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# Viewing History through Exile: Music and Nostalgia in Cabrera Infante's *The Lost City*

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In 2006, exiled Cuban novelist Guillermo Cabrera Infante's lifelong dream of bringing the world of pre-Revolutionary Havana nightlife to the silver screen was finally realized in the Andy García film *The Lost City*. The last work before his death in 2005, *The Lost City* represents a filmic version of a world about to end: the culture and music of Cuba before the triumph of the Revolution and the subsequent exile of hundreds of thousands of Cubans. There are striking points of contact between one of Cabrera Infante's first works, the acclaimed 1967 experimental novel *Tres tristes tigres*, and *The Lost City*, his swan song screenplay 16 years in the making, as well as significant points of divergence between the film and his 1974 work *Vista del amanecer en el trópico*. Through an analysis of the use and function of music and nostalgia in these three works, this paper will consider how Cabrera Infante's re-creation of revolutionary Cuba in *The Lost City* reflects, on the one hand, a stylized and musical world in the spirit of *Tres tristes tigres*, but on the other hand, a narrow, Manichean vision of the historical events of the time that is not evident in his previous works. Through this analysis, one can conclude that screenwriter's nostalgic portrayal of Havana in *The Lost City* reveals a marked shift in his perspective on exile and the events of the Cuban Revolution almost 40 years after leaving Cuba.

In 1983, Cuban-born actor Andy García began working on a project that he hoped would be a Cuban version of the classic film *Casablanca*. A friend recommended that he read Cabrera Infante's novel *Tres tristes tigres* for its rich descriptions of Havana nightlife before 1959. After meeting the author in person in London to discuss his project, García decided that he had found his scriptwriter. For his part, Cabrera Infante was no stranger to the film industry. His

writing credits include numerous film reviews for the literary magazine *Carteles*, the films *Vanishing Point* (1971) and *Wonderwall* (1968), as well as having founded the Cinemateca Cubana. Cabrera Infante's first draft of what was to become the script for *The Lost City* came in at a hefty 351 pages in length, roughly three pounds in weight, and as such, it required significant revision and editing to reduce its massive scope. In spite of having a working script and a vision of the film laid out, García encountered numerous obstacles in procuring financing for the film within the traditional Hollywood circles. Finally, in 2004, the producer Frank Mancuso, Jr. secured financing for the film and gave García permission to begin production. With only 35 days to film and a modest budget of less than \$10 million, García began the task of bringing Cabrera Infante's script to life.

The script for *The Lost City* traces the experience of the Fellove family from the final days of the Batista regime through the initial moments of the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. The protagonist is Fico Fellove, the eldest son of the family and owner of a Tropicana-esque nightclub called *El Trópico*.<sup>1</sup> The seemingly apolitical Fico is pulled into the conflict caused by the Revolution through the actions of his brothers. Youngest brother Ricardo joins Fidel's forces in the Sierra Maestra, and Luis, one of the leaders of the rebellious student group *El Directorio Revolucionario*, is killed following a failed attack on Batista and the Presidential Palace. The ideological tensions in the film rise when Fico falls in love with Aurora, Luis' widow. Whereas Fico and his university professor father distrust Fidel's intentions, Aurora, the proclaimed "Widow of the Revolution," allies herself with the *Fidelistas*.<sup>2</sup> As the political situation becomes more unbearable for Fico as a result of the state's seizure of his nightclub, he decides to leave his beloved Havana and seek exile in New York City.

In addition to the political and personal drama of the Fellove family, one of the unifying themes of *The Lost City* is the music and culture of Cuba. For García, the film's genesis stems from his interest in and passion for the music of this island. He explains that, "For me the entire project started with the music of Cuba, and that's where it all began."<sup>3</sup> Throughout the film, music not only re-creates the ambiance of the time period, but it also functions as one of the main characters in its ability to communicate directly with the viewer. García, who has been involved in numerous musical projects over the past decade,<sup>4</sup> explains that, "The lyrics of the music of these songs are always

commenting [. . .] they're really the protagonists of the film [. . .] they're constantly commenting on the situations." For example, in the scene where Fico's *Fidelista* brother Ricardo visits his uncle's tobacco plantation to confiscate it for the state, an old *vitrola* plays the Miguel Matamoros song *Te picó la abeja* as he approaches his uncle's bohío. According to García, in this scene, the *abeja* represents Ricardo, and his uncle Donoso is the unfortunate soul who is about to be "stung" by the Revolution. If the viewer were to recognize and understand the lyrics of this song, he/she would be able to anticipate Ricardo's impending betrayal.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the music in the background effectively foreshadows the action about to take place on screen.

Different genres of Cuban music present in the film enhance particular moments on the screen. First of all, the Afro-Cuban musical pieces, a number of which were arranged by García himself, heighten the dramatic tension during critical points in the film. For example, a musical piece with the Afro-Cuban Abakuá rhythm plays while Leonela, *El Trópico's* prima ballerina, interprets the piece through dance.<sup>6</sup> At the highest point of rhythmic tension, a bomb explodes, tragically killing Leonela. Another major turning point brought to the fore through the film's Afro-Cuban music takes place at an Afro-Cuban social club dance being filmed by Fico. During the dance, one of the *santeras* approaches Aurora, Fico's widowed sister-in-law and love interest, and announces to her that "El tiempo no está con ustedes," forecasting the end of Aurora and Fico's relationship, as well as the end of their way of life in Cuba. Finally, another Afro-Cuban musical number brings the dramatic scene of the attack on the presidential palace to a fever pitch. On the other hand, *bolero* inspired musical pieces move the nostalgic and romantic scenes. For example, the love theme *Si me pudieras querer* by famed Cuban crooner Bola de Nieve echoes the conflicted and melancholic emotions that Fico feels towards Aurora, the unattainable love of his life. Whereas García's use of distinctive Afro-Cuban rhythms enhances the scenes of significant dramatic tension in the film, the romantic *boleros* that play during the scenes with Fico and Aurora reflect a less conflicted and more nostalgic view of Havana. In other words, the Afro-Cuban music, representative of the social and ethnic tensions that underlay the Cuban Revolution, contrasts with the melodic and sentimental *boleros* that are predominant in the soundtrack of the film, suggesting a preference for this idealized vision of Havana.

The music of *The Lost City* also functions on a symbolic level as the focal point of Fico's life. He is the proud owner of the *El Trópico* nightclub and is committed to preserving music as the center of his establishment, rejecting American mobster Meyer Lansky's proposal to set up gambling operations at the club. The shows at *El Trópico* remind the viewer of an idyllic vision of Cuba free from political and social conflict. As such, unlike his brothers, Fico does not take any sides until the Revolution literally comes to his club in the form of Party officials censoring the content of his shows at *El Trópico* and outlawing the use of the saxophone because of its "imperialist" roots. This artistic censorship precipitates Fico's complete disenchantment with the Revolution and eventual decision to exile himself. Finally, having chosen to leave Cuba, one of the few personal items that Fico tries to take with him as an exile is a collection of Cuban records, an attempt to physically bring the musical legacy of his homeland with him.

For Fico, the desire to take Cuba's music with him to New York City represents the challenge of preserving the last piece of his life that the Revolution has not taken from him. Because of this divisive political conflict, Fico loses both of his brothers, his nightclub, as well as Aurora, the love of his life. García explains, "[. . .] ultimately the main metaphor of *The Lost City*, is about finding solace in the one thing that's never betrayed you, which is your culture, or in Fico's case, his music." In the emotional scene where Fico is interrogated at the security checkpoint before boarding his flight into exile, the soldier asks Fico what he is carrying in his bags, to which Fico responds, "Only what I need." The only items the viewer sees in Fico's suitcase are his LPs and a movie camera, concrete symbols of his "need" to bring Cuba's music with him into exile. Similarly, by reopening *El Trópico* in New York City at the end of the film, Fico creates a space that is free from the divisiveness of politics and the Revolution and tries to find solace in music, as García describes. In contrast to the socially conscious *música de protesta* of the post-Revolution period that aimed to give voice to the marginalized and oppressed, the lyrical *boleros* and energetic *cha-cha-chas* played throughout the film wax nostalgic about lost love, and celebrate dance, fun and good times. For Fico as well as for Cabrera Infante and García, the music of *The Lost City* transcends the conflicts of the time and offers a space of comfort and reassurance. Regardless of political affiliations or points

of view on the merits of the Revolution, aside from the scenes with Afro-Cuban music discussed earlier, the film's music opens a door to a non-conflictive, nostalgic world in which the exile can re-create his or her idealized memory of *la patria*.

Similarly, Cabrera Infante's 1967 novel *Tres tristes tigres* has at its core the music and rhythms of Cuba. While on a theoretical level, *TTT* is a text about the shortcomings of the written word, much of its plotline centers on the world of music and nightlife in Havana shortly before the triumph of the Revolution.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the text, there are numerous characters who are themselves musicians and singers, such as La Estrella, Cuba Venegas, Freddy, and Eribó, and much of the word play and word usage in the text is musical in nature. One of the major narrative lines of *TTT*, the interpolated story "Ella cantaba boleros," describes the encounters of the bolero singer La Estrella with the *tigres*. So significant was this portion of *TTT* that in 1996 these interpolated vignettes were published as the separate, cohesive work, *Ella cantaba boleros*. Furthermore, throughout the entirety of the text, the characters regularly describe their experiences and their reality with numerous references to pop culture, film, and music (Souza 87–88). For example, during their nocturnal drive around Havana in the "Bachata" section, Silvestre and Cué discuss the philosophical implications of playing Bach's music at 65 kilometers per hour while cruising along the Malecón hundreds of years after his death. Cué comments:

Bach, Juan Sebastián, el barroco marido fornicante de la reveladora Ana Magdalena, el padre contrapuntístico de su armonioso hijo Carl Friedrich Emmanuel, el ciego de Bonn, el sordo de Lepanto, el manco maravilloso, el autor de ese manual de todo preso espiritual, *El Arte de la fuga*. [. . .] ¿Qué diría el viejo Bacho si supiera que su música viaja por el Malecón de La Habana, en el trópico, a sesenta y cinco kilómetros por hora? ¿Qué le daría más miedo? ¿Qué sería pavoroso para él? ¿El tempo a que viaja sonando el bajo continuo? ¿O el espacio, la distancia hasta donde llegaron sus ondas sonoras organizadas? (Cabrera Infante, *TTT* 294)

*TTT*'s relationship with music is also evidenced in its structure. In a personal letter from Cabrera Infante to the critic Ardis Nelson,

our author comments that *TTT* resembles a rhapsody in its form (54). In a rhapsody, the music for instruments is irregular in its form and allows for a great deal of improvisation. Much like a rhapsody, *TTT* is a text full of these improvisations and irregularities. Nelson furthers the connection between *TTT* and music by dividing the text into the components of a concert. For example, the section called “Los debutantes” can be considered an overture with its varied motifs reoccurring throughout the work, and the “Bachata” section a fugue and counterpoint (57).

The function of music in *TTT* goes beyond merely an attempt to authentically reproduce the context of Cabrera Infante’s Havana. Throughout *TTT*, Cabrera Infante questions the authority of the written word through the text’s emphasis on orality and the spoken word, its unceasing use of word play and puns, and through the deconstruction of language itself. For example, as seen in Cabrera Infante’s *Advertencia* to his reader, “algunas páginas se deben oír mejor que se leen, y no sería mala idea leerlas en voz alta” (9). In other words, through this warning to the reader, Cabrera Infante casts a shadow of doubt on the primacy of reading and writing as opposed to oral communication, and questions whether the spoken word can be accurately transcribed to the written form. There are numerous examples of the use of orality throughout *TTT*, including the prolific oral wordplay of the character of Bustrófedon as well as the transcription of the Cuban accent and speech patterns into the written word of the text. Bustrófedon not only argues that literature should be written in non-traditional places, such as on bathroom walls, but also written in the air, that is, in the manner of a literature of the spoken word. He explains to his friend Códac, “[. . .] la otra literatura hay que escribirla en el aire, queriendo decir que había que hacerla hablando, digo yo, o si quieres alguna clase de posteridad, la grabas, así, y luego la borras así (haciendo las dos cosas ese día, menos con las muestras pasadas) y todos contentos” (257–58). Critic Alfred MacAdam argues that *TTT* demonstrates that the written sign/written word cannot fully capture or retain the meaning of the spoken word, “*Tres tristes tigres* es una pirámide verbal, la representación sistemática de la incapacidad del signo escrito de retener la palabra hablada” (206). By emphasizing alternative modes of communication, in this case orality and music, Cabrera Infante further undermines the authority of the written word as the principal means of communication and literature as the primary method of artistic expression.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, through music's function as a character and as an alternative method of expression, *The Lost City* questions the primacy of the visual medium, the image, as well as the spoken word, namely dialogue, as the most important vehicles for communication within a film. For example, *The Lost City's* music makes a direct emotive connection with the audience of the film. Cabrera Infante and García were keenly aware of one of the significant segments of the audience for this film: the Cuban exile community. The music of *The Lost City* taps into the memory banks of this specific group of viewers in order to enhance the action on screen. The film's authentic music also awakens a sense of nostalgia that fictitious dialogues between characters could never summon. Cultural studies critic David Shumway explains that film soundtracks using previously recorded music rely on the audience's familiarity with the music in order to produce an emotive response (36–37).<sup>9</sup> Upon hearing popular music of the times, a direct link is made between the exiled viewer and the actions on screen because it is the same music to which he or she would listen at that historical moment in that specific space.

Whereas the use of music as an alternative means of communication in *The Lost City* is consistent with Cabrera Infante's earlier works, the function of nostalgia in the film demonstrates a significant evolution in his vision of the recounting of historical events, including the Revolution. On the one hand, with its lively and optimistic vision of Havana just before the Revolution, *TTT* nostalgically captures the final days of a world that was about to change forever. Cabrera Infante's 1974 work *Vista del amanecer en el trópico*, a collection of vignettes tracing Cuba's troubled history, problematizes the process of historical recollection through its multifaceted presentation of similar historical events and questionable sources. While the nostalgic, idealized vision of Havana nightlife is present in both *TTT* and *The Lost City*, Cabrera Infante's film presents an absolutist, moralistic vision of history with none of the ambiguity of *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* or the light-heartedness of *TTT*.

Completed over 40 years after Cabrera Infante's exile from Cuba, *The Lost City* sets a nostalgic tone and mood through the music of the initial frames of the film. The first scene opens with the image of famed trumpeter Chocolate Armenteros sounding out the Virgilio Martí tune *Cuba Linda*. Those familiar with the song will immediately recall its lyrics: "Cuba linda de mi vida / Cuba linda siempre te



recordaré / Yo quisiera verte ahora / Como la primera vez [. . .]” The stage is set for an experience of memory, remembrance, and nostalgia, a yearning for a place that no longer exists. Projected through the lens of nostalgia, the world of late 1950s Havana becomes distorted by the exile’s need to re-create it in an idealized way. This idealized vision is like seeing Havana “por primera vez.”<sup>10</sup> Throughout the film, the character of Fico seems to sense that the world of Havana as he knows it is about to change forever. For example, on numerous occasions he takes out his home movie camera in order to film music and dance numbers as well as romantic moments he shares with Aurora at the beach. Whereas the scenes relating to the brothers Ricardo and Luis illustrate the political upheaval happening in Havana in the final days of the Revolution, Fico’s plot line and his love interest in Aurora allow Cabrera Infante to wax nostalgic about Havana’s nightlife and social scene. One such occasion is when Fico’s mother asks him to take Aurora out so that she can distract herself from mourning the death of Luis. In a sporty red convertible, Fico and Aurora cruise the streets of Havana and partake of the rhythms and music of the city. One of the crucial stops during their foray is a chance to watch the legendary Benny Moré perform live. These scenes function not only to move the love story plotline along, but they also heighten the sense of foreboding and melancholy of a world that is about to disappear. Jameson argues that these idealized scenes are characteristic of the “nostalgia film:”

Nostalgia film [. . .] seeks to generate images and simulacra of the past, thereby—in a social situation in which genuine historicity or class traditions have become enfeebled—producing something like a pseudopast for consumption as a compensation and a substitute for, but also a displacement of, that different kind of past which has (along with active visions of the future) been a necessary component for groups of people in other situations in the projection of their praxis and the energizing of their collective project (“On Magic Realism in Film” 310).<sup>11</sup>

As with the use of music in the film, the “pseudopast” portrayal of Havana through Fico’s life in *The Lost City* reflects a nostalgia for a simpler time free from the political and social conflicts of the day.

This same nostalgic presentation of the final moments of pre-Revolutionary Havana can be seen throughout *TTT*. Cabrera Infante began writing the text while he was already outside of Cuba in 1961. During this time as a cultural attaché in Brussels, as he was writing *TTT* Cabrera Infante found himself homesick and nostalgic for the Cuba he left behind (Souza 77). Cabrera Infante explains how being in Brussels inspired his writing: “Fue allí donde de veras se gestó *Tres tristes tigres*. No podía atajar el alud de memorias que me venían cada noche impidiéndome dormir y para exorcizarlas comencé a escribir toda esa primera parte del libro que se llama ‘Los debutantes’. [. . .]” (“Memoria Plural” 1087). Critic Raymond Souza notes that the “Bachata” section was in fact written during Cabrera Infante’s final trip to Havana in 1965 due to the death of his mother, thus explaining the sense of nostalgia and loss that permeates that particular section (84). Ardis Nelson argues that *TTT* represents a snapshot of Havana in the 1950s and that Cabrera Infante is trying to preserve, through his writing, a world that is about to disappear because of the historical forces at work in Cuba. As a result of this realization, Cabrera Infante tries to immortalize this world’s language, characters, problems and dreams through his fiction (39). In a 1977 interview with Danubio Torres Fierro, Cabrera Infante explains how one of his motivations for writing *TTT* was to continue the preservation of Havana nightlife that his brother’s controversial film “P.M.” had begun before it was censored by the Castro regime:

La literatura está hecha de nostalgia, lo sabemos, pero si al principio me atacó una suerte de manía ecológica, de preservar la fauna nocturna que tan bien había retratado *P.M.* y que el juicio de la Biblioteca Nacional demostró que estaba condenada a desaparecer, en Bruselas hubo un ataque nostálgico por el hábitat de esa fauna, que es el *genius loci* del libro—es decir, La Habana y concretamente La Habana de noche, porque en el libro se recogen muchas noches que se quieren fundir en una sola, larga noche— (“Memoria Plural” 1087–88).

Much like a naturalist trying to preserve an endangered species and its habitat, Cabrera Infante attempts to rescue the Havana of his imagination and memory through the literary and filmic media. With

the passage of time, the sense of urgency for the exile to immortalize his or her lost world (or lost city) becomes more pronounced. Cabrera Infante comments that the inspiration for *TTT* resulted from each passing year away from Cuba, “No me perjudica la lejanía de Cuba sino que me beneficia: allí nunca hubiera podido escribir *TTT*, ni siquiera en La Habana relativamente libre de 1959. Me hacía falta no sólo la lejanía, sino la convicción de que esa luz de la vela estaba apagada, que solamente por la literatura podría recobrar ese pasado” (“Memoria Plural” 1095).

Similarly, in *The Lost City*, this nostalgia for Havana grows stronger through Fico’s experiences. Even before leaving Cuba, Fico lives in the memories of his past life through the items he carries with him. During the same scene where the soldier who inspects Fico’s belongings finds his collection of records, he also notices a swizzle stick from *El Trópico* in Fico’s pocket and comments: “You worms are strange. Not yet gone, and you are already carrying souvenirs. You can’t take Cuba with you, you know?” This is exactly what Fico attempts to do, take Cuba with him and transplant it to New York City. As soon as he arrives in New York, Fico sets up his projector in his cramped hotel room and watches his home movies with sadness and longing. What is questionable about this scene is that like most exiles who left Cuba soon after the triumph of the Revolution, Fico would probably have imagined Fidel’s rule to be temporary and that he would soon return home to Cuba. In other words, at the moment of his departure, Fico does not really know that he is leaving Cuba forever. Furthermore, his New York experience consists of staying in his hotel room watching home movies of Cuba, listening to records, and later going to work washing dishes at Victor’s Café, an elegant Cuban restaurant. The only occasions when the viewer sees Fico outside in New York is when he visits the statue of José Martí in Central Park and when he dines with the character of The Writer at *El Dragón Rojo*, a Cuban-Chinese restaurant. In other words, while in exile Fico tries to find solace in the Cuban elements already in New York. It would seem that by immediately making Fico a prisoner of nostalgia, Cabrera Infante imparts his own vision of exile, that of the need to re-create the lost city of Havana, almost 40 years after leaving Cuba in 1965.

Fico’s final sublimation into the world of nostalgia takes form at the end of the film. As the tune “Cuba Linda” plays for a final time and García’s voiceover reads from Martí’s *Versos sencillos*, Fico literally

steps into the frame of his home movies, clammers up the staircase of what appears to be a nightclub, and joins the *comparsa* of musicians and dancers at the top of the staircase. Then screen titles reveal that Fico soon opened a New York version of his nightclub *El Trópico*, thus completing the return to his previous life, distant from Cuba only in geographic distance. In other words, the experience of exile leads Fico to duplicate his Cuban life in New York exactly as it was before he left Havana, save for the love of Aurora, who had allied herself with the Revolution. Fico's longing to re-create Havana through his new cabaret can be seen in a conversation with The Writer at Victor's Café. The Writer presents Fico with a miniature Statue of Liberty and explains to him, "This pretty lady's torch is Aladdin's lamp, a Latin's lamp. And it will grant any wish in your life," to which Fico responds, "I wish I could relive it." The Writer declares, "You can by rebuilding it." There are two interesting dynamics at work in this exchange. First of all, Fico does not wish to go back to Cuba and continue on with his life there, but rather he desires to relive that previous life. In other words, the experience of exile instills in him a desire to live in the past and not consider any future possibilities. Secondly, The Writer, who is the on-screen embodiment of Cabrera Infante himself, declares that Fico can indeed fulfill his wishes and relive the past by building a New York version of *El Trópico*. This desire to re-create the lost world of Cuba is most prevalent in the exile enclave of Miami. Cuban writer and literary critic Gustavo Pérez Firmat's nostalgic memoir of growing up in Miami explains:

El exiliado vive de la sustitución, se nutre de lo que le falta. Obligados a abandonar La Habana, nos construimos una copia en Miami. Ante las catástrofes de la historia, el remedio es el remedio. [. . .] Como Don Quijote, todo exiliado es un apóstol de la imaginación, alguien que le da la espalda a la realidad para crearse un mundo nuevo. No en balde el restaurante más popular de La Pequeña Habana es el Versailles, una casa de espejos y espíritus. Cercado de imágenes, rodeado de reflejos, el exiliado no distingue entre el original y el simulacro, entre el oasis y el espejismo.<sup>12</sup> (58)

Through his quixotic imagination, Fico's re-creation of *El Trópico* functions as a copy of his former life in Havana that he cannot

distinguish from the New York version. At the end of the film, the viewer of *The Lost City* does not know if Fico ever realizes that the simulacrum can never truly duplicate the world he left behind, or if he so fully believes the simulacrum that it becomes, in effect, real for him.

The nostalgic vision of Havana presented by Cabrera Infante in *The Lost City* is problematic when one examines with greater attention how time, distance and nostalgia have shifted Cabrera Infante's view of the movement of history. Whereas he once viewed the process of preserving history as multidimensional and complex, as seen in *Vista del amanecer en el trópico*, *The Lost City* offers the viewer a moralistic and unilateral view of these historical events. For example, the presentation of the complexities of the Revolution in the film does well in depicting the excesses of the Batista regime as well as the revolutionary struggles beyond Fidel's *Movimiento 26 de Julio*. However, throughout the film Cabrera Infante's script allows for very little engagement or dialogue with the values and objectives of Fidel's movement. For example, when Ricardo Fellove, the estranged *guerrillero*, arrives at his uncle's funeral, there is no discussion or dialogue with the family, but rather a unidirectional sermon delivered by his father, and a slap in the face from his brother Fico. Ricardo's response is not to try to reconcile these conflicting belief systems, but rather in the Manichean structure presented by Cabrera Infante, the only recourse for this wayward *Fidelista* is suicide.

The other Fellove family member who comes under the spell of Fidel's revolution, and Cabrera Infante's scorn, is Aurora. Although she does not kill herself for realizing the errors of her ways, she is flatly rejected by Fico, who consciously chooses the cruel loneliness of exile over compromising his political ideals in order to continue his relationship with Aurora. In other words, our hero Fico would rather be justified but heartbroken than look for a middle ground and a life of happiness with Aurora. During their meeting in New York City, Fico tells Aurora that returning from exile in order to be able to love her in Cuba would be, "Too big of a price to pay." Fico's exile experience has transformed into a personal crusade to preserve the memory and culture of Havana. He explains to Aurora, "I don't have a loyalty to a lost cause. But I do have a loyalty to a lost city, and that's my cause and my curse." Fico's new cause and curse cannot be compromised by continuing his relationship with a *Fidelista*. Although

he proclaims his eternal love for Aurora, Fico's unilateral solution is for Aurora to join him in exile.

On the other hand, *TTT*, written only a few years after Cabrera Infante's exile, is notably less moralistic with regards to its view of the Revolution. When Arsenio Cué, one of the *tigres*, decides to join Fidel's rebels in the Sierra Maestra, rather than being ostracized from his family, he is merely mocked by his friends for this decision (Swanson 44):

- Me voy al Sierra.
- Es muy temprano para la noche y muy tarde para la madrugada. No va a estar abierto.
- A la Sierra, no al Sierra.
- ¿A Nicanor del Campo ahora?
- No, coño, me voy al monte. Me alzo. Me hago guerrillero.
- ¡Qué!
- Que me uno a Fiel, a Fidel.
- Estás borracho hermano. (Cabrera Infante *TTT* 347)

Whereas in *TTT* a decision to join the rebels is rejected by means of humor and *choteo*, in *The Lost City* there is little humor in the Fellove family's reaction to Ricardo and Aurora's allegiance to Fidel. While in *TTT* Cabrera Infante leaves it up to the reader as to how to interpret Cué's decision, in *The Lost City* there is not any room for interpretation: the actions of Ricardo and Aurora are acts of betrayal that cannot be forgiven. These differing views on the Revolution can be explained by Cabrera Infante's extensive time in exile as well as by the overall serious tone of *The Lost City* in comparison to the light-hearted and humorous *TTT*. Also, unlike Fico's exile experience of wanting to take pieces of Havana with him and to re-create Cuban cabarets on foreign soil, the characters in *TTT* are not facing the imminent threat of exile, even though the reader is aware that the *tigres'* world of late 1950s Havana nightlife is about to end. Furthermore, there is no desire to relive the past or to try to stop the forward progress of history, but rather only a desire to preserve the nocturnal fauna through the written text.

In contrast to the Manichean view of the events of the Cuban Revolution seen in *The Lost City*, Cabrera Infante's 1974 work *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* offers a more problematized and complex

vision of history as well as the role of the reader/viewer in interpreting historical events. The text itself, a series of vignettes describing the sweeping history of Cuba, forces the reader to consider a number of alternative perspectives on the history of the island. As such, the role of the writer/narrator/historian as omniscient, infallible purveyor of truth and information is cast into doubt. Souza explains that the structure of *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* resembles that of a comic strip, and as a result, the reader must play an active role in the construction of meaning, “Individual frames exist as singular entities, but each has more meaning when associated with others—this segmentation is essential to the organization of a comic strip and to Cabrera Infante’s text. In both cases, it is left to the reader to establish connections between the separate units and to form a story, to transform the segments into a cohesive whole” (124). In other words, the creation of historical meaning does not lie solely with the narrator, but rather the reader must also participate in this process.

In addition to having a structure that puts the onus of interpretation on the reader, the role of the narrator in *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* also casts doubt on the text’s ability to accurately represent the events of history. Alvarez Borland’s study of Cabrera Infante and the Cuban literature of exile examines this issue of the problematic narrator in *Vista del amanecer en el trópico*, “[. . .] the voice of the fictional historian in this text embodies a paradoxical stance that challenges the veracity of historical language because it offers no assurance of truth while at the same time it explores aesthetic and philosophical issues of perception and meaning” (30). Whereas the view of the historical events surrounding *The Lost City* presented through the lens of the filmic narrative may consider itself to be an alternative vision to the official discourse of the revolutionary government, in effect it presents itself as reliable and objective. However, years before the creation of *The Lost City*, Cabrera Infante himself questioned if any historical account could be truly objective. Alvarez Borland explains,

While fiction (in this text represented by either “legend” or “in reality”) is not always reliable, history is not entirely objective, because it is a story told from only one of many possible perspectives. History, for Cabrera Infante, is subjective and moldable, and can be used to serve one’s own purposes. [. . .] The voice of the anonymous historian,

however, has no more authority over the facts than other versions and becomes instead a critique of the historical process by telling the perceptive reader that this version, like the others, is only one of the many possible ones that can be offered as true to the reader. (34)

*The Lost City*'s treatment of the events of the Revolution and the ostracism of the two *Fidelista* characters, Ricardo through his suicide and Aurora through Fico's rejection of her love, demonstrate that history for Cabrera Infante is no longer quite so "subjective and moldable" and that, as a result, he no longer offers numerous possible versions of history for the reader and/or viewer to consider. This shift in perspective from history as questionable and multifaceted to uniform and absolute results from the passing of years in exile for Cabrera Infante. Whereas *TTT* and *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* were written in the years immediately following the Revolution, *The Lost City* did not begin to take shape until over 30 years after the triumph of Fidel.<sup>13</sup> Having spent decades in exile in London, Cabrera Infante's view of exile and of the historical events surrounding his exile would naturally change. As with most Cuban exiles, his initial reaction would have been to consider exile a temporary situation with the hope of soon returning to a democratic Cuba. However, as the Castro regime consolidated its position and survived the numerous attempts against it, Cabrera Infante and the Cuban exile came to view exile as a more permanent condition and its retrospective view of the events of the Revolution became more entrenched and absolutist.

In conclusion, as we have seen, music and nostalgia play a critical role in the construction of Cabrera Infante's last work, *The Lost City*. Completed nearly forty years after his exile from Cuba and the creation of *TTT* and *Vista del amanecer en el trópico*, Cabrera Infante's film version of the last days of Havana before the dawn of the Revolution becomes mired in idyllic, nostalgic visions of music and nightlife, a place that can only continue to exist in the collective memory of the exile community. The music of the era functions as both an alternative narrative voice in the film, and as a safe haven for the creation of an idealized *patria* free from the political discussions, family betrayal, or social conflict of the times. Secondly, through his Manichean presentation of the events of the Revolution and its aftermath for the Fellove family, Cabrera Infante demonstrates



his evolution from preservationist of the world of Havana nightlife (*TTT*) and questioner of the absolute truth and veracity of historical accounts (*Vista del amanecer en el trópico*), to a more sharply defined view of history and exile. Having spent more years in exile than in Cuba itself, Cabrera Infante's work reflects the permanence of the exile experience as well as the specific consequences of the Revolution. Nonetheless, this last work in exile clearly demonstrates his dedication to the preservation of a lost time and place, just as Fico does through his declaration, "But I do have a loyalty to a lost city, and that's my cause and my curse."

## Notes

1. García states that he originally wanted to name the club *Tropicana*, but because of the difficulties presented by procuring copyright for the use of the name, he decided to change the name to *El Trópico*.

2. With the term *Fidelista*, I am referring to members of Fidel Castro's *Movimiento 26 de Julio*.

3. All direct quotes from García come from *The Making of The Lost City*, DVD special feature, or from the director's commentary DVD feature.

4. For example, the music of renowned Afro-Cuban musician and composer Israel "Cachao" López, the HBO film *For Love or Country: The Arturo Sandoval Story*, in addition to writing original music for *The Lost City*.

5. Lyrics for this song include the refrain, "Cachita, muchacha / Te picó la abeja / Cachita, no llores / Te picó la abeja."

6. Abakuá tradition traces back to the Calabar area of West Africa, near the border of Cameroon and Nigeria. Slaves from this area set up mutual-aid societies, known as Abakuá secret societies, in Havana, Matanzas and Cárdenas. The music of their special ceremonies included several styles of drums, accompanied by a cowbell, sticks, and rattles (Rodríguez 826).

7. Throughout this paper, I will be referring to Cabrera Infante's novel *Tres tristes tigres* with the abbreviation *TTT*.

8. For more on the destabilizing effect of orality in literature, see Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1988) and Carlos Pacheco's *La comarca oral: la ficcionalización de la oralidad cultural en la narrativa latinoamericana contemporánea* (1992).

9. Although Shumway's article specifically analyzes the role of rock 'n' roll sound tracks in nostalgia films, the parallels between the music of Cuba in the late 1950s and the rock 'n' roll music of the films he discusses are apparent.

10. The experience of exile was one of the principle motivating factors for producer/director/actor Andy García in this project. According to García, “As an exile, that profound nostalgia that I think all exiles feel promoted in me a necessity to dig into the country which I came from, historically, culturally, and, specifically, musically.”

11. For more on Jameson’s discussion of “nostalgia film,” see *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991).

12. Although Pérez Firmat’s work *El año que viene estamos en Cuba* describes the exile experience of Cubans in Miami during his adolescence in the 1970s, there are numerous parallels between his text and Fico’s experiences in New York. One must keep in mind also that, whereas most of Cabrera Infante’s exile took place in London as an adult, García grew up in the Cuban communities of South Florida and is a contemporary of Pérez Firmat.

13. Although *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* was not published until 1974, Cabrera Infante had begun writing these vignettes in the early 60s, some of which later became portions of *TTT*.

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