social realities such as homelessness are not topics discussed on the state media, where only matters of interest to the Revolution are broadcast.

Ahí viven los que no tienen casa. La mayoría son orientales recién llegados. Casi todos se dedican a manejar bicitaxis. Duermen encima de la bicicleta, cagan en cartuchos que después tiran a la basura, y se bañan cuando pueden – explicó el Africano.

¿Y los dejan vivir ahí? – el Conde, ingenuo, trató de poner lógica al asunto.

A cada rato les tumban los techos y los botan, pero a la semana vuelven. Ellos u otros... El problema es no morir de hambre... (Padura 2005: 236).

In order to gain the confidence of the locals, el Conde and el Africano go for drinks in the neighbourhood's illegal bar, while el Conde takes on the persona of an ex-convict who had been incarcerated for stealing and killing cows (a serious offence in Cuba given the scarcity of livestock). In exchange for his story, el Conde learns where to buy drugs in the *barrio* and gets advice on the local prostitutes. "Con la quinta cerveza tenía una idea bastante ajustada de en qué lugares del barrio y a qué horas se podía conseguir marihuana o pastillas, y sabía que incluso era posible comprar crack y coca, y hasta conocía las tarifas de las putas locales" (Padura 2005: 235). El Africano later confesses to el Conde that he was paid up front for a job he failed to carry out and now owes five thousand pesos to "unos blancos que están bien

<sup>30</sup> See also Ida Danciu and Antonio José Ponte "De Berlín a Madrid, hablando de una necrópolis cubana: entrevista a Antonio José Ponte" for more on Ponte's views on La Habana.

pero bien parados y nada más hacen negocios gordos” (Padura 2005: 241). Although el Africano does not want to give el Conde too many details on his criminal activities, despite the fact that the latter is no longer a policeman, it is understood that the job was in relation to a drug trade controlled by a powerful mafia of white men who are not from the area.

Padura makes the topic of the increase in drug use on the island since the Special Period a central concern in *La neblina del ayer*. Like the issue of homelessness, el Conde was unaware of the magnitude of drug consumption in his city claiming: “Los periódicos no hablan de esas cosas” (Padura 2005: 113). Raúl Castro’s announcement in January 2013 is a prime example of the regime’s denial of the drug problem in Cuba. Despite the government’s censorship and control of the media, bloggers, such as Yoani Sánchez<sup>31</sup> and other Cuban journalists who publish in foreign papers, have written articles on the high presence of drugs in La Habana. Unfortunately, only a restricted numbers of Cubans, depending mainly on their professions, have free access to the internet. Otherwise, the majority of Cubans must pay six pesos convertibles for half an hour of very slow internet access in an internet café, a fee which is completely disproportionate to the average monthly wage of fifteen pesos convertibles. Due to the elevated cost of internet usage in Cuba, online journalists are not widely read on the island. Given the economic restrictions on most Cubans, expensive drugs such as cocaine, while available, are mainly sold to tourists or wealthy Cubans. This nevertheless does not translate to Cuba being a drug free country. In all aspects of day-to-day living, Cubans have learned to make the most of what is available to them and have become very inventive in their manner of compensating for the “real” thing which they refer to as “resolver” or “inventar”. In the work of Padura, examples of this include the substitution of minced-banana skin for minced-meat during the Special Period, to the adaptation of cars to allow them to run on cheap oils, as well as proper petrol.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, drug consumption still takes place on the island in the absence of “real” drugs. Yoani Sánchez in her article “¿En Cuba no hay droga?”, written in response to Raúl Castro’s speech in the CELAC

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<sup>31</sup> Yoani Sánchez is based in Cuba where she writes her now internationally acclaimed blog *Generation Y*. She claims to be constantly under surveillance by the Cuban secret services on account of her open criticism of the Castro regime. See <http://lageneraciony.com/>

<sup>32</sup> From *Malabana*.

summit in Chile, tells a personal anecdote to convey how inventive young Cubans can be in order to get high. In her story, Sánchez explains that as a secondary boarding school student, she was prescribed eye drops to cure a cornea infection, yet, despite using the drops daily, her infection was not healing. She then discovered that her locker was being raided by other students who were stealing her eye drops and replacing them with water. The active ingredient in the drops, homatropine, was being consumed by these students as a means of getting high. Other non-standard drugs taken at the time were “campana” flower infusions, known as the poor man’s drug. Later “polvos para inhalar” and “hierba” were introduced to the school. Friends of Sánchez, who took these drugs, claimed “con dosis regulares ya no se siente ni el ardor del hambre en el estómago” (Sánchez 2013). Sánchez attributed the desire to evade reality and the lack of ethical values from teachers to the amount of drug abuse at her school. At the start of the new millenium, according to Sánchez, “aumentaron las ofertas en el mercado de la evasión: melca, marihuana, coca - esta última actualmente a uno cincuenta pesos convertibles el gramo - pastillas EPO; Parkisonil rosado y verde, piedra, Popper y todo tipo de psicotrópicos”. She concludes that drug takers come from all social sectors in Cuba, but that what unites them is their desire to escape: “dejar atrás la asfixia cotidiana” (Sánchez 2013).

Other independent journalists, based in La Habana, have published recent articles on the drug scene there in online newspapers such as *Diario de Cuba* or *Café Fuerte*. Iván García published an article entitled “La Habana, entre drogas y reguetón” five months before Raúl Castro’s CELAC speech. In this article, García links the world of reguetón, a fusion of rap with Cuban beats, which originated in the peripheral *barrio* of Alamar at the start of the new millennium, to drug consumption. Reguetón has become the most popular music listened to in La Habana and can typically be heard booming from private houses, cars and public places. Many Cuban reguetón groups have become famous internationally and take their music on international tours. From the sale of CDs and concert tickets, with prices ranging from five to twenty pesos convertibles, reguetón musicians have become a new elite in Cuba and, according to García, are the best customers for drug dealers selling up-market drugs such as cocaine. Reguetón is the music of the new generation of Cubans and, according to the article, drug taking is typical at reguetón concerts. Parkisonil and other “legal” drugs sold at pharmacies are most common among

Cubans who do not have much access to hard currency. García prices Parkisonil at twenty-five Cuban pesos, which is equivalent to one peso convertible, and claims that “no es raro que un adolescente habanero de quince años alguna vez haya probado sicotrópicos o fumado un porro de marihuana criolla, la más barata” (García 2012). We find elements of the behaviour described by García echoed in *La neblina del ayer*, when el Conde asks Yoyi on one occasion if he has ever tried drugs. Yoyi admits to taking “alguna pastilla con ron, algún cigarrito de marihuana en una fiesta” (Padura 2005: 113). When el Conde tells him that he has never tried any drugs in his life, Yoyi’s response is to call el Conde and his generation “marcianos” (Padura 2005: 113). Through Yoyi, Padura shows the reality of everyday life for part of the younger generation. Yoyi speaks of taking psychoactive drugs along with rum as if it were a perfectly normal activity for a young person like him. In fact, he considers el Conde’s generation unnatural for not having done the same. It is plausible that el Conde’s generation grew up in a more positive Cuba and did not feel the same need to evade reality as the present generation does. However, it could also be argued that there was tighter control over the population before the Special Period. García, like Sánchez, also concludes that taking drugs is young Cubans’ “manera de escapar” from daily problems. Manuel Guerra Pérez is another independent journalist residing in La Habana who has had his report on Cuba’s drug problem published in an online foreign paper, in response to Raúl Castro’s claims that Cuba was a drug free zone.<sup>33</sup> Guerra Pérez concludes his article by asking Raúl Castro where the drugs are coming from, which are “manteniendo a nuestros jóvenes en un círculo vicioso sin salida”, if the drug traffickers had been eradicated as Raúl Castro had maintained in the Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular in December 2012 (Guerra Pérez 2013).

In Mark Galeotti’s article, “Forward to the Past: Organized Crime and Cuba’s History, Present and Future”, the author also identifies an increase in drug consumption in Cuba since the Special Period, despite the authorities’ efforts to stamp out drug trafficking. These measures included extending the death penalty to cover drug trafficking in 1999. Nevertheless, the threat of execution was not enough

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<sup>33</sup> Guerra Pérez lists the most common drugs consumed in La Habana as marihuana, cocaine and crack. He points out that crack is most frequently taken in Central and Old Habana where prostitution is more prevalent and that it is most commonly taken in peripheral areas of the city “amenzadas por el auge de la delincuencia juvenil”.

to deter drug traffickers and in 2003 further measures had to be implemented. These included Operation Hatchet III, an interdiction programme, and Operation Popular Shield, an investigative programme “drawing on the resources of the DNA (Dirección Nacional Anti-Droga), police, military, TGF (Tropas Guarda Fronteras), and customs” (Galeotti 2006: 50). While these programmes led to the seizure of several tons of narcotics and numerous arrests, according to Galeotti “the overwhelming majority of these were low-level users and dealers, primarily petty black-market dealers who offer tourists everything from cigars to drugs” (Galeotti 2006: 51). Galeotti therefore assumes that there are organized crime groups in operation in Cuba and that the domestic market for drugs “is growing steadily” (Galeotti 2006: 51). Galeotti attributes this increase in the demand for drugs to the “disenchantment among young Cubans, a generation born since 1959, for whom leftist ideals have diminishing appeal” (Galeotti 2006: 51). He also states that the informal and underground economy provoked by economic pressures since the Special Period have helped to foster a culture of illegality and have built up networks of mutual protection and assistance from which organized crime grows (Galeotti 2006: 51). Seven years after Galeotti’s article was published, Cuban journalist Iván García also refers to organized crime in La Habana involved in drug dealing and to the authorities’ failure to dismantle “los incipientes *carteles* habaneros de tráfico de drogas” (García 2013). García also highlights in the same article, *Drogas en Cuba: Existen*, the existence of rehabilitation centres for drug addicts in La Habana, militating further against the claims of Raúl Castro’s “no hay drogas en Cuba” statement.

As stated at the beginning of this Chapter, *La neblina del ayer* is not the only text in which Padura addresses the problems of the younger generation of Cubans. Indeed, the author had already addressed the issue of drug consumption among La Habana’s youth in his short story “Mirando el sol”, found in the collection *La puerta de Alcalá y otras cacerías* (2000). The story offers a grim description of the lives of a group of young males in the city of La Habana at the turn of the millennium. Their lives consist of alcohol and drug consumption, while they entertain themselves either going to dog fights, watching pornography or taking it in turns to have sex with their female friends. In keeping with the typical drug use described by García, the drugs they take are marijuana and whatever prescription drugs they can steal. One of the

protagonists, Richard el Cao, has easy access to prescription drugs, as his mother holds a managerial position in a hospital, giving him the opportunity to steal prescriptions from her. He later forges her signature on them in order to fill the prescriptions at a pharmacy. His friend Alexis obtains drugs by stealing pills from his grandmother, without considering the consequences of leaving his ailing grandmother without her medication. When asked what will happen if his grandmother should need her medicine, Alexis replies “que se muera” (Padura 2000: 139). Like Yoyi, the group also take Parkisonil along with rum, which the narrator describes as “un cohete cuando cae arriba del alcohol” (Padura 2000: 136). Apart from stealing from family members, they also target tourists. In the story, Richard el Cao and another member of the group, nicknamed Yovanoti, carry out an attack on a German tourist in order to steal his money. They laugh about the physical harm they cause to the tourist, on recounting the attack to the rest of the group and the anger they both felt on discovering that the German only had ten dollars in his wallet: “El Yovanoti me tuvo que aguantar, porque lo que me dieron ganas fue de darle dos patadas más. ¿Tú sabes lo que es venir de Alemania y andar con diez dólares arriba? Pero, bueno, con eso compramos estos dos litros” (Padura 2000: 142).

I discussed earlier the corruption of parents of this younger generation as a contributing factor to their lack of morals, as argued by Hansing. In this story, Padura offers an example of said corruption. Alexis acquires cash by selling bottles of cooking oil found in the boot of his father’s car. There had been twenty bottles of this high quality cooking oil in the car, which strongly suggests that Alexis’ father had somehow stolen the oil with the intention of selling it on. This is common practice in most work places in Cuba, but especially where food and drink are present. Workers appropriate ingredients in order to sell them later on the black market as a means of subsidising their low wages.<sup>34</sup> The reader’s suspicions about Alexis’ father are not unfounded given that on the first page of the story an account

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<sup>34</sup> See Mónica Escudero’s article “Why aren’t your nails polished? The paradoxes of Women and Socialism in Cuba” (146) for more on private appropriation of state resources and *la doble moral*. See also Damian Fernández “The Greatest Challenge: Civic values in Post Transition Cuba” for more on the increase in criminality in Cuba and *la doble moral*.

is given of his father's dismissal from the Ministry where he works.<sup>35</sup> It is not specified why he was dismissed, although it is implied that it was on the grounds of corruption. Nevertheless, his father is reinstated to his position and does not even lose his bonus of owning a car "porque él tiene buenos amigos" (Padura 2000: 133). That Alexis shows no sense of guilt for stealing from his own family is easier to understand when his father's corruption is taken into account. As suggested earlier by Hansing, Alexis has been brought up to consider stealing a natural activity. It is worth noting that Alexis and his group of friends are white Cubans and come from educated backgrounds. Alexis', and the narrator's father, work in a Ministry and Richard el Coa's mother holds a high ranking position in a hospital. Despite this, the group of friends show no interest in education or other professional ambitions and are lost in a corrupt and degenerate world of narcotics, alcohol, gambling, sex and violence. The author thereby makes clear that disaffection and criminality are widespread among Cuban youth and are not limited to the poorer and less privileged communities of La Habana.

Where in previous narratives Padura has presented the desire to leave Cuba as motivated by political disenchantment, here, although the topic of emigration is also central to the story, the main reason most of the group want to travel is for economic gain. There is no mention of political motives behind their desire to leave the island, something which coincides with the research carried out by Chase and Azel, and discussed above. However, not all of the characters in the story wish to leave Cuba. Nonetheless, this does not imply any commitment to the Revolution. For instance, although the narrator does not wish to leave Cuba, he states this is because he would have to work hard in the United States. His friend Richard el Cao agrees and adds that "con alcolifan (homemade alcohol) y pastillas él vive bien en donde quiera" (Padura 2000: 138). Differently to his friends, Yovanoti says he will change his lifestyle if he reaches the United States: "Él dice que si llega allá deja el alcohol y las pastillas y los pitos de mariguana y hasta el cigarro, para ganar mucho dinero" (Padura 2000: 139). Kakin wants to emigrate because he dreams of owning a car with five gears. Annia and her family pretended to be Jehovah's Witnesses in order to get a visa for the United States and Vanessa is working on finding a *yuma* (Cuban

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<sup>35</sup> Padura does not specify at which Ministry Alex's father works. This non-specification of the Ministry could be read as a means to generalize corruption in all sectors of the Cuban government.

slang for tourist) that will give her dollars and take her to live in Paris. The story ends tragically with the murder of two black youths at the hands of Alexis who commits the murders because they had refused to pay him the one hundred pesos bet he had won at an illegal dog fight. A policeman who arrived on the scene is also shot by the alcohol and drug crazed Alexis, leading the friends to attempt an escape from the island on a stolen speed-boat. Ironically, only the narrator and el Cao survive the escape and manage to reach the United States alive, despite their desire to remain in Cuba.

In *Malabana* (2001), a film written by Padura and directed by Guido Giansoldati, a vision of the underworld of La Habana, where drugs and violence are the order of the day, is also presented. The opening scenes include the murder of a tourist by two low ranking criminals who happen upon the tourist in a drunken state on their way home from the local bar. They steal his rucksack and find two bags of cocaine inside with a street value of two-hundred thousand dollars. The tourist had smuggled the drugs in through customs and had planned to sell them to an important drug dealer in La Habana. The light hearted and often comical film is centred on the aforementioned dealer's search for the cocaine. Padura includes a character nicknamed el Yuma (tourist) in the film, who, like Yoyi el Palomo, insists on mixing English words and phrases into his sentences. El Yuma is also a drug-dealer who plans on making a profit from the smuggled narcotics. Apart from his illegal activities, his evident love for North-American culture (el Yuma has a prominent USA tattoo on his arm) makes him a clear non-believer in the Revolution. The higher-ranking dealer is a more elderly white Cuban, who lives in a mansion in a nice area of the city. He clearly also practices *la doble moral*, discussed earlier, and does not want to be seen to associate with el Yuma. *Malabana*, while a work of fiction, serves as a reflection of Cuban reality and yet another example of corruption and the existence of drug-trafficking in the city, which again contradicts the official discourse of the Revolution.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> In an interview with the author in 2009, Padura suggested I include *Malabana* in my research due to its realistic representation of modern day La Habana.

### 3.3. Mapping Changes in La Habana: The Labyrinth Between the Imagined Pre-revolutionary City and its Post-Special Period Reality

Mario Conde is obsessed with pre-revolutionary Cuba and in particular with the 1950s, the decade he was born. He holds no personal memories of this period, yet feels a form of nostalgia for a time long gone, perhaps an inherited nostalgia from the previous generation, who lived through this period and remember it as one of abundance. In the following quote, he tries to explain this obsession to Yoyi: “Las historias y los personajes de los años 50 son mi Bel Air. Es como una fascinación por vivir esa época tan extraña con los recuerdos de otras gentes” (Padura 2005: 89). He imagines La Habana in the fifties as a magical place of music and lights. The title of the novel, *La neblina del ayer*, is taken from the words of a bolero written by Argentine brothers Virgilio and Homero Esposito in 1946 called *Vete de mí*. The song has been interpreted by many artists, but one of the most popular versions was made famous by Cuban artist Bola de Nieve in the 1950s. The mist of yesterday is an appropriate title for a novel that links Cuba’s prerevolutionary past to its post-Special Period present. El Conde’s fascination with the period leads to his obsession with Violeta del Río. El Conde first learns of Violeta through a cut out from a newspaper, dated 1960, found inside a book he bought from the Ferrer’s library, announcing the singer’s early retirement from music. El Conde is taken by her beauty and his sixth sense convinces him that he needs to learn more about her. This need to discover Violeta’s story is deepened when Dionisio is found dead in his library from a knife wound to the neck and el Conde and Yoyi are considered prime suspects for his murder. El Conde believes that Violeta is connected in some way to Dionisio’s murder and that, through her past, the present mystery will be solved.

As el Conde delves deeper into Violeta’s history, images of La Habana in the 1950s are unveiled. These images, while nostalgic, also include the uglier realities of the time and in particular the presence of the North American mob and its influence on the city. Padura’s account of 1950s Habana incorporates notorious mafia names such as Meyer Lansky, Joe Stassi and Lucky Luciano. The author shows how these mobsters became involved with local businessmen to form profitable alliances. Padura also relates Batista’s involvement with the mafia and gives an insight into the repression of his dictatorship and his use of the police force as his personal army. In

discovering who Dionisio's murderer is, El Conde uncovers a family story that dates back to the mob era. The house siblings Dioniso and Amalia Ferrer inhabit once belonged to Alcides Montes de Oca, who increased the fortune he had made during World War II by marrying an heiress to a sugar baron. During his marriage, Montes de Oca had two illegitimate children with his secretary Nemesia. He paid off his driver to claim them as his children and to give them his surname, Ferrer. Nemesia and her two children remained alone in the mansion in Vedado after Montes de Oca fled Cuba for Miami, with his legitimate children, in 1960, once he realized that the Revolution he had supported was socialist and the woman he loved, Violeta del Río, had died. Nemesia never told her son Dionisio who his true father was, but confided the truth to Amalia. Alcides and Nemesia continued their love affair until the former met and fell in love with Violeta del Río. When Amalia realized that Montes de Oca planned to marry Violeta, she knew that she would never be recognized as an heir to the Montes de Oca fortune and name. This realization led her to commit the murder of Violeta by placing cyanide in the singer's cough medicine and thereby creating the scene of a suicide. The story of Nemesia and Alcides is told through letters, written by the former to the latter, that were never posted. Instead, these letters were hidden in the library and left untouched until el Conde and Yoyi start to divide the library into sellable and non sellable books forty-three years later. When Dionisio came upon the letters, he confronted his sister, thus provoking the fratricide. Meanwhile, Nemesia, who took to her bed with depression in 1960, after discovering her daughter's crime and the subsequent death of Montes de Oca in a car crash in Florida some months after Violeta's murder, was neglected by her daughter and would have also died at her hands, if Amalia had not been discovered as the murderer of her brother. This story serves as a pretext to permit the author, through el Conde to explore the immediate pre-revolutionary years.

What is revealed is a story of corruption, prostitution and gangsterism. Flor de Loto was the stage name of Elsa Contreras in the fifties. She worked as a stripper/dancer/prostitute in a strip club in La Habana, until she met Alcides Montes de Oca and his associates, Meyer Lansky and Joe Stassi, in 1955. Montes de Oca asked Flor de Loto to organize a ring of high-class prostitutes for wealthy American tourists. Her job entailed finding and educating beautiful young Cuban girls to serve as escorts to American VIPs, to ensure they enjoyed their stay in La Habana. The

agency was to serve as publicity for the island to promote investment from the United States (Padura 2005: 290). Through her search for escorts, Flor de Loto met Violeta del Río, who was singing in a bar in Cienfuegos. Flor de Loto took Violeta under her wing and they soon became close friends. Through Flor de Loto, Alcides Montes de Oca met and fell desperately in love with Violeta and helped launch her singing career in La Habana. It is Flor de Loto who unveils most of the mystery of Violeta's past to el Conde. She also serves as a connecting character, joining the two periods of pre-revolutionary and post-Special Period Cuba together. She describes her luxurious lifestyle of the 1950s, which is contrasted with her present precarious circumstances. She now lives in a tiny room full of "objetos opacos y arruinados" (Padura 2005: 279). situated in perhaps the most dangerous *barrio* of La Habana. She proudly shows el Conde a photo of herself naked, taken in her youth. The deterioration of what was once a beautiful woman to the "adefesio" Mario Conde sees before him could be taken as a metaphor for the deterioration of the city, once vibrant and new but that has been in decline since the Revolution of 1959 (Padura 2005: 279-80). Antoni Kapcia describes the evolution of the city from 1940 on in his book, *Havana The Making of Cuban Culture*. The economic growth of the city brought an increase in its population, leading to a construction boom which saw "the development of housing and industry to the south-east and west and saw the new airport develop the areas around Rancho Boyeros and Santiago de las Vegas" (Kapcia 2005: 89). New shopping areas emerged such as prestigious department stores, new supermarkets and shopping malls. Kapcia notes that this changed "the familiar pattern of street vending and small-scale shop-front selling, except for the bodegas in working-class areas" (Kapcia 2005: 89). La Habana, once a growing and prosperous city where, as one of Padura's characters claimed, "se podía tomar un café con leche en cualquier esquina" (Padura 2005: 117), bears no resemblance to the deteriorated city it has become, just as the photo of the beautiful young woman bears no resemblance to the withered old eyesore el Conde beholds.

Fulgencio Batista re-claimed power in Cuba, in April 1952, by way of a military coup. A candidate for the upcoming elections, Batista did not wait to risk his chance of not being legally elected. He had first come to power as head of the Cuban Army, in 1934 after the Revolution of 1933, which ended Machado's dictatorship, and ruled the country through various puppet presidents until 1940, when he was

elected president. He remained in power until 1944, when he left Cuba to live in the United States. Remembered for his positive social reforms, including education, land and labour reforms, historian Hugh Thomas notes that despite alienating “most of the respectable representatives of Cuban public life and all the old middle-class and professional groups, he had popular support, he was admired and even loved by the masses” (Thomas 2010: 441). Given his institution of the progressive 1940 constitution, Cubans hoped Batista would work positively to end corruption within government and strengthen the economy after his *golpe*, in 1952. Thomas points out that “it immediately became clear even to old admirers of Batista that in the years of exile the ex-sergeant had changed. He was far lazier than he had been in the 1940s” (Thomas 2010: 505). Thomas states that Batista spent his days eating sumptuously, playing canasta with his military friends and watching horror films. “He was also fascinated by the lives of his political opponents or ordinary people in Cuban society and spent hours listening to their tapped telephone conversations” (Thomas 2010: 505). In his book, *The Havana Mob*, T. J. English offers a detailed account of Batista’s relationship with the mob and in particular Meyer Lansky. According to English, Batista’s alliance with the mafia began in 1933, when Lansky presented Batista with a suitcase containing half a million dollars as a down-payment for their future business together. Eye witness to the transaction and associate of Lansky’s, Joe Stacher claimed that “Batista was given a guarantee of between three and five million dollars a year in exchange for a monopoly on the casinos at the Hotel Nacional and everywhere else on the island where we thought tourists would come. On top of that he was promised a cut of our profits” (English 2008: 38).

In his reconstruction of 1950s Cuba, Padura includes Lansky as an associate of Montes de Oca, yet the latter did not have any dealings with Batista. Montes de Oca hated Batista, but at the same time needed him to remain in power to protect his business interests. The author also makes reference to Lansky’s relationship with Batista and their plan to create a “Costa de Oro entre el Mariel y Varadero ... beneficiada con las mejores playas del mundo y especialmente dotada para la construcción de hoteles, casinos, urbanizaciones de lujo, marinas, restaurantes y otros atractivos innombrables” (Padura 2005: 187). Meyer Lansky is described in the novel as “el socio de Lucky Luciano, que se había hecho dueño del juego y del negocio de la putas en La Habana y había metido mucho dinero en la construcción

de hoteles nuevos con el consentimiento de Batista, que por supuesto sacaba sus buenas tajadas de aquellas inversiones” (Padura 2005: 163). It transpires at the end of the novel, through Amelia’s confession to her brother’s and Violeta’s murders, that Lansky and Montes de Oca were planning the assassination of Batista in order to prevent the Revolution gaining power. In order to continue controlling the tourism sector, they needed Batista alive, yet they knew, due to his “torpeza política estaba a punto de echarlo todo por la borda, pues cada día se veía más claro que estaba condenado a perder la guerra porque casi nadie quería pelear por él” (Padura 2005: 371). According to the novel, Batista lost the war because his followers were disenchanted by his failures. This description of Batista, as a once powerful leader who was loved by the masses but ultimately failed to realize his electoral promises, could be interpreted as an invitation to the reader to compare Batista to present day Cuba’s revolutionary leaders. The current tourism sector has been developed thanks to foreign investment, most notably from Spanish hoteliers, who, like the mob in the 1950s, have created spaces of luxury along the Cuban coastlines, purely for the use and enjoyment of foreign tourists. The novel suggests that, like Batista, the Regime has also lost support, in part because of its change in economic policies, which serve the few rather than the majority. The suggestion of Cuba losing its sovereignty to foreign investment and corruption in the 1950s could also be paralleled to the present day situation in Cuba. Foreign investment in Cuba, particularly in hotels and holiday complexes, has been crucial for the development of the tourism sector on the island. Without foreign investment, Cuba would not have been able to regenerate its tourism services, which are vital to its economy, and continue to provide the country with the hard currency it desperately needed during the Special Period.

The presence of the mafia is noted in the novel, yet it does not hold an important role in the development of the story-line. Corruption, violence, prostitution and drugs are the backdrop to the story of La Habana in the 1950s, just as they exist in the present day narrative of 2003. Silvano Quintero was a journalist and acquaintance of Violeta del Río in the fifties and for that reason el Conde tracks him down. He tells el Conde of his former obsession with the singer and how this obsession nearly cost him his life. Quintano was shot and beaten for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Slave to his obsession with the singer, he followed her to her house, but was attacked when he got too close (Padura 2005: 165). This

story parallels el Conde's present day story. His curiosity to find out more about Violeta leads him to search for more information on her in a hostile environment where outsiders are treated with suspicion. El Conde, like Quintano, is badly beaten and left unconscious on a piece of waste-ground (Padura 2005: 271). Padura makes the connection between the mafia of both periods blatantly clear in the novel: "Conde recordó que casi cincuenta años atrás otra mafia había castigado alevosamente la curiosidad de un periodista metido donde no debía estar" (Padura 2005: 346). Similarly, through Flor de Loto's story, we learn of the networks of prostitution that were in place in La Habana prior to the Revolution. Correspondingly, el Conde experiences firsthand the business of prostitution in the city when el Africano insists on paying for prostitutes for both of them. El Conde initially hesitates, although he admits his own curiosity as he has never before had "sexo pagado" (Padura 2005: 242). On seeing el Conde vacillate, el Africano tries to convince him with the pretext that, similar to socializing in the *barrio*, in order to be trusted and gain information, he should also "templar unas putas" like everyone else and tells him: "Si de verdad quieres meterte en el ambiente y que nadie sospeche, tienes que seguir palante, hasta el fondo" (Padura 2005: 242). When this argument does not fully convince el Conde, el Africano manages to persuade the former by challenging his sexuality: "Te veo un poco delicadito. No te fumas un taladro y tampoco te jamas una jeva ... ¿Tú no serás maricón, eh, chico? (Padura 2005: 242). Again Padura demonstrates, through his characters, the widespread acceptance of drugs and prostitution in the city, as well as the *machismo* inherent to Cuban culture, which has already been discussed in Chapter 1.2. This is visible in the above example through el Africano's suggestion that a man who does not take drugs and visit prostitutes must be queer, thereby insinuating that he considers it normal behaviour for any regular heterosexual male on the island. In a conversation with Manuel Palacios, el Conde's former partner on the police force, Palacios explains that police control in the most affected areas is high, yet despite so many arrests carried out in an effort to clean up these areas, the problems always return. Palacios believes that the people living in these *barrios* do not know how to live differently. This argument does not sit well with el Conde, who knows that a powerful mafia is behind the criminality, a mafia which controls from behind the scenes, far from the *barrios* (Padura 2005: 353). El Conde is unable to carry through with the paid for sexual experience, yet it serves to show him yet again the existence of a phenomenon

in his city which until now had been foreign to him and which he knows has developed out of a necessity to survive financially for the women, who see no alternative to prostitution, and out of the need of their clients, who use their services as they would use drugs, in an effort to briefly escape reality: “Entonces había comprendido que toda su liberalidad moral era apenas un juego infantil en aquel mundo alucinante, donde el sexo adquiría otros valores y usos, y se convertía en un medio de vida, una vía de desfogue de las miserias y tensiones” (Padura 2005: 244).

The fact that el Conde had not experienced until now such degradation in his city proves again the inequality in the city in terms of standards of living. While the Revolution was successful in eradicating most of the upper-middle and higher classes in the 1960s, standards of living still varied in the city depending on location.<sup>37</sup> El Conde was brought up and lives in a pleasant, yet humble neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city where he enjoys: “el olor de la tierra recién regada, el perfume matinal de las flores, el cielo azul sin la mácula de una nube y el canto de un sinsonte desde el follaje de un aguacate cargado de frutas” (Padura 2005: 254). In this image, Padura pays homage to the beauty of Cuban nature, perhaps as a means of defending his city’s qualities, despite the unattractive realities the author has been compelled to describe in his work in order to offer a true account of his city. El Conde considers himself lucky to live in this area and to know that “a pesar de las carencias y frustraciones sufridas por años, ni él ni sus amores más cercanos se habían visto obligados a atravesar las fronteras últimas del envilecimiento para sobrevivir” (Padura 2005: 254). The enticing image of el Conde’s barrio is in direct contrast with that of el Africano, which leaves el Conde feeling dirty and contaminated:

Esa noche, mientras se restregaba bajo la ducha, procurando arrancarse de la piel la suciedad, la infamia y la sordidez entre las que había gastado uno de los días más extraños de su vida, Mario Conde volvió a preguntarse cómo era posible que en el corazón de La Habana existiera aquel universo pervertido donde vivían personas nacidas en su mismo tiempo y en su misma ciudad, pero que a la vez le podían resultar tan desconocidas, casi irreales en su acelerada degradación (Padura 2005: 238).

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<sup>37</sup> In Chapter one (1.2.) I discuss the physical breakdown of the city’s neighbourhoods and how these still translate as a separation of the classes, the new upper class being the Revolution’s elite, many of whom took over the mansions which once belonged to the upper class.

Here, Padura again raises the theme of inequality in the city, where people of his own generation seem alien to him. On account of their place of birth or because they migrated from outside La Habana, they have been subjected to the “envilicimiento” in order to survive.

Having established that the novel clearly points out that the corruption which existed prior to the Revolution is again visible in present day Cuba, and given that the mafia of the fifties was supported by the president, Batista, the question of the level of corruption within the present government, and in particular, the Castro brothers, is also suggested. In the book *Corruption in Cuba: Castro and Beyond*, the authors outline the history of corruption on the island from the colonial period to the present and establish that prior to the Revolution: “Cuba was burdened with a deeply ingrained tradition of corruption forged over four centuries of colonial rule” (Diaz-Briquets and Pérez López 2006: 85). However, the characteristics of the socialist model in particular, “make them a fertile ground for petty corruption and for the political elite to enjoy privileges few other have as uncontested rulers of the state” (Diaz-Briquets and Pérez López 2006: 121), rendering the model inadequate for the elimination of corruption in a country where it is so deeply embedded. Diaz-Briquets and co-author Pérez-López list the reasons for the high level of corruption in a socialist country such as Cuba as being:

The overwhelming monopoly power exercised by the state over the supply of goods and services, the free hand that government officials enjoy in making resource allocation decisions, and the very low degree of accountability of government officials for their actions<sup>38</sup>, mediated by a controlled press and a ban on independent civil society organizations (Diaz-Briquets and Pérez López 2006: 121).

Although the government controlled Cuban press rarely comment on state corruption, the authors of *Corruption in Cuba* note that during the rectification period in the mid eighties, Castro publicly criticized corrupt government officials who were enriching themselves and the press published cases exposing petty corruption “to lend support to Castro’s rhetoric and actions” (Diaz-Briquets and Pérez López 2006: 142). In 1989, the famous Ochoa trial brought to light the high level of corruption of certain government officials. According to Galeotti, “Major General Arnaldo Ochoa was tried and executed for his alleged involvement in

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<sup>38</sup> Padura gives an example of this corruption in *El hombre que amaba a los perros* which I discuss in Chapter four (4.1.).

trafficking and accepting bribes from Colombian cartel members” (Nilsen 2007: 381), a crime of which Castro himself has also been accused. Silvia Nilsen and Maria Werlau also discuss Castro’s involvement with Colombian and Mexican drug cartels in the 1980s. Nilsen writes in her article “Cuba and Illegal Operations” that Castro had to personally know and approve of drugs and arms transactions carried out in the 1980s, since he was the one to introduce the notorious Colombian drug producer, Pablo Escobar to Manuel Noriega, former president of Panama, who have both been convicted in the U.S. of their crimes (Nilsen 2007: 381). Werlau claims in her article “Fidel Castro, Inc.: A Global Conglomerate” that “the involvement of high-ranking Cuban government officials in international drug-trafficking under the orders or with the knowledge and acquiescence of the Castro brothers has been long alleged” (Werlau 2005: 386). Werlau states that “Castro’s efforts to diffuse mounting evidence of his involvement in drug trafficking is said to be behind ‘the Ochoa affair’ claiming that the high-ranking government officials were used “as scapegoats at a time when the U.S. had irrefutable evidence of Cuba’s role in the drug trade” (Werlau 2005: 388). Galeotti does not support Werlau’s claim, stating that “the DEA noted no evidence of complicity by the government itself” (Galeotti 2006: 51), yet he does agree that Cuban waters were used for boat-to-boat transfers by Colombian cartels during this period. Both Werlau and Nilsen base their accusations on the testimonies of defectors. Diaz-Briquets and Pérez-López also refer to these testimonies as a way in which “the wall of secrecy concerning corrupt acts in Cuba has been pierced”. They note that the truthfulness of these defector’s testimonies has been ascertained “as they tend to agree with each other” (Diaz-Briquets, Pérez López 2006: 125). They add that “the findings of judicial proceedings in the United States and other countries, and the reports of allegedly illicit international financial operations, add credibility to defectors’ allegations” (Diaz-Briquets, Pérez López 2006: 125). Braham also refers to the “Ochoa affair”, claiming it “provided a final disillusionment for many in Padura’s generation” (Braham 2004: 55). She also comments on the trial being widely considered a sham, but not on account of the officials being used as scapegoats for drug crimes, as Werlau believes, but because it was “intended to eliminate some independent-minded officers amid political uncertainties provoked by the fall of the Berlin Wall” (Braham 2004: 55). The idea that it is widely believed that they were executed as political scapegoats rather than

criminals implies that their corruption would have been overlooked had they not been supportive of *glasnost* and *perestroika*.

El Conde, in his role as flaneur, walks the city of La Habana in *La neblina del ayer* while taking in the changes which the city has undergone since the Special Period, as expressed in the following quote:

La nueva vida surgida en la ciudad, luego del letargo profundo en que la sumiera los años más oscuros de la Crisis, tenía un ritmo y una densidad que el ex policía no lograba atrapar. Raperos y rastafaris, prostitutas y drogadictos, nuevos ricos y nuevos pobres rediseñaban una geografía urbana, estratificada según los dólares poseídos y que empezaba a parecerse a la normalidad, aunque siempre lo hacía preguntarse cuál era la vida real, si la que él conoció en su juventud, o la que ahora constataba, en su tiempo de luto y madurez (Padura 2005: 222).

Padura again highlights the wide gulf between those who are in possession of hard currency and those who are not. He realizes that prostitution and drugs are not merely confined to the most dangerous areas of the city, but have become an integral element of the city. On his mission to solve a mystery from the past, el Conde discovers parts of his city which were previously unknown to him, such as the shanty towns, or places that he had once known but which now seem unfamiliar to him. These changes make el Conde feel like an outsider in his own city. In an effort to evoke past memories, which in reality never belonged to him, el Conde tries to summon up the image of La Habana in the 1950s, “un planeta lejano, conocido de oídas, escuchado en discos olvidados, descubierta en infinitas lecturas, y que en sus evocaciones siempre se le aparecía poblado de unas luces, clubes, cabarets, melodías y personajes” (Padura 2005: 223).

During his investigations into Violeta del Río's life and death, el Conde meets up with different characters who were acquainted with Violeta in the fifties. These accounts of La Habana during that period support el Conde's romantic ideas of his city prior to the Revolution. El Conde, accompanied by Yoyi, first meets musicologist Rafael Giró, in an effort to buy Violeta's only recorded single, which included the boleros *Vete de mí* on side A and *Me recordarás* on side B. These song titles are also the titles chosen by Padura for part one and part two, respectively, of the novel. Giró speaks of the musical glory days of La Habana and lists all the artists who regularly played in the city (Padura 2005: 92). Yoyi el Palomo is amazed at

Giró's description of a lively city, full of clubs and restaurants, so different to the city in which he has grown up.

Imagínese que en esa época, en La Habana, había más de sesenta clubes y cabarets con dos y hasta tres espectáculos por noche. Sin contar los restaurantes y los bares donde había tríos, pianistas y hasta conjunticos...

Increíble - dijo el Palomo, sinceramente asombrado.

¿Se imaginan cuántos artistas tenía que haber para mantener ese ritmo? La Habana era una locura: yo creo que era la ciudad con más vida de todo el mundo. ¡Qué carajo París ni Nueva York! Demasiado frío... ¡Vida nocturna la de aquí! Verdad que había putas, había drogas y había mafia, pero la gente se divertía y la noche empezaba a la seis de la tarde y no se acababa nunca (Padura 2005: 91).

Giró admits that prostitution, drugs and the mafia were also present at that time, yet assures them that these issues did not stop people from having fun. This claim subtly raises the invitation to compare the atmosphere of La Habana in the 1950s and the city some sixty years later where prostitution, drugs and the mafia are still present, but without the happy ambience described by Giró. El Conde's description of a greatly deteriorated modern day Habana contrasts directly with the nostalgic evocation offered by the ageing musicologist. Instead of people enjoying themselves to the rhythm of the Cuban nights, el Conde sees a frightening city, inhabited by people without hopes or dreams:

La sensación de degradación que flotaba en el aire alarmó al ex policía, que percibió en la piel un temblor demasiado parecido al miedo: aquel ambiente era definitivamente explosivo, ajeno a la ciudad amable donde él había vivido por tantos años. Demasiadas gentes sin nada que hacer o perder. Demasiadas gentes sin sueños ni esperanzas. Demasiado fuego bajo una olla tapada que más tarde o más temprano reventaría por las atmósferas de presión acumuladas (Padura 2005: 152).

Not only does el Conde's description clash with that of Rafael Giró, it also contrasts with his own memories of the city. The current atmosphere of a city inhabited by aimless and lost citizens is that of post-Special Period Cuba. The night-life of the fifties was not experienced by el Conde, but neither was the feeling of living in a hopeless, disenchanting city. Nevertheless, el Conde continues walking in the city in an effort to find some connection to its lavish past. In place of the imaginary musical world of the fifties, el Conde sees bars and cabarets only open to those who have dollars to pay the entrance fee. He sees the ruins of landmark clubs from the past and cabarets, such as El Capri or El Parisien, which are now only accessed by tourists or those who can pay in dollars. El Conde realizes that he lives in a city which no

longer belongs to him, or his memory of the past. The city he grew up in and the city he imagines existed before the Revolution are no longer:

El Conde sintió, por primera vez en sus casi cuarenta y ocho años de vida, que trashumaba por una ciudad desconocida, que no le pertenecía y lo empujaba, excluyéndolo... Violeta del Río y su mundo de luces y sombras ya no vivían en aquella dirección, se habían ido sin dejar otra referencia que los restos físicos de escenarios cerrados, quemados o inaccesibles, incluso para la memoria de alguien empecinado en oponerse al último olvido (Padura 2005: 224).

As el Conde continues his walk, he finds himself even more lost in the midst of a city unknown to him. He notices a prostitute with an elderly foreign tourist, a group of shouting youths, “su júbilo quizás narcótico”, he sees a shiny Lada speed by with music blaring from its windows, “miró a su alrededor y tuvo la nerviosa certeza de hallarse extraviado, sin la menor idea de qué rumbo debía tomar para salir del laberinto en que se había convertido su ciudad” (Padura 2005: 225). Padura’s protagonist denies any negative aspect to the pre-revolutionary city and is adamant in his romanticisation of that era, despite the undeniable inequalities, poverty, criminality and corruption that also characterized this same period of Cuban history.

In the *Cuatro estaciones* tetralogy, Padura addressed the topic of the disenchantment of his generation, which is also that of el Conde and his friends. This disenchantment is also reflected in the author’s description of his city, La Habana, which, in 1989, the year the tetralogy is set, is in a state of ruin, in which its inhabitants’ struggle for survival reflect the failures of the Revolution. *La neblina del ayer*, set fourteen years later, shows the results of the Special Period on the city and its people. Severe hardship and institutionalized corruption have taken their toll on the younger generation of Cubans, who came of age during or after the Special Period. This generation are more disaffected than disenchanted with the Revolution, as disenchantment implies that they once believed in revolutionary ideology. Padura parallels La Habana in the 1950s to the present day narrative of 2003. The fact that corruption, mafias, drugs, prostitution and violence are common to both periods serves to put into question the achievements of the Revolution. The problem of the increasing drug problem on the island since the Special Period, especially among the youth, is presented in the novel as a means of escapism from the harsh reality of everyday life. Increasing inequality among citizens due, to the introduction of the dual currency, is also presented as a factor which has influenced the rise in

criminality in the city. In the novel, el Conde asks himself, while taking in the grim panorama of his city afflicted by drugs, prostitution and the divide between rich and poor, whether his youth in the 1970s, filled with hope was more real than what he now sees his city to be (Padura 2005: 222). He later comes to the conclusion that what the city is now is real and his life up to this moment has been a lie, because it was based on the manipulation of reality: “No: él mismo era una mentira, porque, en esencia, toda su vida no había sido más que una empeñada pero fallida manipulación de la verdad” (Padura 2005: 225). This realization comes as a result of el Conde’s discovery of the other city, where he witnesses social problems never officially acknowledged in the state media. El Conde now sees clearly the results of the failed Revolution’s promises; a city destroyed by corruption, with its worst affected victims being the Cuban youth, who in order to adapt to their inherited political situation, have lost all their “pureza interior” (Padura 2005: 88) and hope for a better future. *La novela de mi vida* can be read as a social chronicle in which the author exposes the more unattractive aspects of his city, which can be interpreted as means to prove and to attest to the fact that Cuban official discourse is at odds with its reality. In the following Chapter, I will examine how Padura returns to the roots of communism, and in particular Stalinism, in an effort to discover the factors which have led to the development of this disenchanted city.

## Chapter Four

### Debunking the Socialist Dream: *El hombre que amaba a los perros*

#### Introduction

Leonardo Padura's work could be classified as a negative critique of the actions of the Cuban authorities and *El hombre que amaba a los perros* (2009) can be interpreted as a negative critique of the way communism has been implemented by various governments. I employ the term negative critique as it was developed by theorists from the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, and as outlined by Pam Morris in *Realism*. I adapt their theory to the Cuban context to support my argument of a critique reading of Padura's work. According to Morris, Horkheimer and Adorno's book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) puts forward the theory that "the root of modern political and cultural intolerance and repressive moral and social conformity [lies] in the collaborative relationship that had developed between the Enlightenment and capitalism" (Morris 2003: 18). Horkheimer and Adorno identify the realist novel of the eighteenth and nineteenth century as a mass produced part of consumer culture, which categorized human beings and objects as conforming to a capitalist mode of mass production. Realist fiction reproduced gender, class and racial stereotypes. Horkheimer and Adorno state: "Through the countless agencies of mass production and its culture the conventionalised modes of behaviour are impressed on the individual as the only natural, respectable and rational ones" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1997: 28). In realist novels morally, condoned patterns of behaviour are rewarded by wealth and opportunities for men, and love and marriage for women. Unconventional behaviour results in punishment and failure: "Enlightenment becomes wholesale deception of the masses" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1997: 42). However, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, according to Morris, does not present a wholesale rejection of all progressive thought, but rather a critique of bourgeois Enlightenment as the pursuit of a dominating functional rationality. It is suggested that a positive self-reflexive form of Enlightenment could be produced, which would offer a critique of the aforementioned system of mass culture, and that realist art can offer a form of knowledge that constitutes such a negative critique. Kafka and Beckett are given as examples of such fiction (Morris 2003: 21). Pam Morris offers a definition of

negative critique which adequately describes how I value Padura's representation of reality in La Habana in his novels:

Negative Critique: A cultural and artistic analysis that places value upon the ability of literary work to reveal oppressive and authoritarian elements in the existing social formation or in the prevailing perception of what constitutes social reality (Morris 2003: 168).

In this final Chapter, I will examine how *El hombre que amaba a los perros* continues to offer answers to El Conde's questions of where and how the Revolution led his generation, and his city, to disenchantment. The title of this most recently published novel to date by Padura was inspired by Raymond Chandler's short story, "The Man who Liked Dogs", although, beyond the title, it is hard to make any thematic comparison between these works of fiction. In this novel, Padura adds a new dimension to his ongoing negative critique of the Cuban authorities in his work, which culminates in this novel by his offering an account of the rise and fall of the Soviet Union. Corruption and failures in the USSR and their effects on Cuba are outlined in the novel and in particular their devastating effects on the city of La Habana. The novel is structured into a multi-layered narrative consisting of thirty Chapters, each Chapter corresponding to one of the three protagonists. Nine of these Chapters correspond to the purely fictional character, the *habanero* Iván; ten to Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky, and eleven to his murderer, Ramón Mercader. The action centres around main protagonist and narrator Iván, who is of the same generation as Padura's previous protagonists Mario Conde and Fernando Terry, thus the novel shares in the generational focus of the Conde series, *Las cuatro estaciones*, *La neblina del ayer* and *La novela de mi vida*. A love of dogs is the initial unifying element for the three protagonists, as the title of the novel suggests. However, I will explore in this Chapter how these protagonists also share stronger sentiments, such as the feeling of disenchantment. I will also go on to question the significance of representing Trotsky and Mercader in a contemporary Cuban work of fiction.

In his article "Death, Socialism and the Death of Socialism in *El hombre que amaba a los perros*", Wilkinson carries out a reading of the novel using semiotic theory, whereby he reaches the conclusion that, through Padura's use of the verb "desmerengar", the author is making reference to Fidel Castro, and he points out that Castro also uses this unusual verb in two of his speeches. He claims that because of the presence of this (well hidden) reference to Castro, the novel cannot be read as an

insinuation that Cuban socialism is dead. The following are the concluding lines of his article:

He may not be mentioned by name but by inferring the discourse of the *Comandante*, we can see how on a deeper level faithful these texts are to the ideology of the revolutionary project. Despite Castro's absence by name, he nonetheless remains. To paraphrase Barthes: The continuation (if not exactly the birth) of socialism in Cuba is at the cost of its death in the USSR (Wilkinson 2011).

I take issue with Wilkinson's reading of *El hombre que amaba a los perros*, and in the following paragraphs, will argue that the novel by no means celebrates socialism in Cuba and, on the contrary, can be read as a declaration of the end of the socialist era.

#### **4.1. An Historical and Generational Journey to Disenchantment**

The novel begins with Iván's story, which is set in La Habana in September 2004 and is told in first person narrative. Iván's story could be that of any Cuban of his generation and his story traces the history of the Revolution from Iván's coming of age, in the 1970s, to the present day narrative, set in 2004. Iván's descent into disenchantment is on a par with the chronological history of the Revolution and its errors. The first Chapter sets the tone of the novel as one of criticism and disenchantment with the Revolution, underlined by fear. Iván blames his wife's death on the failures of the Revolution. He also highlights the failures of the state to look after its citizens by pointing out his friends' role in saving him from more unfortunate circumstances. I will discuss how the author creates this atmosphere of disillusionment in the following brief synopsis of this first Chapter. Hurricane Ivan had just passed over the island of Cuba, causing great destruction and killing a total of sixty-four people in the Caribbean. The hurricane did not make landfall on Cuba and no deaths were caused by the passing of the cyclone. However, had the hurricane hit the city of La Habana, Iván and his wife Ana knew that the roof of their house would not have withstood the storm and nor would the city of La Habana. This scene reminds us of el Conde waiting for the hurricane to arrive and completely demolish the city in *Paisaje de otoño*. Ana finally passes away just after the risk of the storm making landfall has ceased. She had been dying of bone cancer for some years. We learn that her cancer was more than likely an indirect result of malnutrition suffered

during the most difficult years of the Special Period (Padura 2010: 19). Iván comments on the extra hardship the couple faced during the last months of her illness, given that he had to leave work to take care of her, and points out that they survived those months thanks to the support of their friends, who brought them food and supplies that “ellos lograban obtener por las más sinuosas vías” (Padura 2010: 19). Again, as seen throughout the work of Padura, reference is made to ordinary people being involved in criminality and the black market out of necessity. Iván goes on to describe how he met Ana at the start of the Special Period when: “[l]a gloriosa Unión Soviética había lanzado ya sus estertores y sobre nosotros empezaban a caer los rayos de la crisis que devastaría el país en los años noventa” (Padura 2010: 22). When the shortage of paper, ink and electricity led to the closure of the veterinary magazine at which Iván worked, he and his colleagues were sent to work in a handicrafts workshop, indefinitely. Again Iván is saved by his friends from his “inútil destino” (Padura 2010: 23), and given a job as an assistant in a veterinary clinic. It was at that clinic that he met Ana, which prompted him to question whether the major changes in history taking place at the time were merely fate, leading him to meet the love of his life. Against the backdrop of “hambre, apagones, la devaluación de los salarios y la paralización del transporte” (Padura 2010: 23), Ana and Iván live happily together. Years later, Iván decides to tell Ana about his encounter with Ramón Mercader fourteen years previously and admits that he never wrote about it “por miedo” (Padura 2010: 24).

The next Chapter of the novel involving Iván, Chapter nine, focuses further on the effects on Cubans of past mistakes made by the Revolution and in particular the period of “el quinquenio gris”, which lasted from 1971 to 1976, a period already criticised in *Pasado perfecto*, as we will see below. The author compares the atmosphere in Cuba in 1971 to that of a witch hunt - “el año en que más cálido llegó a ponerse el ambiente con la orden expresa de dar caza a cualquier tipo de bruja que apareciera en lontananza” (Padura 2010: 79) - and Padura’s protagonist remembers how strict censorship policies affected him during the decade of the seventies. Once more, the author repeats a similar scene through which the innocent protagonist suffers the repressive power of the authorities. In his final year at college, Iván wrote a short story about a revolutionary who had been overcome by fear, which led to his suicide. Confident in his literary capabilities, his first collection of short stories had

already been published in the university magazine - Iván handed in his latest work to the same magazine. A week later, he was summoned to the director's office and strongly reprimanded by "aquél hombre vestido de poder, seguro de su capacidad para infundir miedo" for writing a story which was "inoportuno, impublicable, completamente inconcebible, casi contrarrevolucionario" (Padura 2010: 81). Iván was told at the time that no further action would be taken against him and that the incident would be forgotten. He describes the fear he felt after the meeting: "[a]quel día supe con exactitud lo que era sentir Miedo, así, un miedo con mayúsculas, real, invasivo, omnipotente y ubicuo, mucho más devastador que el temor al dolor físico o a lo desconocido que todos hemos sufrido alguna vez" (Padura 2010: 82). This scene of a character being humiliated and reprimanded by an authority figure has been repeated by all of Padura's protagonists. Mario Conde, in *Pasado perfecto*, was reprimanded in high school for a short story he wrote about a boy who preferred to play ball, instead of going to mass with his mother. He and his friends from his literary group were all called into the principal's office and one by one reprimanded for their lack of ideologically sound literature. Mario Conde also remembers the fear and humiliation he felt at the time.<sup>39</sup> Fernando Terry, in *La novela de mi vida*, was humiliated by his boss for taking an initiative at work in an effort to improve efficiency within the company. This fear had a lasting effect on Terry and soon developed into a paranoia that prevented him from leading a normal life thereafter.<sup>40</sup> Heredia also suffered similar humiliation at the hands of General Tacón. All of the aforementioned humiliations and reprimands take place in the office of a person in a position of power. They use their space and position to abuse their authority, highlighting the notion of inequality and forced submission to a corrupt system. These situations result in a sense of shame, frustration and, most of all, fear. Padura's protagonists realize how defenceless they are in a system where they are stripped of the freedom to express themselves for fear of the consequences. These examples also show how much power one single person can have over the lives of those below them and how easily that power can be abused.

Through Iván, the author uncovers the level of surveillance held over the population, even at street level, and how this constant control leads to a feeling of

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<sup>39</sup> See Chapter one (1.4.) page 42

<sup>40</sup> See Chapter two (2.4.) page 74.

distrust among his peers. This idea also ties in with the phenomenon of *la doble moral*, as discussed in the previous Chapter: a fear of expressing an honest opinion in public has been a contributing factor to widespread double standards. Prior to the incident with the director of the university magazine, Iván had been reprimanded for voicing in public his disagreement on university teachers being fired over religious beliefs or because of their sexual orientations. He had neither written about it nor had he set up a public meeting to discuss it, he simply voiced his opinion on the matter out loud to a group of friends. He added that he did not think it was fair that those teachers should be dismissed and suggested that, had they been members of the communist party, their situation would have been overlooked. He did not discover the implications of his honesty until he was denied membership to the “élite juvenil”, a section of the young communist movement, “por no haber sido capaz de superar ciertos problemas ideológicos y faltarme madurez y capacidad de entendimiento de las decisiones tomadas por compañeros responsables” (Padura 2010: 79). At that point in time, Iván accepted the criticism and promised to mend his ways. But, Iván had been denounced by somebody in his circle of friends. Therefore, fear of the authorities is further extended to fear of companions and peers, which in turn becomes a very effective form of self-censorship, as it is never known who can be trusted, which also has the additional side effect of *la doble moral*, as mentioned above.

One of the greatest economic mistakes made by the Revolution is addressed in this novel and is presented as one of the first catalysts of disenchantment for the Cuban population; the *Zafra* or ten million ton sugar harvest. Again, I will refer to Iván’s story in the novel in order to continue to chart his road from compliance to disillusion with the Cuban Revolution. Iván, “convencido de que aquella heroica empresa sería decisiva para nuestra salida del subdesarrollo” (Padura 2010: 78), accepted that all of the work carried out in 1970 for the *Zafra* had resulted in failure without question, in the same way as he accepted the criticism of his outspokenness. Historian Hugh Thomas writes on this “10 million ton harvest” in *Cuba A History* that, in contrast to the original plans of the Revolution in 1959 to “switch away from that emphasis on sugar which had played for so long such a large and many thought destructive part in Cuban society”, the sugar industry by 1963 “played a larger part than before 1959” (Thomas 2010: 979). The harvest from 1969 yielded only 4.5

million tons, which Fidel Castro considered “the country’s agony” (Thomas 2010: 980), and so he set the 10 million ton target for the following year. In order to reach that target, strong propaganda was used to motivate the population to be involved in the greatest sugar cane harvest of Cuban history, as the citation below, from Thomas, demonstrates:

Meantime a delegation from North Vietnam, not to speak of the Soviet Minister of Defence, Marshal Grechko, and the entire Cuban cabinet have all done their time in the cane fields, while government propaganda has spoken of the harvest as if it were a military challenge: “Every worker should act as he would in the face of an enemy attack, should feel like a soldier in a trench with a rifle in his hand” (Thomas 2010: 980).

Another negative outcome of the *Zafra* was heightened ideological expectations from the authorities on the part of Iván’s generation: “las exigencias ideológicas se hicieran más patentes, pues ya formaban parte de nuestras vidas de jóvenes revolucionarios aspirantes a la condición de comunistas, y las entendíamos o queríamos entenderlas como necesarias” (Padura 2010: 79). Here, Padura points out their desire to believe in government policies, suggesting that, by that time, a struggle already existed amongst the population of the island to keep on supporting the Revolution and Padura thus pinpoints the beginning of an internal questioning of the modus operandi of the regime. The failure of the *Zafra* undoubtedly aroused feelings of disenchantment within the general public with the revolutionary government, especially with regard to their economic policies, which had until then been disastrous. As Thomas points out, despite promises made in 1960 by Castro that “improvements in the standard of living would come faster than in any other country which had undergone a revolution, two years later the standards of life in the cities had collapsed while at the end of the 1960s most Cubans were living in a very Spartan manner” (Thomas 2010: 979). The *Zafra* was seen as their big chance at “salir del subdesarrollo” (Padura 2010: 78), yet it also failed. Cracking down on any alleged counter-revolutionary conduct was an effective manner of avoiding any public uproar over the state of the economy. Implementing strict censorship policies was the most effective manner of avoiding any visible opposition to the Castro

government capable of stirring up discontent among the general public. One year after the Zafra, in 1971, began “el quinquenio gris”.<sup>41</sup>

By 1973, Iván’s disenchantment with the system was beginning to grow, as he realized that his first collection of short stories, which had been published and had received critical acclaim at the time, were considered worthy of publication, not due to the quality of the work but because of the themes about which he chose to write. In the following quote, Iván describes how his writing was negatively affected by the atmosphere of censorship which was greatly limiting artistic freedom at the time:

Yo había escrito aquellos cuentos imbuido, más aún, aturdido por el ambiente agreste y cerrado que se vivía entre las cuatro paredes de la literatura y la ideología de la isla, asolada por las cascadas de defenestraciones, marginaciones, expulsiones y “parametraciones” de incómodos de toda especie ejecutadas en los últimos años y por el previsible levantamiento de los muros de la intolerancia y la censura hasta alturas celestiales (Padura 2010: 77).

In line with Castro’s famous words, “Dentro de la revolución todo, fuera de la revolución nada”, from a speech known as “Palabras a los intelectuales”, given at the last of his three meetings in La Biblioteca Nacional with Cuba’s artists and intellectuals, in April 1961, Iván had previously written “relatos sobre esforzados cortadores de caña, valientes milicianos defensores de la patria, abnegados obreros cuyos conflictos estaban relacionados con las rémoras del pasado burgués que todavía afectaba sus conciencias” (Padura 2010: 77). When Iván wrote his second short story, one which did not fit in with the ideology of the “Hombre Nuevo”, he was promptly reminded of the error of his ways and warned not to stray again: “me habían golpeado con una regla para que retirara las manos” (Padura 2010: 77). The metaphor of primary school punishment for a final year university student is a very effective manner of describing the paternalistic role of the state over its people. However, despite being told that no action would be taken against him, after finishing university, Iván was sent to Baracoa, a twenty six hour bus ride away from La Habana, to carry out his “servicio social”, the two years that all university graduates must work “como retribución por la carrera estudiada gratuitamente” (Padura 2010: 76). Apart from expressing his disagreement with some government policies in public and writing an almost counter-revolutionary story, his interest in

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<sup>41</sup> See Chapter one (1.3.) for more information on the First Congress of Education and Culture which saw the beginning of strict censorship over all artists, also known as “El quinquenio gris”.

reading Sartre and Camus also added another black spot after his name. This resulted in “una especie de destierro a una Siberia tropical” (Padura 2010: 77). This deliberate comparison of Soviet punishment to the Cuban context highlights a reading of the novel as a critique of Cuban policies, highly leveraged by Soviet influence. In *Vientos de cuaresma*, we are given an example of how this mandatory work placement far from the capital could be avoided, if the right influences were mobilized. Protagonist/victim Lissette Nuñez’s step-father held a high-ranking position in the Ministry of Education and used his influence to avoid Lissette being sent outside La Habana to carry out her “servicio social” (Padura 2001: 35).

The story of Iván’s experience in Baracoa serves to reveal institutionalized corruption within the Revolution and the role of state controlled media as an accomplice to that corruption. It opened Iván’s eyes completely to the reality of the revolutionary politics of the time. As director of the local radio station, Iván was in charge of broadcasting local and national news. He soon discovered that the radio station was utilized as a means of self propaganda for the ambitious, who wanted to be promoted to even better positions outside Baracoa:

La emisora Radio Ciudad Primada de Cuba Libre era, precisamente, el medio encargado de concretar una realidad virtual más embustera aún que la de ríos, montañas y carreteras de nombres caprichosos, porque estaba construida sobre planes, compromisos, metas y cifras mágicas que nadie se ocupaba de comprobar, sobre constantes llamados al sacrificio, la vigilancia y la disciplina con los que cada uno de los jefes locales trataba de construir el escalón de su propio ascenso-coronado con el premio de salir de aquel sitio perdido (Padura 2010: 83).

Padura here highlights the corruption within the system and how the revolutionary card was often played by those who, paradoxically, were operating with their own individual interests in mind. Iván represents those who turned a blind eye out of fear, allowing the lie to continue. Aware that the system was corrupt, Iván saw no alternative but to go along with the game. He knew that if he refused to broadcast their lies, he would suffer the consequences of going against the system, including losing his university degree. Therefore, he instructed his two journalists to write about:

“planes sobre cumplidos, compromisos aceptados con entusiasmo revolucionario, metas superadas con combatividad patriótica, cifras increíbles y sacrificios heroicamente asumidos, para darle forma a una realidad inexistente, hecha casi siempre de palabras y consignas, y muy pocas veces de plátanos, boniatos y calabazas concretas” (Padura 2010: 83).

Iván's experience is also a strong criticism of journalism under the Revolution, where all means of communication are state owned and only one version of the facts is offered. Padura, who as a journalist in Cuba has also experienced censorship firsthand, overtly questions the information Cubans are fed and reiterates the lack of accountability of those in charge of keeping the nation informed. He suggests that, as long as the revolution is portrayed favourably, any lie is valid. In his book *Cuba A Critical Assessment*, sociologist Samuel Farber identifies the issue of lack of accountability as one of the factors to blame for the disasters in Cuba's economic system, and states: "In the absence of an open and democratic public life, consumers lack the power to bring government economic planners to account. The lack of an open press and mass communications has facilitated cover-ups, corruption, and inefficiency" (Farber 2011: 54). Farber also points out the Cuban authority's awareness that "subordinates often tell their superiors what they would like to hear instead of the truth" (Farber 2011: 54), as those corrupt bosses, described by Padura in the novel, do in order to benefit personally from their false achievements. Farber quotes Raúl Castro's words at the national parliament in 2010: "Sometimes comrades, without a fraudulent purpose, transmit unverified false information provided by their subordinates. This is how they unconsciously end up telling lies. That false data can lead us to erroneous decisions with greater or lesser national repercussions" (Farber 2011: 54). It is interesting to note how Raúl Castro clearly seems to want to challenge the previous modus operandi of state companies, yet without directly challenging those who present the falsehoods and thereby absolving the leaders of any responsibility.

Given his position, Iván was constantly receiving invitations to various different activities and meetings he described as "la comelata y la bebedera", which he always accepted, "por mi propio miedo o por mi incapacidad para rebelarme" (Padura 2010: 84). Here Padura again points out, as he did in his previous novels, the social inequalities still present in revolutionary Cuba, where rationing did not exist for those in certain positions. Iván became a "cínico capaz de mentir sin escrúpulos" (Padura 2010: 84), as the *compañero* who had previously held his position had foreseen he would: "Prepárate, socio: aquí te vas a hacer un cínico o te van a hacer mierda... Bienvenido a la realidad real" (Padura 2010: 83). During the two years Iván lived in Baracoa, he discovered that the only way to survive the experience was

to get drunk. On his return to La Habana, he had to be hospitalized to cure his alcoholism. Some months later, he was offered a similar position in La Habana, “premio al trabajo que se suponía que había realizado en Baracoa, evaluado como excelente” (Padura 2010: 126), but he refused, knowing that that lifestyle was to blame for his alcoholic downfall. Instead, he opted for a simple proof reading position for a veterinary magazine. It was 1975, and Iván describes how “el quinquenio gris” was taking its toll on Cuban artists who had fallen outside the system for not conforming to the parameters set out by the government and writing “obras sinflictivas” (Padura 2010: 127):

Entonces había comenzado a rastrear en el submundo de la esfera periodística y cultural, todavía atestado de ángeles caídos, que antes habían sido celebrados y polémicos escritores, periodistas, promotores, todos defenestrados, quizás de por vida, y por las razones o sinrazones más disímiles (Padura 2010: 126).

Iván refers again to the “quinquenio gris” later in the novel in an effort to explain to his wife why he never wrote Mercader’s story. Iván never returned to writing any literature after being reprimanded in 1973 and his eye opening experience in Baracoa. He refers to Russian writer Isaac Babel, who stopped writing once strong censorship in the USSR prevented him from writing freely and was finally executed during Stalin’s great purge in 1940. Iván tells Ana that, like Babel, he made a conscious decision to “escribir el silencio” (Padura 2010: 401) to save himself from being “marginado, prohibido, sepultado en vida a los treinta, cuando de verdad puedes empezar a ser un escritor en serio” (Padura 2010: 400). According to Iván, in order to continue being a writer during the seventies and eighties in Cuba, it was necessary to write “literatura vacía y complaciente de los años setenta y ochenta, prácticamente la única que alguien podía imaginar y pergeñar bajo el manto ubicuo de la sospecha, la intolerancia y la uniformidad nacional” (Padura 2010: 400). Iván was not willing to conform to revolutionary parameters, nor was he willing to risk the consequences of rebelling against the system, as the following quote illustrates: “Al menos con la boca cerrada podía sentirme en paz conmigo mismo y mantener acorralados mis miedos” (Padura 2010: 401).

Padura returns to the topic of the persecution of homosexuals in this novel with the story of William, Iván’s brother. Again Iván suffers first hand mistakes made by the Revolution, contributing further to his disenchantment. In Chapter one, I discuss the persecution of homosexuals in Cuba, as described in the novel

*Máscaras*. This novel also focuses on *parametraciones* during “el quinquenio gris” and more specifically the persecution of homosexual writers. William’s story, in *El hombre que amaba a los perros*, differs slightly to Marques’, in that William was not a writer but a student, while his lover was a university lecturer. As mentioned earlier in this Chapter, educators were expelled from their positions, if they were considered to be homosexual. In this case, when it is discovered that William is having an affair with his teacher, both are expelled from the university. William was suspended from university for a period of two years and not allowed to return to university to finish his degree in medicine. His parents felt so ashamed by his open homosexuality that they threw him out of the family home, despite Iván’s protests. They had thought him “cured”, after sending him to two years of psychological therapy and hormonal treatment. William’s homosexuality led to the downfall of his family. Iván could not forgive his mother for disowning William, but later realized that nobody was to blame but the system. William and his lover fought for their rights for two years, but finally gave up and decided to attempt a new start outside Cuba, yet died trying to reach Florida on a stolen speed boat. The tragedy sent his parents into a deep depression and, within two years of William’s death, both of Iván’s parents had died.

By 1977, when Iván first met Trotsky’s murderer, Ramón Mercader, Iván was already fully disenchanted with the Revolution. In Baracoa, he had witnessed first hand how the system was being corrupted and, on his return to La Habana, he saw how strict censorship was affecting artists. He no longer wanted to work in journalism, nor did he want to be a writer. Fear was the underlying factor behind these decisions. He witnessed the downfall of his own brother, an excellent student who had been expelled only because his sexual orientations were not in line with revolutionary ideology; the “Hombre Nuevo” could not be homosexual. Homosexuality was considered bourgeois decadence, which would be eradicated, along with capitalism in the utopian socialist society.

Iván’s story of disenchantment commences in 1970, which coincides with the beginning of a change within the Cuban Revolution; a switch towards a Soviet influenced socialist revolution. Cuba had established trade agreements with the USSR in the early days of the revolution and “was officially recognized as socialist in 1963 after Castro’s first visit to Russia in that year” (Brown 2009: 30). Prior to the Special Period in the nineties, Cuba had enjoyed some years of economic stability,

during the decade of the eighties, leading Iván to believe in the possibility of a positive future for his children. Soviet influenced work bonuses, put into effect in the 1970s, encouraged workers to become more productive. Prior to this period, Che Guevara's economic policies, which included "moral" incentives, had been in place and proved disastrous for the economy (Farber 2011: 148). The decade of the eighties also saw a decrease in strict censorship and the beginning of a new generation of writers on the island, since Castro's "Palabras a los intelectuales" speech in 1961. This generation "tímidamente empezaban a escribir de un modo diferente, historias diferentes, con menos héroes y más gente jodida y triste, como en la vida real" (Padura 2010: 315). Padura describes the period of lesser hardship in Cuba as an "ilusoria bonanza" (Padura 2010: 316), which was soon to end. Along with the fall of the Soviet Union, apart from hunger in Cuba, came the truth, as exposed in *glasnost*: "En esos años se atravesó el puente que iba del entusiasmo de lo mejorable a la decepción de comprobar que el gran sueño estaba enfermo de muerte y que en su nombre se habían cometido hasta genocidios como el de Cambodia de Pol Pot" (Padura 2010: 321). It was this revealed truth that, according to the narrator, was the principal cause of total disenchantment with the socialist dream in Cuba. Previous hardships suffered by Iván, el Conde and Terry's generation had been bearable because they believed that there was light at the end of the tunnel and that they were working towards a utopian society, one which was only attainable through a temporary adaptation period.

Aquellas fueron las revelaciones que nos ayudaron a enfocar los bultos imprecisos que, durante años, apenas habíamos entrevisto en las penumbras y a darles un perfil definitivo, tan espantosa como ya es fácil saber. Aquéllos fueron los tiempos en los que se concretó el gran desencanto (Padura 2010: 321).

As mentioned earlier, despite almost starving to death, Iván remembers the hardest years of the Special Period as the happiest of his life. His love for Ana outweighed the suffering from lack of food and basic commodities. This capacity to bear hardships on the strength of an emotion is similar to the initial years of hardship suffered by Iván's generation, due to the sense of hope for a brighter future that they felt. In the eighties, Iván no longer believed in this illusion and, despite the "bonanza", he was unable to enjoy the fact that "había comida, había ropa (socialista y fea, pero comida y ropa), había guaguas, a veces hasta taxis, y casas en la playa que podíamos alquilar con el dinero del salario" (Padura 2010: 401).

Padura offers a detailed description of life in La Habana during the Special Period in *El hombre que amaba a los perros* as never before described in his previous novels. Through Iván and his friends, Special Period reality is explicitly expressed and results in their definitive disenchantment. Due to the lack of fuel, “apagones” were every day occurrences and transport was reduced to riding a bicycle. Given that the calorie consumption from their diet was below sufficient for an average adult, and taking into account the amount of calories required for cycling, polyneuritis avitaminosis, “la misma que se extendía en los campos de concentración alemanes”, was commonplace (Padura 2010: 402). Iván’s description of a typical meal during the Special Period in the novel helps to explain why so many Cubans developed avitaminosis: “Tomamos agua, café de granos mezclados y nos comimos unos panes con picadillo de pescado aumentado con cáscaras de plátano hervidas” (Padura 2010: 407). The image offered by Iván of skinny baseball players and presenters at an almost empty stadium, highlights the hardships suffered by the population at large (Padura 2010: 405). Iván’s friend Dany, “agobiado por la crisis”, had given up writing and spent most of his time looking for his next meal: “apenas dejaba flotar los días, ocupado en perfeccionar sus estrategias de supervivencia y la búsqueda de la próxima comida, como casi todos los habitantes de la isla” (Padura 2010: 405). The same fight for survival was what motivated Iván to cycle to the countryside every day, carrying out veterinary jobs for farmers in exchange for fresh produce to keep his wife Ana alive. This “guerra por la supervivencia” (Padura 2010: 405), became even more real on one occasion when Iván had a knife fight with another veterinary surgeon who was trying to steal his clients. The starvation suffered during the Special Period led to the resurgence of primitive instincts that took over their personalities and even their values. Iván explains that “en el fondo del abismo, acosado por todos los flancos, los instintos pueden ser más fuertes que las convicciones” (Padura 2010: 402).

In the summer of 1994, given the state of emergency the country was in, the Castro regime allowed the emigration of its citizens: “para lanzarse al mar en cualquier objeto flotante” (Padura 2010: 404). Iván and Dany made their way to Cojímar, a port town east of La Habana, to witness thousands of Cubans take to the seas on makeshift rafts, convinced that they would find a better life in Miami. The sight of the flight of so many Cubans, while the police looked, on saddened Iván,

who saw the mass emigration as something more than a great escape, as Dany had suggested. Iván was saddened because for him it signified the end of the Revolution, and the futility of all of their sacrifices, which all ended in a mass exodus, leading him to ask:

¿Todo para llegar a esto?

El hambre obliga - comentó él.

Es más complicado que el hambre Dany. Perdieron la fe y se escapan. Es bíblico, un éxodo bíblico... una fatalidad” (Padura 2010: 406).

This quote clearly supports my argument that this novel does not offer any hope for Cuban socialism, as Wilkinson suggests in his article. In the following section, I will examine the significance of Ramón Mercader’s story, as imagined by Padura.

#### **4.2. Ramón Mercader: The Disenchanted Villain/Victim**

Ramón Mercader’s life story, as conceived by Padura, and related to Iván in Cuba, starts in 1936. Fighting with the Republican Army on the outskirts of Madrid against Franco’s Nationalists at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, Ramón is called to the sidelines to attend to his mother, Caridad del Río. She had come to ask her son to join the Soviet Secret Service and form part of a very important mission. Without questioning the mission, Ramón, who is blinded by his unconditional faith in communism, accepts. Padura describes Ramón’s childhood and background prior to 1936 and suggests that his mother’s influence was crucial in his communist beliefs and his future as a Soviet Agent. Caridad’s unhappy marriage to a wealthy Catalan businessman led her to underground Barcelona in the 1920s, where she met with proletariat members of the communist party. In this atmosphere, Caridad lived a promiscuous existence, accompanied by alcohol and drugs. When her husband realized the extent of her addictions and her involvement in communist activities, including the sabotage of his own companies, he had her committed. Once released, Caridad left her husband and took her children with her to France, where she instilled in them a devotion to the fight of the proletariat. Ramón’s brother, Luis Mercader, wrote Ramón’s biography in 1990, fifty years after the murder of Trotsky. In a documentary filmed by José Luis López Linares and Javier Rioyo in 1996, *Asaltar los cielos*, Luis Mercader speaks of his mother’s influence on Ramón and the

problems in his parents' marriage, due to her lack of sexual interest, contrasted with his father's insistence on taking her to pornographic shows in Barcelona. Padura addresses this topic in the novel and suggests that Caridad's hatred for the bourgeoisie stemmed from her hatred for her husband (Padura 2010: 46). The author offers a description of Barcelona in October, 1936, where the "efervescencia de los meses anteriores iban perdiendo su fulgor" (Padura 2010: 117). He compares the excitement lived by Ramón's fellow communists, at the beginning of 1936, at the hope of "la eliminación del enemigo" (Padura 2010: 117), with a tired, hungry city, already sick of the war against the enemy and longing to return to normality only a few months into the Civil War:

Ramón se encontraba una ciudad cansada, más aún, desencantada, asediada por las escaseces y ansiosa de regresar a una normalidad quebrada por la guerra y los sueños revolucionarios. Era como si la gente solo aspirara a llevar una vida común y corriente, a veces incluso al precio infame de la rendición (Padura 2010: 117).

This description of a disenchanted city, tired of revolutionary struggles and the hardships that accompany them, could be interpreted as a direct allusion to the tiredness and disenchantment of Padura's native city, La Habana. In the same paragraph, Padura refers to the closure of bars and dance halls in Barcelona, as part of the "Grandes Propósitos" of Catalanian socialists, which now seemed to have lost their shine. Ramón noticed a sign which read "EL BAILE ES LA ANTESALA DEL PROSTÍBULO; LA TABERNA DEBILITA EL CARÁCTER; EL BAR DEGENEREA EL ESPÍRITU: ¡CERRÉMOSLOS!" (Padura 2010: 117). This call by communists to rid society of the degeneration of the spirit due to alcohol and dance is another reminder of Cuban policy in the sixties, when many bars and nightclubs were shut down by the Revolution. Amid this disenchanted atmosphere, Ramón meets his Soviet mentor Kotov, who convinces him that socialists and trotskysts were plotting against the Soviet Union "para desacreditar a los soviéticos" (Padura 2010: 120). The Popular Front, an electoral coalition which came to power in January 1936, was made up of different leftist and centre parties. It is later revealed in the novel that Kotov, following direct orders from Stalin, was campaigning to break up the left wing union, thereby weakening the Republic and its army in its struggle against the Nationalist Army, who had started the Civil War, after a military coup in July of that same year. Stalin provided the Republicans with weapons and military support in exchange for Spanish gold. It is later suggested in the novel that

the dictator used Spain as one of his war strategies, in an effort to make a pact with Hitler:

La guerra solo debía durar lo suficiente para que Stalin pudiera utilizar a España como moneda de cambio en sus tratos con Hitler, y que, cuando llegó ese momento, nos había abandonado a nuestra suerte, pero colgándose la medalla por haber ayudado a los republicanos y, como premio adicional, quedándose con el oro español (Padura 2010: 521).

This use of Spain by the USSR, as part of its wider battle ground, can be compared to how the Soviet Union used Cuba during the Cold War, in the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Historian Hugh Thomas comments in *Cuba A History* that “Russia had always desired a neutral Cuba more than a satellite; but if satellite she had become, with all its consequent risks, then one quid pro quo would be to make her a strategically profitable satellite” (Thomas 2010: 943). While obliged by promise to defend Cuba in the case of an attack from the USA, the Soviets had ulterior motives for planting the missiles on Cuban territory. Thomas points out that Soviet president Khrushchev did not want to use the weapons. However, he knew that their presence “could be a means of exerting diplomatic pressure on Kennedy, over Berlin or in order to guarantee against a US invasion of Cuba” (Thomas 2010: 942).

Before Ramón sets out for Russia, he experiences first hand the manipulation of the truth by his mentor Kotov, who is working hard to spread false accusations against the anarchist and unionist parties in an effort to eliminate them from power. Propaganda against them included that Trotskyists were passing maps and military information to the fascists. Despite Ramón’s unconditional support of the cause, “le costaba aceptar la mezquindad de aquel montaje” (Padura 2010: 176), as he knows that this propaganda is false. Kotov convinces Ramón that any lie is valid, as long as it serves to help them win the war (Padura 2010: 176).

Ramón is taken to Russia that year to start his training as a Soviet secret agent. He works with psychologists to forget his previous identity and is known as Soldado 13 until he takes on his new persona, Jacques Mornard, a Belgian whose mission is to make American Trotskyist, Sylvia Ageloff, fall in love with him in an effort to get close enough to Trotsky to be able to murder him. Jacques, handsome and wealthy, has no difficulties in making the rather unattractive Sylvia fall for all of Jacques’ charms.

Ramón's early sentiments of discomfort with the lies created by Kotov are the warning signs that he failed to heed. By the time Ramón has come close to the end of his mission he is aware that he has also been lied to and manipulated. Kotov writes the letter Jacques will carry on him on the day of the murder, in case he should not escape alive from Trotsky's home. This letter is filled with lies regarding his motives, making Ramón realize that the whole operation has been based on lies. He also realizes that the lies written by his mentor in the letter are similar to those pronounced against Trotsky "y otros hombres juzgados y sentenciados" (Padura 2010: 464), by Stalin. Ramón realizes that the letter is full of lies because there never was any truth behind his mission: "¿No existían acaso verdades, hechos reales sobre las cuales apoyar la trascendente decisión de un joven revolucionario, desencantado al extremo de sacrificarse y cometer un crimen para librar al proletariado del influjo de un traidor?" (Padura 2010: 464). However, it is too late for him to retreat from the mission; he knows he will not be allowed to live and that his only chance for survival is to murder Trotsky. Therefore, in the version of his life presented by Padura, Ramón Mercader was already disenchanted by Stalinism prior to carrying out his mission of murdering Trotsky. When he finally killed Trotsky, it was no longer out of hatred for an enemy of the Revolution but out of fear for his own life: "Si aún lo necesitaba, aquella carta fue la última comprobación de que, para él, no había otra salida en el mundo que la de convertirse en un asesino" (Padura 2010: 464). Days later, Ramón admits his doubts about the mission to his mentor due to the number of lies surrounding the case. He tells Kotov that he would love to kill a traitor, yet is still unsure if Trotsky was really a threat to the Revolution, claiming: "Quisiera poder entrar mañana en esa casa y reventarle la vida a un traidor renegado y estar seguro de que lo hago por la causa. Ahora no sé dónde empieza la causa y dónde las mentiras" (Padura 2010: 474). Kotov convinces him that "la única verdad que importa es cumplir las órdenes" and that Trotsky "es una amenaza para la Unión Soviética. Estamos en un punto donde todo el que no esté con Stalin está a favor de Hitler, sin medias tintas. ¿Qué importan unas cuantas mentiras si sirven para salvar nuestra gran verdad?" (Padura 2010: 474). This black or white division of politics is worthy of consideration in the Cuban context.

Within the one party politics of the Cuban government there is no room for political diversity. Those who do not support the Revolution are not considered

socialists and are often categorized as supporters of US imperialism. Padura portrays Ramón as a victim of manipulation; from his mother Caridad del Rio, his mentor, Kotov and also from the only woman he had loved, Africa. In the novel, Africa is a fanatical communist, who places the cause before love and even before her own daughter. She resembles Caridad in her pragmatic almost inhumane nature. Yet, according to Padura, it is out of love for Africa, and for a desire to be loved and respected by her, that Ramón goes ahead with the plan to kill Trotsky. Ramón may just as easily have been convinced by the woman he loved to forget the cause, in order to settle down to lead a conventional life, marry her, and raise their child together. Kotov, aware of Ramón's weak spot, tells him that killing Trotsky would raise Africa's respect for him and this is enough for Ramón to stop questioning the crime he was about to commit (Padura 2010: 475).

Twenty eight years after Ramón killed Trotsky with an ice pick at his home in Coyoacán, Mexico City, he met his mentor again in Moscow. After spending twenty years in prison in Mexico, Ramón returned to Russia where he received military honours. He married Mexican born Roquelia, a communist who had visited him in prison, and settled with her in Moscow. After twenty-eight years, Kotov finally reveals the truth to Ramón about his role in the murder of Trotsky. Although Ramón was already repentant of his actions and suffered the consequences daily, the truth that his life had no value to Stalin and that he had simply been used as a pawn still deeply upset him:

Ramón sintió el golpe de la conmoción. Oír, por boca del hombre que había fraguado con Stalin aquella operación, la confesión de que no solo había sido utilizado para cumplir una venganza, sino que se le consideró una pieza más que prescindible, derrumbó el último asidero que había resistido el paso de aquellos años plenos de desengaños y descubrimientos dolorosos (Padura 2010: 527).

Kotov confessed to Ramón that they had expected him to die on the day of Trotsky's murder, at the hands of Trotsky's bodyguards. In the case of Ramón surviving, he was to be killed by another Soviet agent; Stalin did not want him to survive. The following quote by Kotov, denouncing the perversion and corruption of Soviet dictators such as Stalin and Brezhnev, is a direct criticism by the author of the Soviet socialism on which the Cuban revolution chose to base its ideologies:

Tú no fuiste el único que fue a morir por un ideal que no existía. Stalin lo pervirtió todo y obligó a la gente a luchar y a morir por él, por sus necesidades, su odio, su

megalomanía. Olvídate de que luchábamos por el socialismo. ¿Qué socialismo, qué igualdad? Me contaron que Brézhnev tiene una colección de autos antiguos... (Padura 2010: 529).

Padura has offered many examples of inequalities in socialist Cuba throughout his work, most of which include luxuries enjoyed by high-ranking officials from the Cuban government. Kotov's response to Ramón's accusations of cynicism - "El día que mataste a Trotski sabías por qué lo hacías, sabías que eras parte de una mentira, que luchabas por un sistema que dependía del miedo y de la muerte. ¡A mí no puedes engañarme!" (Padura 2010: 529) - implies that the onus is on the individual to behave in a morally correct manner and that socialism was used as an excuse to act immorally or to follow orders, without stopping to think individually. Kotov manipulated Ramón into murdering Trotsky, yet Ramón was still the perpetrator of the crime. Nevertheless, Padura still portrays Ramón as a victim of socialism. He confronted Kotov before the murder and was fed with more lies to convince him to continue with the assassination of Trotsky. According to the narrator, had Kotov been sincere with Ramón, he probably would not have committed the crime. His destiny was determined for him by powers in which he thought he believed, as he was unaware of the reality of Stalinism. The narrator suggests that millions of believers, like Ramón, were "estafados" (Padura 2009: 540). They were conned into carrying out actions in the name of socialism which they too would live to regret. This inevitably led to a feeling of disenchantment with everything for which they had previously fought, as the following quote illustrates:

Ramón había recibido tantas ratificaciones y revelaciones sobre la fabricación truculenta de su destino y del destino de tantos millones de creyentes, que se había vuelto adicto a aquellos diálogos en los que cada uno, desde la colina de su conocimiento, arrojaba la luz que siempre les faltó a las acciones de sus vidas, a la idea misma por la que habían luchado, matado, sufrido ergástula y torturas, para terminar viviendo unas existencias amorfas, desencantadas, sin norte... (Padura 2010: 540).

It is interesting to note Padura's use of the word *creyentes* to refer to the supporters of the Revolution. As noted in Chapter one of this thesis, the author frequently makes use of biblical vocabulary to describe the atmosphere of the city of La Habana. Referring to the revolutionary supporters as believers, could be read as an insinuation that the Revolution took the place of religion in the city. As mentioned in Chapter one (1.3.), religion was outlawed by the authorities until the Special Period,

and from the 1990s on, more and more Cubans have returned to religion, possibly to fill the gap left after their disenchantment with the Revolution.

As mentioned above, by the time Iván met Ramón Mercader, he was already disenchanted with the Cuban Revolution. Nevertheless, Iván was still shocked by Mercader's story: "una historia repulsiva, que devalúa ella sola millones de discursos que se han hecho durante setenta años" (Padura 2010: 243). Although Iván felt more and more disenchanted with his own government's policies, he had not yet lost faith in the ideal of communism. Ramón's story would change the glorified image Iván held of the USSR, fatherland of communism, "the first country to establish a Communist political and economic system" (Brown 2009: 3). Before his conversations with Mercader, Iván knew very little about Trotsky: "Yo recordé mi contacto fugaz con el nombre y algunos momentos de la vida de aquel personaje turbio, medio desaparecido de la historia, impronunciable en Cuba" (Padura 2010: 189). Mercader's story awoke Iván's interest in Trotsky, yet strict censorship made it almost impossible for him to find a non-hypercritical biography of the man who had once been such an important political figure. La Biblioteca Nacional only held copies of biographies published by a Russian publisher "en los que sus autores se dedicaban a devaluar cada acto, cada pensamiento, incluso cada gesto que aquel hombre había hecho en su vida y hasta en su muerte" (Padura 2010: 240). Iván finally contacted his good friend Dany, knowing that his wife's uncle had been imprisoned in the sixties, along with a group of "simpatizantes trotskistas con los que sostenía relaciones personales y dijeron que hasta filosóficas" (Padura 2010: 241). Dany's reaction of "¿Tú te volviste loco, mi socio? ¿Te estás emborrachando otra vez o qué carajo te pasa?" (Padura 2010: 240) shows that harbouring an interest in Trotsky in the decade of the seventies was still a dangerous activity in Cuba. Padura adds to this a list of counter revolutionary activities which were also taboo at the time:

Si escuchar cierta música occidental, creer en cualquier dios, practicar yoga, leer determinadas novelas consideradas ideológicamente dañinas o escribir un cuento de mierda sobre un pobre tipo que siente miedo podía significar un estigma y hasta implicar una condena, meterse con el trotskismo hubiera sido como colgarse una soga al cuello, sobre todo para los que se movían en el mundo de la cultura, la enseñanza y las ciencias sociales (Padura 2010: 240).

Given the extent of activities considered counter-revolutionary, one could be forgiven for simply not knowing whether a certain activity was deemed ideologically sound or not. Therefore, if faced with the doubt as to whether a given activity was ideologically acceptable or not, one had the obligation to “consultarlo” (Padura 2010: 245). In Iván’s case, he feared that continuing his conversations with Mercader without consulting could potentially get him in trouble with the authorities. As Ramón Mercader tells Iván his life story, he unravels his experience with the Soviets, from the period of the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s, to his death in Cuba in 1978. Trotsky’s story completes the history of the Socialist Revolution from its formation in Russia in 1917, to its downfall in 1991. The hardships experienced by Cubans during the Special Period in the 1990s were a direct result of the fall of the Soviet Union, combined with the ongoing blockade. In 1993, Iván reads the biography of Trotsky’s murderer, written by his brother Luis Mercader, which confirms Ramón’s story, as told to Iván in the seventies, uncovering the horrors of Stalinism. Instead of feeling enlightened by the truth, Iván’s initial reaction is to feel sorry for himself and his generation, who were led to believe in an ideology based on brutality and corruption: “mi primera reacción fue sentir pena por mí mismo y por todos los que, engañados y utilizados, alguna vez creímos en la validez de la utopía fundada en el ya para entonces desaparecido país de los Sóviets” (Padura 2010: 399).

### 4.3. The Fall of the Perverted Utopia

When el Conde asks the question in *Paisaje de otoño* “¿Cuándo, cómo, por qué, dónde había empezado a joderse todo?” (Padura 1998: 26), besides the personal elements which had a influence on the detective’s lonely existence, the answer lies in the history of the Soviet Revolution and how the communist utopia was corrupted, and, consequently, how Soviet influence also led Cuba to its greatest crisis ever lived. In an interview with Manuel Campirino, which took place in 2007, Padura explains what he hoped to achieve by writing *El hombre que amaba a los perros*:

Más bien a lo que políticamente trato de acercarme, si es posible, es a una mirada sobre cómo se pervirtió la gran utopía del siglo XX, esa posible sociedad de los iguales con la que se aspiraba a llegar a través de la Revolución rusa, como eso se fue pervirtiendo desde el principio, y tanto Trotsky como Stalin fueron culpables de esa perversión y ese fracaso que terminó bueno, en algo que era tan inesperado

como previsible, como fue la desintegración de la Unión Soviética (Campirano 2007).

Padura states that the utopia was perverted, and suggests that this had a direct influence on the Revolution's downfall in Cuba. This statement also implies that Padura does not criticise the system, or the ideology, but merely the way it has been implemented.

In this section, I will focus on Padura's representation of Trotsky in the novel. On a closer study, Trotsky's role in the novel seems to be as a critic of Stalinism, and the revolutionary focuses most of his attention on pointing out Stalin's brutality. He questions the Marxist idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat and how it was corrupted by communist dictators such as Stalin. Padura uses what he imagines is Trotsky's opinion to express a condemnation of authoritarian regimes and blames them for the failure of the utopian dream, as is evident in the following quote from the novel: "Tal vez el primer error del bolchevismo, debió de pensar Liev Dávídovich [Trotsky], fue la radical eliminación de las tendencias políticas que se le oponían: cuando esa política pasó del exterior de la sociedad al interior del Partido, el final de la utopía había comenzado" (Padura 2010: 384). This quote can also be applied to the Cuban context, where there is no room for political opposition in the Castro dictatorship.

There is no doubt that through Trotsky's criticism of Stalin, Padura also insinuates that Fidel Castro is in the same category as other communist dictators. This is made clear when Trotsky highlights certain policies imposed on the population by Stalin, which are also common to policies enforced by Fidel Castro, such as blaming enemies of collaborating with foreign superpowers "como todos los dictadores" (Padura 2010: 160).<sup>42</sup> This can be read as a reference to Cuba's long

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<sup>42</sup> In 2003, seventy-five men and women were imprisoned with lengthy sentences after a one-day trial for plotting with the enemy, the USA, against the revolution. In Stalin's time, the enemy foreign power was Germany, until Stalin's pact with Hitler. It is clear that on generalizing dictators and choosing to comment on how collaboration with foreign power is a common tactic among them, the author is alluding to Fidel Castro and indirectly naming him a dictator, one who is comparable to Stalin. Other examples of policies common to Castro and Stalin found in the novel include Stalin's policy of having enemies lose their jobs (96) and setting up forced labour camps to transform enemies into "hombres socialmente útiles" (145).

standing enemy, the USA, and Padura's inclusion of the words "como todos los dictadores" can be read as an indirect affirmation that Castro is as much a dictator as Stalin was. Trotsky is also represented as a disenchanted protagonist, one who still believes in revolution, but has become disenchanted with the outcome of the Russian Revolution in the hands of Stalin. The first image of Trotsky offered, to the reader by Padura, is of a man who is now questioning acts carried out in the name of communism, as this quote illustrates:

Liev Dávídovich se preguntó si en realidad la Revolución tendría el derecho de trastocar un orden ancestral, perfecto a su modo e imposible de calibrar para un cerebro europeo afectado de prejuicios racionalistas y culturales. Pero ya andaban por aquellas tierras los activistas políticos enviados desde Moscú, empeñados en convertir a las tribus nómadas en trabajadores de granjas colectivas, a sus cabras montaraces en ganado estatal, y en demostrarles a turkmenos, kazajos, uzbekos y kirguises que su atávica costumbre de adorar piedras o árboles de la estepa era una deplorable actitud antimarxista (Padura 2010: 25-6).

From this extract, it is clear that Padura imagines the man responsible for founding the Red Army, a previous leader of the Menshevik party and the expected successor to Lenin, in the early years of his exile from Russia as a figure who was already beginning to doubt any revolution's right to radically change another culture in the name of Marxism. At a later point in the novel, Padura again depicts Trotsky questioning the Marxist theories on which he and Lenin based their decision making. In the novel, Trotsky admits that, in the case of free elections in 1921, the Bolsheviks probably would not have been elected and therefore would have lost power: "Por primera vez desde el triunfo de Octubre, debieron haberse preguntado si era justo establecer el socialismo en contra o al margen de la voluntad mayoritaria. La dictadura proletaria debía eliminar a las clases explotadoras, pero ¿también reprimir a los trabajadores?" (Padura 2010: 68). Padura adds that Lenin and Trotsky justified their decision, at the time, not to hold elections because "ésta podría revertir el proceso mismo" (Padura 2010: 69). Trotsky, as imagined by the author, then admits that despite being aware of the lack of public support from the majority of the citizens, they chose to force their own ideologies on the population against their will: "llegado el momento en que las masas dejaban de creer, se impuso la necesidad de hacerlas creer por la fuerza" (Padura 2010: 69). Padura's Trotsky even asks himself if he too would have become a "zar pseudocomunista", like Stalin if he had had "la desvergüenza y la astucia necesarias para abalanzarse sobre el poder tras la muerte de Lenin" (Padura 2010: 69). Trotsky recognizes that in order to maintain the power

to continue with the Revolution, it was necessary to stamp out all forms of opposition, as Lenin had done, and which Stalin later took to the extreme in the form of his great purges, and asks: “¿Habría sido capaz de sostener la pertinencia democrática de una oposición, de facciones dentro del Partido, de una prensa sin censura?” (Padura 2010: 69). Padura here points out that the Marxist revolution had been a failure from the start. Lenin and Trotsky saw no alternative but to stamp out by force, any opposition to Bolshevik rule. Marx’s dictatorship of the proletariat would never in fact have become a dictatorship of the proletariat, whereby the proletariat ruled, but rather a dictatorship over the proletariat. The Bolshevik Revolution was largely supported because the majority of the people desired democracy and longed to see an end to the rule of the Russian Czar.

Karl Kautsky, a Marxist and once supporter of the Bolsheviks pointed this out in his 1934 book, *Marxism and Bolshevism: Democracy and Dictatorship*:

The Bolsheviks, too, agreed among themselves to establish the rule of brutal force instead of economic insight. They thereby succeeded in setting up throughout the immense Russian state in place of the overthrown Czarist autocracy, an autocracy of their own. They succeeded perfectly, if the purpose of a socialist party is to be regarded as making its own leaders the rulers of the State. They failed dismally if the purpose of a socialist party is to be the use of its power for the realization of the party’s program. This program demands the freedom and welfare of the entire people. The Bolsheviks erased freedom from their program the minute they seized power (Kautsky 1934: Chapter 3).

Kautsky had fallen out of favour with Lenin in the 1920s, who publicly named him a “renegade” in his pamphlet *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*. Brown mentions that, according to Kautsky, Marx’s ideal of the dictatorship of the proletariat was interpreted differently by Lenin and not as Marx had intended (Brown 2009: 56). Brown makes clear at the beginning of his book, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, that:

There was a wide gulf between the original theory and the subsequent practice of Communist rule. Karl Marx sincerely believed that under communism - the future society of his imagination which he saw as an inevitable, and ultimate, stage of human development – people would live more freely than ever before (Brown 2009: 9).

Life in Russia under Stalin was a far cry from the freedom Karl Marx had dreamed of, instead, everything was controlled by the dictator, including the history and memory of the country. Padura describes Russia under Stalin as “un país deformado por miedos, consignas y mentiras” (Padura 2010: 27). A parallel can be made here to

Cuba. Castro, as well as Batista before him, made reference to Martí's dream of a *Cuba libre* in his speeches. It was believed that the Castro led Revolution would bring freedom and equality to all Cubans. Yet, soon after the start of the Revolution, it became obvious that elections would not be held and that opposition to the new regime would not be tolerated. The fear described by Padura in Russia under Stalin is comparable to the fear experienced by Iván and Padura's other protagonists, Fernando Terry and el Conde, under the Castros.

Trotsky was declared an enemy of the Revolution and his name was erased from the historical memory of the nation: “se dedicaron a liquidarlo de la historia y de la memoria, que también habían pasado a ser propiedad del Partido” (Padura 2010: 27). Padura also refers in the novel to Stalin's control over literature and questions the truth behind Gorky's loyalty to Stalin. Gorky had been a supporter of the Bolsheviks and a close friend to Lenin.<sup>43</sup> However, he became disenchanted with Lenin and, in 1918, wrote critically of the leader in his collection of essays, *Untimely Thoughts*, in which he compares Lenin to the Czars. Orlando Figes writes in his article *Maxim Gorky and the Russian Revolution* that Gorky's relationship with the Bolsheviks was very contradictory; he openly criticised their violent policies yet admired and supported Lenin. Gorky left Russia in 1921, after the Sailors' Revolt in Kronstadt, yet returned in 1928 and was treated as a national hero by Stalin (Figes 1996: 16).<sup>44</sup> Padura's reference to Gorky in the novel is in relation to his writings, which glorified the work of Stalin and in particular the achievements made in the Solovskii Lager, where “el sistema penal soviético luchaba a treinta grados bajo cero por transformar a lumpens y enemigos de la revolución en hombres socialmente útiles” (Padura 2010: 145). His other work, *Kanal ímeni Stáline*, consisted of a compilation of texts written by Russian authors praising the success of “la prodigiosa transformación de los prisioneros obligados a trabajar en el canal en resplandecientes modelos del “Hombre Nuevo” Soviético” (Padura 2010: 145). Stalin's White Sea – Baltic Sea Canal opened in 1933 and was built by slave labourers, concentration

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<sup>43</sup> See Chapter one (1.3.) for references to Gorky's article “Proletarian Humanism”.

<sup>44</sup> According to Figes, Gorky took advantage of his privileged position to help out those who were in need, especially during the years of the famine. According to Figes, it is suspected that Gorky's death was not due to natural circumstances and that he was in fact another victim of Stalin.

camp prisoners of Stalin. According to Padura, in the novel, over 200,000 prisoners were “obligados por años a construir las esclusas, presas y diques de un canal que incluía veinticinco millas de recorrido cortadas sobre roca viva, solo para que Stalin demostrase la supremacía de la ingeniería socialista” (Padura 2010: 145), and at least 25,000 perished in the act. Padura’s Trotsky finds it hard to comprehend Gorky’s sudden support for the regime when in 1921 Gorky had stated:

Todo lo que dije sobre el salvajismo de los bolcheviques, sobre su falta de cultura, sobre su crueldad rayana en el sadismo, sobre su ignorancia de la psicología del pueblo ruso, sobre el hecho de que realizan un experimento asqueroso con el pueblo y destruyen a la clase trabajadora, todo eso y mucho más que dije sobre el bolchevismo, guarda toda su fuerza (Padura 2010: 146).

Padura’s Trotsky asks himself how Gorky could possibly have changed his opinion so radically and returned from exile in Italy. He imagines that Stalin had somehow coerced or blackmailed him into writing those books which openly supported and praised his policies, as the following quote illustrates:

¿Qué argumentos había utilizado Stalin para lograr que un hombre con esas ideas regresara desde su cómodo exilio italiano? ¿Cuáles para someterlo a la humillación de firmar esos libros y convertirse en cómplice de unos espantosos crímenes contra la humanidad, la dignidad y la inteligencia? (Padura 2010: 146).

However, Figes suggests that: “it was good old fashioned nationalism that persuaded Gorky to return home” (Figes 1996: 16). According to Figes, the rise of fascism in Italy at the time also influenced his decision and he writes: “[t]he more disillusioned he became with Fascist Europe the more he was inclined to extol Soviet Russia as a morally superior system”.<sup>45</sup>

In *El hombre que amaba a los perros*, Padura often portrays Trotsky in a sympathetic light and depicts him as being repentant for some of his acts and defensive of others. With regards to his views on artistic censorship, he is seen in the novel as a man who deeply regrets ever defending this position, who blames this regret on the fate of artists such as Maiakovki and Gorky and the ruin of authentic

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<sup>45</sup> The drop in the sales of his books in Europe and the fact that he was treated as a national hero in Russia also convinced Gorky to leave his exile in Italy although he remained divided between Stalin’s supporters and his rightist opponents. Figes notes nonetheless that there is evidence to show that Gorky was later involved in a plot to murder Stalin. It is believed that this led to the death of Gorky’s son and more than likely also to his own death (Figes 1996: 16).

artistic expression in the USSR. The following citation from the novel depicts the result of severe censorship over art in the USSR:

Por aceptar condiciones políticas que él mismo había defendido (a esas alturas mucho lamentaba haberlo hecho), en el presente no se podían leer sin repugnancia y horror los poemas y novelas soviéticas, ni ver las pinturas de los obedientes: el arte en la URSS se había convertido en un pantomima en la que funcionarios armados de pluma o pincel, y vigilados por funcionarios armados de pistolas, solo tenían la posibilidad de glorificar a los grandes jefes geniales” (Padura 2010: 351).

This quote reminds the reader of previous descriptions and criticism of the results of censorship in the Cuban context, not only in *El hombre que amaba a los perros* but also in *La novela de mi vida*. In the latter, the author also refers to the inferior quality of literature which received awards and acclaim because of its content rather than its calibre.

Padura’s Trotsky admires Maiakovki’s integrity and sincerity, which is contrasted in the novel with other artists who use the revolution for personal ambition, without really believing in or understanding the reality of Stalin’s dictatorship. Padura uses the example of French writer and Nobel Prize winner Rolland Romain who: “proclamaba la integridad de Stalin, certificaban los métodos humanitarios de la GPU al obtener las confesiones y hasta desmentían que hubiera represión intelectual en la URRS” (Padura 2010: 258). The support of such widely acclaimed artists for Stalin was probably the best international propaganda the dictator could possibly find. In the Cuban context, the support of international artists has also served a similar purpose for the Castro regime. Gabriel García Márquez is a strong supporter and personal friend of Fidel Castro. His overt admiration for the Castros and the Cuban Revolution is a valuable asset to their international image as he serves as a loyal ambassador for the Revolution. Such support from individuals who live privileged lives can provoke the ire of those who have certain ideologies imposed on them and have no alternative than to live the harsh reality of the often romantic ideals of others. This “solidarity” with the Revolution is criticized in the novel by Iván who only considers real “la solidaridad entre los jodidos”, as the quote below demonstrates:

Dar hasta que duela, y no hacer política ni pretender preeminencias con ese acto, y mucho menos practicar la engañosa filosofía de obligar a los demás a que acepten nuestros conceptos del bien y de la verdad porque (creemos) son los únicos posibles y porque además, deben estarnos agradecidos por lo que les dimos, aun cuando ellos no lo pidieran (Padura 2010: 403).

Trotsky's solution in the novel to Stalin's clueless supporters could easily be applied in the Cuban context to artists such as Márquez, who support the Castros:

Los pondría a vivir con su familia en un departamento de seis metros cuadrados, sin auto, con mala calefacción, obligados a trabajar diez horas por día para vencer en una emulación que no conducía a nada, ganando unos pocos rublos devaluados, comiendo y vistiéndose con lo que les asignasen por la cartilla de racionamiento y sin la menor posibilidad no ya de viajar al extranjero, sino de levantar la voz (Padura 2010: 353).

Perhaps the event that caused most disenchantment amongst the supporters of Stalin was the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact. In late August 1939, Stalin signed a Non-Aggression Pact with Hitler. On the first day of September 1939, Germany invaded Poland and two days later Britain and France declared war on Germany. "The Soviet Union in the meanwhile, was given a relatively free hand by Germany to deal with its near neighbours. It incorporated what had been part of Poland into Ukraine and launched an attack on Finland" (Brown 2009: 91). Brown explains that Stalin did not want to "rule out a future attack by Nazi Germany on the Soviet Union, but thought that there was much to be said for the major capitalist states destroying each other while, in the meantime, the Soviet Union gathered strength for a future conflict" (Brown 2009: 91). By pointing out the barbarities carried out by Stalin, along with his willingness to make pact with the enemy, Padura offers a clear criticism of the Cuban Revolution's support for Stalinism and its decision to emulate Soviet socialism.

Ramón Mercader remembers the consequences of the news of the Pact as a "día amargo" for him and other Stalinist supporters: "rotos todos los esquemas que apuntalaban sus creencias, se enfrentaba a lo inconcebible, pues se había concretado el acercamiento entre Stalin y Hitler que Trotski había anunciado durante años" (Padura 2010: 330). Brown also notes how the Nazi-Soviet Pact "came as a profound shock to tens of thousands of Communists in different continents" (Brown 2009: 91), as it was in direct contrast to Communist International policy, described below:

The Comintern policy up to the moment at which the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was signed was to emphasize, on the one hand, the imperative need to defend the world's 'first socialist state' and, on the other, to combat fascism (Brown 2009: 91).

In the novel, Ramón Mercader learns of the pact from his mother, Caridad, who informs him of the reactions of French communists to the news: "en el Concord y en Rivoli han quemado banderas soviéticas. Mucha gente dice que va a renunciar al

Partido, que se siente traicionada” (Padura 2010: 330). Ramón found out some months later, when he himself was in prison in Mexico for the murder of Trotsky, that communist prisoners in Franco’s Spain had committed suicide over the pact between Stalin and Hitler: “La desilusión resultó tan dolorosa que varios comunistas españoles, presos en las cárceles franquistas, se suicidaron de vergüenza y desencanto al saber del acuerdo: aquella era la última derrota que podían resistir” (Padura 2010: 330).

By the time Fidel Castro announced that the Cuban revolution was socialist, in 1961, and signed trade agreements with the USSR, part of the truth of Stalin’s brutality had already been made public. Soviet leader Khrushchev was the first to uncover Stalin’s crimes in his Secret Speech at the Twentieth Party Conference in 1956. This speech was printed and sent to all communist leaders; several thousand copies were made. It soon came into the hands of the CIA and was subsequently published in the *New York Times* and in Britain by *The Observer* (Brown 2009: 242). Although the speech was not to be published in Russia until 1989, Stalin’s brutality had become public knowledge some years before the Cuban Revolution. Despite the already obvious failures of Leninism-Stalinism, the Castros still chose to base their Revolution on the Soviet model. In the 1970s, Soviet influence on the Revolution’s policies was evident, especially regarding censorship. The harshest years for Cuban artists, the ‘quinquenio gris’, were in the seventies. Around the same time in Europe, changes were being made in European communist parties, especially in Spain and Italy. The leader of the communist party in Spain, Santiago Carrillo, wrote in his book *Eurocommunism and the State* that “the culminating point in winning our independence was the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968” (Brown 2009: 466). Carrillo was referring to his party’s independence from Moscow, after the atrocities of the Prague Spring, when the Soviets sent in Warsaw Pact troops as a result of reforms made within the Czechoslovakian communist party that were not acceptable to the Soviets. The Soviet Union occupied Czechoslovakia from then until 1991. Brown notes that the immediate effect of Czechoslovakian reformism was to quash any reform in Eastern Europe for fear of the military consequences, yet it “was to stimulate some of the most important West European Communist Parties to embrace a more reformist programme and to cease to follow slavishly Soviet ideological guidance” (Brown 2009: 369). This, however, was not the case in Cuba, where

Soviet influence resulted in reduced civil liberties. Brown also notes how Carrillo criticised the lies that had been told about Trotsky as an ‘agent of fascism’, and said “it was high time that Trotsky’s role in the Revolution was presented in an objective way” (Brown 2009: 369). Trotsky, who had been Stalin’s arch enemy, was still considered an enemy to the revolution in Cuba, his followers were imprisoned and his books were censored, as was any available information on Trotsky.

A love for dogs, as the title of the novel indicates, is the most obvious connecting factor for the three main protagonists of this novel; Iván, Leon Trotsky and Ramón Mercader. However, these three men’s lives are also connected involuntarily through decision making that is beyond their control. Padura unites all three characters, making them one in their status as victims and in their shared emotions; love of dogs, fear, and, most importantly, disenchantment. Iván, Trotsky and Ramón Mercader are all presented as victims of corrupted communism. Their stories serve as a means by which Padura can widen his analysis of current disenchantment in La Habana, working back to failures of the USSR and socialism under Stalin, failings well documented before Cuba strategically aligned itself with the USSR after the Cuban Revolution. Their stories serve as a window to show how forced labour camps, censorship and political repression, which he criticizes in earlier novels, are present already in Stalin’s regime. Padura’s sympathetic portrayal of Trotsky’s murderer, as a deceived victim of the USSR, could be interpreted as a means of justifying his own generation’s acceptance and compliance with the Revolution, a theory which is supported by the following quote: “Me pregunté si Iván, más que interrogar al autor de la confesión, no habría estado buscando a través de aquella confesión una respuesta perdida dentro de sí mismo” (Padura 2010: 561). Iván identifies with Mercader in that his generation too was as, Andrés claims in *Paisaje de otoño*, “una generación de mandados” (Padura 1998: 23). At the end of the novel, Padura, through the narrative voice of Dany, clarifies that Iván’s role in the novel is: “representar a la masa, a la multitud condenada al anonimato, y su personaje funciona también como metáfora de una generación y como prosaico resultado de una derrota histórica” (Padura 2010: 569). The novel ends with the crushing of protagonist Iván by his roof caving in on top of him and his dog. This image symbolizes the destruction of the disenchanted city at the hands of the Revolution and the disastrous effects of the failed communist dream. It also

symbolizes the fate of the disenchanted generation, that of Iván and of Padura's previous protagonists, Mario Conde and Fernando Terry.

## Conclusion

This thesis set out to establish how La Habana is represented as a site of disenchantment in the work of Leonardo Padura, through a close reading and analysis of all the published novels by the author to date. Padura's crime fiction, which initially subverted the Cuban style of socialist detective novel, published for twenty years until the Special Period, rather than extolling the Revolution, offers a critique of its mistakes. This criticism becomes more evident in his more recent novels, *La novela de mi vida* and *El hombre que amaba a los perros*, which, while sharing some of the characteristics of crime fiction, can also be classified as historic fiction.

In the *Cuatro estaciones* tetralogy, the author successfully creates personalities which allow for reader identification with the characters and realistic insight into the lives of the protagonists, who serve to exemplify the sentiments of their disenchanted generation, which is also that of the author. Throughout the series, el Conde and his circle of friends give testimony of their frustrations and disillusion with the Revolution. Memory and nostalgia of the early days of the Revolution, when this generation still believed that their sacrifices and hard work would one day lead them to a utopian society, underlines present disenchantment. In the present day narrative of 1989, this group of friends have lost faith in the Revolution and their lives centre around a struggle for everyday survival. Certain spaces within the city evoke el Conde's memories of the past, which are not always nostalgic. Through the detective's perspective, the author denounces how the Revolution has contributed to their disenchantment. The main complaint el Conde and friends share is the lack of freedom and choice they were given. El Conde's best friend, el Flaco Carlos, who is paralysed and wheelchair bound because he was sent to fight in the Angolan civil war, represents this "injured" generation who now suffer the consequences of the Revolution's decisions. Padura's other protagonists, Fernando Terry and Iván, share the same characteristics as el Conde. All three are *habaneros* of the same generation, and are frustrated writers with a history of unsuccessful intimate relationships. The similarities between these characters overlap and serve to highlight the whole of the disenchanted generation.

The persecution of homosexuals in Cuba led to the disenchantment of the homosexual community and those who believed in a free and just society. In *Máscaras*, Padura highlights homophobic attitudes, which were promoted by the Revolution, through el Conde, who considers himself to be a typical “*machista-estalinista*”. Through the character Marqués, Padura pays homage to Virgilio Piñera and all the Cuban intellectuals whose work was censored and who lost their positions simply because of their homosexuality. The author refers to La Habana in this novel as “la ciudad hereje”, which I interpret both in the biblical and the anti-authoritarian sense. Due to the limited amount of goods available in official commercial outlets, most *habaneros* are forced to buy on the black market, converting them into heretics. The Revolution’s opposition to religion, converted socialism into the only faith permissible. Therefore, the heretics of the city are also all those inhabitants who have lost faith and become disenchanting with the Revolution.

The portrayal of the physical city of La Habana and its architecture in *Paisaje de otoño* lends itself to an interpretation of the city as a site of disenchantment. El Conde’s movements around the city trace the inequalities and hypocrisies visible in the city. El Conde visits the different *barrios* that make up the city and prove that the socialist utopia of an egalitarian society was never to be in La Habana. Padura points out how the mansions once owned by the bourgeoisie are now occupied by high ranking officials of the Revolution, who have taken the place of the Cuban oligarchy as “justicia histórica”. This comfort and wealth enjoyed by a small percentage of the population is contrasted with the impoverished existence experienced by the majority. The knowledge that this inequality exists is another factor leading to disenchantment in the city. El Conde believes he is the only inhabitant left who notices the beauty of the derelict buildings, which can be read as an indication of the level of disenchantment of the inhabitants of the city who no longer care about the destruction and decay of La Habana.

A concept that was first touched on in *Máscaras*, the concept of the mask, is further developed in *La neblina del ayer*. This novel can be read as a display of a product of the Special Period on the inhabitants of La Habana; the phenomenon of *la doble moral*. This can be translated as a means of survival in a disenchanted city, where trust and honesty in your fellow *compañero* are rare personal qualities. Padura effectively highlights the changes to the city and the *habaneros* through el Conde,

who fourteen years after his retirement from the force in 1989, feels overwhelmed by changes to areas of the city with which he was once familiar. The new generation differs greatly to el Conde's in that they are not disenchanting because they never believed in the Revolution and because they came of age in the Special Period when extreme hardship allowed no room for political ideology. The product of the Special Period is a generation who show no sense of moral values, a topic also represented in Padura's short story "Mirando al sol" and the film "Malabana".

Parallels between life in the city in the past and the present day narrative are common features between Padura's *La novela de mi vida* and *La neblina del ayer*. This technique allows the author to highlight the repetition of history and to critique the authorities. In *La novela de mi vida*, Padura returns to the origins of Cuba as a nation and offers a vision of La Habana at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Cuba's first patriotic poet, José María Heredia, and present day narrative poet Fernando Terry, share the same fate of being rejected by their country and forced into exile. The disenchantment that is felt by Heredia is mirrored by that of Terry and serves to question Cuban independence and nation building. Heredia was extolled by Martí, whose ideas of a *Cuba libre* have been used by Castro in turn. Nevertheless, one hundred years after the independence of Cuba from Spain, the fate of exile is still a reality, as is limited liberty. Descriptions of gambling, prostitution and criminality in colonial La Habana also reflect the Revolution's failures to eliminate problems inherent to the city. Similarly, in *La neblina del ayer*, the historic period, late 1950s pre-revolutionary La Habana, serves to parallel many of the social problems of the corrupt Batista years with those of the post-Special Period. Nevertheless, in this novel, the historic period is also remembered and romanticized nostalgically as a time of abundance, emphasizing further present disenchantment.

An invitation to study the history of communism and to examine outside influence on the city's disenchantment in *El hombre que amaba a los perros* offers many answers to the disenchanting city. Through his representation of Trotsky, Padura highlights the errors made by the Bolsheviks at the start of the Russian Revolution, such as the suppression of party politics, which led to Stalin's brutal dictatorship. The Castro led Revolution based its ideals on Stalinism, despite the fact that the truth behind his brutal regime had already been made public prior to the Cuban Revolution. Trotsky was still condemned in Cuba and his murderer, Ramón

Mercader, given asylum on the island. Mercader is portrayed as another victim of communism, one that was deceived by the promise of a utopian society. Through Iván, the present day protagonist, Padura offers a summary of errors made by the Revolution and relates how these led to the protagonist's disenchantment. The novel ends on a very negative note with the crushing of Iván by the roof of his house caving in on him, a fate threatened not only at the start of the novel but also to el Conde in *Paisaje de otoño*. The destruction of the disenchanted city has begun and little hope is left for socialism.

This complete analysis of the work of Padura published over almost twenty years makes evident that disenchantment in La Habana is a pervasive and recurring theme in his fiction. I have established that Padura's novels can be read as a negative critique of the Revolution and of how communism was implemented inside and outside of Cuba. His narrative highlights how mistakes made by the Revolution have led to a disenchanted city. This often unattractive representation of the city, which the author depicts, takes the reader to a site of disenchantment rarely described in official discourse. For this reason, Padura's novels can be said to be a social chronicle of life in La Habana both in its historical past and under the Revolution since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989. This representation reflects the hardships and product of the Special Period on the city, which is ultimately one of disenchantment.

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