

CASAL'S CUBAN COUNTERPOINT OF ART AND REALITY*

Ivan A. Schulman
University of Florida

It has been traditional to treat the life and art of Julián del Casal and José Martí as antithetical statements.

Si Martí encarna entre nosotros las nupcias del espíritu con la realidad, con la naturaleza y con la tierra misma, Julián del Casal (1863–93) significa todo lo contrario. Su incapacidad radical para asumir la realidad, que unas veces interpreta como signo de “idealismo,” de pureza y anhelo inconciliables con lo mezquino de la circunstancia, y otras, las más, como fatal “impotencia” de su ser, se resuelve en un estado de ánimo dominante: el hastío.¹

These two central figures of Cuban Modernism were born only ten years apart, inherited a common legacy of romantic idealism, but cultivated a literature and life style whose diversity is not unrelated to the nature and substance of their separate concepts of man, history, and Cuban colonial society. Martí's aspirations for perfection and beauty are inseparable from the revolutionary struggle for a free Cuba whose redemption his painful exile and his fervent Americanism permitted him to perceive with a clarity that his uninterrupted residence in the colony might have denied him. Casal, on the other hand, lacking Martí's capacity for sacrifice, irrevocably tied—physically—to the spectacle of “nuestros desastres políticos, . . . nuestras tristezas incurables y nuestra decadencia material,”² fell victim to the contradictions of the colony and sought brief, fitful periods of reprieve in what might be regarded as the *internal* equivalent of the *dynamic motif* embodied in Martí's exile: A scanning of infinite and frigid horizons in search of the meaning of man, his destiny, and the divine spirit. This process, which we should prefer to characterize as one of *internal displacement*, has resulted in Casal's identification as a dreamer, an escapist, a victim of neuroses and aberrations in the style of the French decadents, or, at best, a *poseur par excellence* closer to Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset, Gustave Moreau, or Baudelaire than to his native Cuba.

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Many of Casal's values with respect to art and reality are shared by his generation of the early Modernist period (1875–1918). His exotic fantasies, his yearning for delicate, aesthetic art forms, his reverence for French models are undeniably related to a social and cultural crisis whose Europeanized writers often preferred imagined to real landscapes or the vagaries of historical and mythic experiences to the exigencies of the domestic scene. Casal's own acid comments easily lead—and perhaps mislead us—in this very direction: “Que no vean ya mis ojos /la horrible Realidad que me contrasta” (“Tras una enfermedad”); “Cualquiera [leyenda], por vulgar que sea, es preferible a la realidad” (*Prosas*, 2:101); “sólo guardo en lo interior del alma/la nostalgia infinita de otro mundo” (“Esquivez”). This doleful rejection of reality alternates with a fin-de-siècle tedium whose motifs may be Baudelairian, but whose roots, we feel, are Cuban: “En mi alma desolada siento, /el hastío glacial de la existencia/ y el horror infinito de la muerte” (“Paisaje espiritual”).

But, between the poles of a repugnant, material reality and an unattainable visionary idealism lies not only Casal's state of resolved *hastío*, which Vitier so cogently identifies as a middle ground, but an even more significant search for infinity and distance whose temporal and spatial dimensions suggest the philosophic agonizing of his age.

A TELESCOPIC STRUCTURE

Concepts of reality, irreality, escapism, and oneirism lie at the center of the motivational forces of Casal's art. These should be understood not in their most literal or obvious sense, but in the context of the conflicts of the individual artist with his milieu. Casal's revulsion for Cuban society “no lo sitúa necesariamente entre los frustrados y evadidos. . . . Todo su exotismo es desde luego un modo de ocultarse, . . . pero ocultarse no es huir, sino replantear la batalla en otro terreno.”³

Even a superficial reading of Casal's works, particularly his verse, reveals an attraction for counterposed or oppositional imagistic structures whose two conflicting spatial levels constitute a metaphorical statement, devoid of allegorical implications,⁴ on the nature of reality. These anti-thetical structures are based upon a nucleus of negative and positive signs. At the negative pole are such images as *pantano*, *abismo*, *miasma*, *cieno*, *lodazal*, *fango*. These are contrasted with elevational or ideal images such as *cima*, *mariposa*, *perfume*, *lirio*, or *rosa*, which suggest a second, superior reality. The two worlds may be juxtaposed in successive lines:

Así mi ensueño, pájaro canoro
de níveas plumas y rosado pico,
al querer en el mundo hallar cabida,

encontró de lo real los muros de oro
 y deshecho, cual frágil abanico,
 cayó entre el fango inmundo.
 ("Mi ensueño")

Or, they may be arranged strophically with a contrasting enumerative technique as in "Cuerpo y alma." Only occasionally does Casal attempt a union of the two strata of reality either as an indication of conflict resolution or as a harmonious synthesis in the style of the prevailing revival of Pythagorean philosophy. Equally lacking are the moral overtones of transformational structures in which movement from lower to higher spheres goes beyond Neoplatonic overviews and suggests a dynamic restructuring of the universe of the variety Martí embodied in similar metaphorical constructs.

In view of the strain of literary Romanticism which permeates Casal's work, we might simply attempt to relate these antithetical structures to the Romantics' dualistic vision of the forces of the universe, but only as a "conciencia *dramáticamente* alienada del mundo, y, por ende, una búsqueda de principios reconfortantes, ya sean individuales o colectivos, que bloqueen la pungente y conturbadora realidad social, económica, cultural, ideológica."⁵ Or, guided by Monner Sans's remarks, we might simply consider them a reflection of Baudelaire's aesthetics,⁶ particularly of the forces of heaven and hell: "Il y a dans tout homme, à toute heure, deux postulations simultanées, l'une vers Dieu, l'autre vers Satan. L'invocation à Dieu, ou spiritualité, est un désir de monter en grade; celle de Satan, ou animalité, est un joie de descendre."⁷ Finally, these polar forms might be associated with universal concepts of realism and idealism.⁸

While all of these alternatives seem valid, the specific nature of Casal's polar structures, that is, their nontransformational, nonsynthetic substance suggests implications that we feel lead to a reconsideration of Casal as the Cuban⁹ antithesis of Martí's dynamic, social vision.

If, as has been so often indicated, Casal were merely a dreamer or escapist, how do we explain his predilection for dual realities with contrapuntally arranged motifs. Instead of a single, fancied, escapist structure, Casal's polarities embody what Mario Praz has termed a *telescopic structure*, one in which the realities of the more immediate world as well as those of another more perfect sphere are combined in the same canvas or poem. In contrast with the telescopic structure, Praz speaks of one characterized by an "exoticism which represents to itself as actually present the land of the heart's desire."¹⁰ The fact that Casal chose the telescopic or dualistic perspective is, in our view, a stylistic signal indicative of an overwhelming attachment to the irritating, ever-present realities of a moribund culture in whose grip he languished.

Our conviction that the spatial dynamics of the telescopic structures are tied to a particular view of social, political, and cultural realities is supported by discursive statements and their associated signs, especially in the abundant prose now available in the centenary edition.¹¹ In his collected prose, Casal's counterpoint of art and reality is presented in numerous contexts, exemplified by the following sharp antithetical impression:

Al salir del estudio [del pintor Collazos], para entrar de nuevo en el mundo, el ánimo se siente dolorosamente impresionado por la realidad. Tal parece que hemos descendido, desde un palacio italiano, poblado de maravillas artísticas, hasta un subterráneo, lóbrego y húmedo, donde resuenan lamentaciones, de esos que se contemplan en las aguas fuertes de Paranése [sic]. Pero el ánimo pronto se consuela, con el recuerdo de lo que ha visto y de lo que ha admirado, porque el arte proporciona todos los goces . . . ¡hasta el de olvidar! (*Prosas*, 1:153)

Two spatial levels point to two realities, while the opiating function of art as recalled experience serves to compensate for a lower stratum (material reality) and moves us to a higher realm (artistic reality). The imagery of shade, cavern, and humidity has a specificity not always apparent in the verse.¹² And, the summoning of Piranesi-like visions to describe Cuba's social malaise acquires an imagistic fixity in this and other antithetically structured passages.

Even Parnassian aesthetics can reveal social significance. Its objects of luxury (*seda, oropeles*), which in Casal's verse so often signify ideal beauty, in the passage that follows is a veneer incapable of screening abject misery (*hedor purulento, llagas*). A double reality is thus symbolically represented by contrasted paired images: *Rincón azul de Paraíso x lóbrego Infierno*: "Y es que la miseria ha penetrado en el seno de los hogares cubanos, sin que se la pueda expulsar de ellos. Aunque se la oculte, bajo manto de seda, recamado de oropeles, en el último rincón de la casa, se perciben el eco de sus gemidos y el hedor purulento de sus llagas. . . . No vemos siquiera un rincón azul de Paraíso, desde el lóbrego Infierno en que vivimos sepultados" (*Prosas*, 2:27). Casal's anguish, like Bonifacio Byrne's, was a triple martyrdom "de su destino, de su aspiraciones y de su medio social" (*Prosas*, 1:274).

AN ESTHETE'S VIEW OF SOCIETY¹³

The poet's attachment to his environment is evident not only in his preference for a dualistic rather than an oneiric vision, but, on a discursive level, in his "hovering" or morose descriptions of Cuban society. And these, in turn, constitute the substance that generates the creative structures and images mistakenly identified, on an absolute basis, with the artist as dreamer or escapist.

Casal's social analyses admittedly fall short of the profundity of Martí's; they lack a grasp of the roots of political problems. It is precisely because he is caught and limited by a colonial dependence that Casal's vision is shallow and riddled with oversights and inconsistencies. He rejected the Spanish presence in Cuba and was openly anti-yanqui: "Por más que el espectáculo [de los payasos norteamericanos] me aburrió, me repugnó y casi me enfermó como aburre, repugna y enferma a los que tienen un poco de gusto artístico todo lo que procede del pueblo norteamericano, de ese pueblo que dejó morir a Edgard Poe, en la miseria, que compra las obras de los grandes artistas, no para venerarlas, sino para especular con ellas" (*Prosas*, 2:60). But it is not the problem of a double colonial dependence created by the growing American influence within the older Spanish colonial system¹⁴ that disturbs Casal. He sees its effects without being concerned about its full implications. Thus, his distrust of the United States is based on its cultural pharisaism. His grasp of the fundamental meaning of the Modernist crisis is not more incisive. And yet, the general nature of the crisis and his individual anguish with respect to it are not absent. But, again, it is the vision of the artist that prevails; Casal speaks not of capitalist or neocolonial structures, but rather of a mercantilist spirit, "el mercantilismo, que se dilata como lepra asquerosa por nuestro cuerpo social" (*Prosas*, 1:151). A broadening of his critique brings him not to the specifics of political or economic problems but to an ideological quandary whose nature he presents by means of a dualistic structuring:

En ningún final de siglo más que en el nuestro se han visto tantas cosas contradictorias e inesperadas. De ahí ha nacido en los espíritus una incertidumbre que cada día reviste caracteres más alarmantes. El análisis nos ha hecho comprender que, después de tantos siglos, no es posible determinar a punto fijo el progreso de la humanidad. Más bien se puede afirmar que ha retrocedido, porque ha amado muchas cosas que hoy sólo puede odiar. Tanto desespera ese estado de ánimo que muchos de los seres que lo experimentan se despeñan por los riscos de la extravagancia, no por el afán de llamar la atención, sino por olvidarse de que no pueden creer en nada, pues la verdad de hoy es la mentira de mañana, y porque sienten al mismo tiempo la necesidad imperiosa de albergar en su alma alguna creencia.

Sabiendo que ese estado no se puede prolongar, porque nos hace la vida insostenible, se cree vagamente que el remedio será descubierto en la década que resta de [sic] siglo; pero como se teme también que las muchedumbres hambrientas promuevan un gran cataclismo social, la incertidumbre de que he hablado, o sea la *tristeza fin de siglo*, se va introduciendo, como los microbios de una epidemia, en todos los espíritus, no sólo de Europa, sino de todos los países civilizados. (*Prosas*, 3:18)

In spite of his limited capacity for social analysis, Casal is aware of a rising popular rebellion in European industrialized states and its conceivable

reverberations in Cuba. And it is obvious he is also cognizant of the vertiginous changes of his times that have left man without firm ideological or spiritual supports, or, in fact, a standard by which to measure the direction of his progress. Ideological confusion leads to exacerbated materialism. The evil is both social and moral; Cuba is passing through what in Casal's view is a "noche moral": "A pesar del profundo escepticismo, de las numerosas aberraciones y de la falta de sentido moral que vienen mirando, como llagas purulentas, el seno lacerado de nuestra sociedad; todavía se encuentran, en la Habana, almas privilegiadas que han logrado preservarse del contagio y conservar su pureza virginal" (*Prosas*, 2:40–41). The dual levels of reality perceived by this nineteenth-century moralist expose his social roots. His specifically moral perspective is elucidated in the antithetical imagery identified with his hovering over and contemplating a corrupt environment:

Son semejantes [estas almas privilegiadas] a estas *plantas verdes, coronadas de flores blancas*, que se levantan en las superficies de los *pantanos*, sin que una gota de fango ennegrezca el verde de sus hojas o el armiño de sus pétalos. Mientras todo se corrompe a su alrededor esparcen el *perfume* delicado de su seno, purificando la atmósfera de los gérmenes mortales que contiene diseminados . . . Desde la altura de su posición social, algunas saben descender, como los ángeles legendarios, a los antros oscuros de la vida, donde la miseria habita, el vicio acecha y ruga la desesperación. (*Prosas*, 2:41; emphasis mine)

A similar spatial dichotomy lends support to the theory we wish to advance in explanation of the fundamental social sense of Casal's metaphors as an embodiment not only of ideological concepts—realism as opposed to idealism—but, in addition, as a reflection of his lingering preoccupation with a society he detests but whose odious presence he fails to place out of mind and sight. In writing of Esteban Borrero Echevarría's traits of intelligence he observes: "No podían [los frutos de su inteligencia] ser avalorados, por deficiencias del medio, en el mercado intelectual"; "su temperamento lo arrastraba al ensueño y la realidad lo condujo a la acción." This conflict is represented on the one hand by an aspirational, elevational structure—*ascender en pos de las águilas hacia el sol*—followed by a resigned movement of descent—*marchar tras los reptiles hacia el lodazal* (*Prosas*, 1:261–62). Crass reality thus prevails over visions of art and idealism.

Where are the solutions to these social ills? The conventional Romantic refuge in the past has but a momentary triumph over the compelling forces of the social scene: "Tal parece que, olvidada [nuestra población] de su cruenta miseria y despierta de su mortal letargo, surgía rejuvenecida ante los ojos, mostrando el entusiasmo juvenil y la estruendosa animación de pasados días" (*Prosas*, 2:14). There is also the notion of physical displacement as a source of solace, a solution entertained



by Arsenio in "La última ilusión." The present is irreconcilable with Arsenio's character, aesthetic inclinations and education. In canvassing alternatives he describes the corrupt, inept and decadent society of his time. Paris is the obvious antidote to Havana. But even Paris offers two cultures: The one he detests is rich, robust, bourgeois, and universal; the other, his ideal, is rare, exotic, delicate, sensitive, and artificial. But just as Arsenio—Casal's alter ego—is incapable of taking his life, so is he also incapable of the dynamic act of rerooting his existence: "Porque si me fuera," he confesses, "yo estoy seguro que mi ensueño se desvanecería como el aroma de una flor cogida en la mano, hasta quedar despojado de todos sus encantos." To this Arsenio adds the disjunctive which bears directly upon Casal's worldview, his relationship to his environment, and, finally, the ties of his milieu to his art: "Mientras que viéndolo [su ensueño] de lejos, yo creo todavía que hay algo, en el mundo, que endulce el mal de la vida, algo que constituye mi última ilusión, la que se encuentra siempre, como perla fina en cofre empolvado, dentro de los corazones más tristes, aquella ilusión que nunca se pierde, quizás" (*Prosas*, 1:226–29). Nonrealization, nonfulfillment, in short, nonmovement, are thus transformed, via suspension, into preserved illusions. Immobility acquires qualities of an ideal as the artist is incapacitated by the conflicts and contradictions of the colony and the cultural crisis of his age.

THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE

The process by which inaction is idealized and fashioned into aesthetic motifs reveals attempts at dynamic change, thus providing psychological insights into the relationship of the individual artist to his social medium. While Casal was undoubtedly impotent as far as social action was concerned, he nevertheless understood something of its substance, and even its significance for Cuba. Of Antonio San Miguel's paper *La Lucha* he wrote:

Su diario ha llegado a ser, en corto espacio de tiempo, el órgano de la opinión pública, la cual está por encima de todos los poderes. Ocupándose minuciosamente de lo sucedido, diciéndolo todo sin ambages ni rodeos, interpretando los sentimientos populares, pidiendo el cumplimiento de reformas prometidas y anunciando las que reclama el porvenir; ha hecho temerse, no sólo de los que desempeñan los primeros cargos públicos, sino de todos los parásitos que pululan alrededor de éstos. No se comete un solo acto de ilegalidad, sin que al instante sea denunciado por el diario democrático. (*Prosas*, 1:148)

These comments on *La Lucha* broaden our vision of a picturesque Casal enclosed in a minuscule room decorated with *japonerías*.

The tensions of his desperate irresolution created a morbid fascination for the theme of action. Of Juana Borrero he wrote: "Dentro de poco

tiempo, toda vez que una artista de tan brillantes facultades no puede permanecer en la sombra, ya porque una mano poderosa la arrastre a la arena del combate, ya porque se lance ella misma a cumplir fatalmente su destino" (*Prosas*, 1:271). But of himself he noted his desire to take refuge "en ese lugar paradisíaco [Vento] y de no retornar al combate de la vida, donde hay que permanecer en el puesto señalado hasta quemar el último cartucho, hasta exhalar el último suspiro" (*Prosas*, 2:42); or "Perdió mi corazón el entusiasmo/al penetrar en la mundana liza" ("Paisaje espiritual"). Like the gladiator of his "Bajo-Relieve," though encouraged and cajoled, he succumbed time and time again.

A letter dated 1890 substantiates Casal's realization that he was drawn to dynamic figures: "Sólo he encontrado en estos días una persona que me ha sido simpática. ¿Quién se figura usted sea? Maceo, que es un hombre bello, de complexión robusta, inteligencia clarísima, y voluntad de hierro." To which he adds: "No sé si esa simpatía que siento por nuestro General es efecto de la neurosis que padezco y que me hace admirar los seres de condiciones y cualidades opuestas a las mías" (*Prosas*, 3:82). This reverence, while it raises unresolved psychological speculations, also serves to point up the force of Casal's Cuba as an artistic motif in his work. Under the influence of this social presence, the final lines of "A un héroe," written in celebration of Maceo's brief visit to Havana in 1892, convey the impression of a depraved, materialistic ruling class presiding over a hopelessly weakened enslaved population: "Hallas sólo que luchan sin decoro/espíritus famélicos de oro/imperando entre míseros esclavos" (emphasis mine). In contrast with these lines are those of "Oración" where antipodal images (*sombra*, *luminosos haces*) embody Casal's hope for an end to the untenable state of his personal inaction, with its concomitant motifs of tedium, distance or coldness:

¡Oh, Señor!, si la sombra no deshaces
y en mi alma arrojas luminosos haces,
como un sol en oscuro firmamento,
haz que sienta en mi espíritu moroso
primero la tormenta que el reposo,
primero que el hastío . . . ¡el sufrimiento!

DISTANCE

By distance we mean not simply perspective but a structural motif by means of which the poet, in his function of *voyeur*, moves his vision to the outer and upper levels of a *telescopic structure* as a reaction or alternative to his hostile environment. Arsenio's previously cited comments on Paris are an embodiment of this concept: "Viéndolo de lejos, yo creo todavía que

hay algo que endulce el mal de la vida" (emphasis mine). Or, when Casal elucidates his ideas on Maceo he concludes: "Ya se ha marchado y no sé si volverá. Después de todo me alegro, porque las personas aparecen mejor a nuestros ojos *vistas de lejos*" (*Prosas*, 3:82; emphasis mine).

Distance, in an aesthetic and ideological context, constitutes both an expansion of the telescopic structure and a counterstatement to frustrated attempts at harmonious social integration. As a counterstatement it represents a search for transcendency at the heights of human experience. In "Bohemios," for example, Casal explains his admiration for the women "de mirada abrasadora":

Yo os amo porque os lleva el devaneo
donde el peligro vuestra vida afronte,
y en vuestros ojos soñadores leo
ansias de traspasar el horizonte

Traspasar el horizonte here is a metaphorical embodiment reminiscent of Praz's ideas on "interiority," an indication of a voyeuristic rather than a visionary quest for the hidden sense of what lies most immediately beyond us.¹⁵ In terms of Casal's worldview, the conflicts of his inadaptability to his real world and his rejection of its values create his indecisive suspension—the "hovering" to which we have referred—in which there is a contemplation of the frontiers of a subjectivized perspective (distance) of infinities and coldness. In "Bohemios" *glacial* and *ilusión* are counterposed; the women Casal admires have eluded "el soplo glacial del desengaño" by pursuing "la sed insaciable de lo extraño." Their illusions constitute a dynamic motif, a fiery trail (contrasted with Casal's *sombre*, frigid inaction)—*ígneo rastro/que os traza en lo infinito vuestro ensueño*—a metaphor suggesting the dynamic of perennial search for transcendence (distance: *Ver el [sitio] que más lejos se levanta*) as an alternative to reduction. Through structured distance the poet comes to terms with the limitations of his conflictive existence without abandoning unrealized ideals nor the realities of life, however imperfect or repugnant they may be. Hence the significance of the concept of distance as an enlargement of one of the two perspectives of a telescopic structure. In the style of his "hombre de las muletas de níquel," whose illusions insulated him against society's materialism, Casal chose a life of intense interiority, and, like his fictional creation, strained his vision, "sus miradas, rígidas y glaciales, hacia lo lejos, hacia lo más lejos que podían alcanzar" (*Prosas*, 1:233).

BRUMAS, SOMBRA, FRÍO

While the images of the lower spheres of a spatially conceived construct constitute the objectionable substance of material reality—*lodo, pantano,*

fango, etc.—the pursuit of alternatives viable for Casal brings him to the fringes of a composite reality. From the mire of repugnant reality the poet rises and extends his vision toward a horizon that he desperately trusts will be illuminated both for himself and for Cuba. The components of such a system of values are apparent in the following brief passage in which Casal's enthusiasm approaches the equivalent of dynamic action resulting in the idealized displacement or *replanteamiento* to which Cintio Vitier has referred:¹⁶ "[La legión heroica de los conquistadores del ideal] se ha impuesto la gloriosa tarea de *eleva*r hasta los últimos *confines* de nuestra patria la antorcha luminosa de la civilización, cuyos brillantes fulgores disiparán las *sombras* que ennegrecen el *horizonte*, e iluminarán el camino que hemos de atravesar" (*Prosas*, 2:28; emphasis mine). The juxtaposition of *eleva*r, *confines*, *horizonte* in this conventionally phrased description is scarcely fortuitous. Implicit in the imagistic grouping is the process of "scanning the horizons" as anguish seeks relief in an uncertain future: "La sombra tenebrosa de las inquietudes del porvenir" (*Prosas*, 1:157); or solace from the weight of the past: "La bruma de los recuerdos" (*Prosas*, 1:157). While Casal speaks of "la tristeza del recuerdo" (*Prosas*, 1:163), suggesting his generally melancholy temporal concepts, by contrast, he refers to "el esplendor de la distancia" (*Prosas*, 1:163).

In "Sueño de gloria" (dedicated to Moreau), the poet, in his voyage toward the ideal via an apotheosis of the painter, announces "de la Tierra en los *confines*, /el juicio universal de los humanos" and summons the Creator from behind "brumas opalinas." The poem contains a universal construct with its valley and firmament, its light and shade. From the "sombra glacial" in the first line we reach the "fulgores siderales," the "ambiente lumínico" of the last.

In the light of these and other contexts, it seems reasonable to generalize and identify horizons with an ascensional movement toward spiritual values or artistic ideals, difficult though these may be to attain. Their elusiveness, however, explains the poet's iteration of *frío*, *hielo*, *glacial* as the embodiment of a middle ground. When Casal characterized Huysman's life he spoke of his languishing (*languidece*) between two poles, an alternate view of our previous allusions to the state of suspended animation of the Cuban's psyche. "Fuera de esos dos polos," writes Casal, "es decir del extremo entusiasmo o de la extrema repugnancia, su alma languidece sobre le monotonía de la vida, como la sombra de un ahorcado sobre un abismo de hielo, asfixiada de hastío, humedecida de lágrimas, enervada de asco, adolorida de desencantos" (*Prosas*, 1:174). Casal's *hastío* is conceptually related to *frío*, but with the latter image suggesting not a final solution but a middle term, the psychological impassivity of the superior being who needs to and has been obliged to

rise above the *abismo de hielo*. The qualities of indifference and concentration implicit in *frío* provide, at the same time, for a potential spiritual fulfillment through passionate identification. Thus, Elena, deified and united with Moreau in "Sueño de gloria" is first portrayed in the sonnet as impassive: "Indiferente a lo que en torno pasa, / mira Elena hacia el lívido horizonte / irguiendo un lirio en la rosada mano." Her frigid scrutiny is modified by an idealized passion in the presence of Moreau: "Colorean su tez matices rojos, intensa conmoción su seno agita" ("Sueño de gloria").

Passion points to spiritual realization. But the distance and difficulties between the latter and material reality are such that the poet slips into an entranced state of suspension: "Yo hubiera querido permanecer, por tiempo infinito, en ese estado de calma inalterable, de olvido profundo y de perfecta beatitud, estado en que hunde el espíritu . . . siempre que el cuerpo se encuentra mecido, arrullado y entumecido por las ondas" (*Prosas*, 2:71). *Frío* and *calma* are associated with immobility or balance. The cessation of external movement is the lot of the artist: "Aunque trate de luchar, en los primeros tiempos, su energía se gasta, su inteligencia se atrofia . . . [se explica que] se detengan repentinamente sin atreverse a avanzar, como viajeros sorprendidos, en mitad del camino, por inesperado abismo, donde la sombra ondea, el frío impera y fermentan las impurezas" (*Prosas*, 2:71).

There is a further shade of distinction between *frío* and *hastío*. The latter, in a sense, represents a descent, a falling away from struggle, whereas *frío*, though tied to *abismo*, is an abstraction, a transitory but painful incapacitation, but with the potential of piercing the *brumas*, *sombras*, and *neblina* of the horizon.

In the elaboration of these images Casal undoubtedly was influenced by Gustave Moreau's spatial structuring. The painter's inspiration is evident, for example, in the *inertia x movement* antitheses of the sonnets from "Mi Museo ideal." The Cuban poet, like the French painter, was attracted to physical immobility, a fascination that Moreau analyzed in connection with his canvases:

Une chose domine en moi, l'entraînement et l'ardeur la plus grande vers l'abstraction. L'expression des sentiments humains, des passions de l'homme m'intéresse sans doute vivement, mais je suis moins porté à exprimer ces mouvements de l'âme et de l'esprit qu'à rendre pour ainsi dire visibles les éclairs intérieurs qu'on ne sait à quoi rattacher, qui ont quelque chose de divin dans leur apparente insignifiance et qui, traduits par les merveilleux effets de la pure plastique, ouvrent des horizons magiques, je dirai même divins.¹⁷

And, as José Pierre comments, "prôner 'la belle inertie' en plein coeur du XIX^e siècle, n'est-ce pas d'ailleurs aller sciemment à retours de l'éloge de l'énergie."¹⁸ Frigidity and fixity are thus not merely signs of an incapacity for full integration of the individual and his milieu but also an inverse

reaction, at bottom, a protest against the energy and momentum of a "mercantilist" society whose values repulsed both the French painter and his Cuban admirer. For Cintio Vitier these values are directly related to the Cuban malaise: "Ese escalofrío de Casal, por ejemplo, siempre hemos sospechado que está dando testimonio del *frío interior* que hay en nuestro país. . . . Casal, que no tuvo la pasión política, que arrebató nuestro carácter durante casi un siglo, empezó a sentir, en sí mismo y en los otros, en el fenómeno de lo cubano como mundo existencial cerrado, ese fondo frío que ya desde los años 20, más o menos, constituye el visible y escalofriante *substratum* de nuestra vida nacional. . . . Casal nos produce el efecto de que ya sabe que pertenece a un pueblo *sin destino*." ¹⁹

TWO STATIC STRUCTURES

Tied to the concept of coldness is the first of two structures whose syntactic arrangement suggests overwhelming tedium and debilitation: *La enumeración inerte*.²⁰ Locked into place with the alternative of an impassive searching of the horizons for spiritual alternatives, Casal dwelled on what lay before him (in keeping with his telescopic structuring) with an almost hypnotic fascination: "Todas las noches, en la Habana, son iguales. Siempre vemos el mismo cielo, tachonado de los mismos astros; aspiramos el mismo ambiente, impregnado de los mismos olores; recorremos las mismas calles, alumbradas por los mismos mecheros de gas; penetramos en los mismos cafés, invadidos por las mismas gentes" (*Prosas*, 2:27).

In the telescopic structure the sense of hovering is balanced by the dualities of its perspective. In the pluralities of the *enumeración inerte* there is a senseless accumulation of a single variety of details:

Fétido como el vientre de los grajos
al salir del inmundo estercolero
donde, bajo mortíferas miasmas,
amarillean los roídos huesos
de leprosos cadáveres; viscoso
como la baba que en sus antros negros
destilan los cólicos reptiles
al retorcer sus convulsivos cuerpos
entre guijarros húmedos

("Cuerpo y alma")

The same pattern—adjective plus *al* plus a connective—is employed in the remaining lines of the first section of the poem, and, with variations, in the second.²¹

A correlative structure²² of the *enumeración inerte* is also pluralistic, of the variety described by Dámaso Alonso in his study "Sintagmas no

progresivos y pluralidades: tres calillas en la prosa castellana." Such expressions, needless to say, are a constant of Hispanic prose, and the nonprogressive tagmemes (*sintagmas no progresivos*) which are of special significance in Casal's prose are those in which "todas las voces . . . tienen una misma función sintáctica."²³ Each age, each writer, responds to the circumstances and stimuli of his environment fashioning distinct pluralistic patterns. Casal's formulations in this regard reveal a fascinating consistency: "Rubén Darío, que, por su fantasía, por su estilo y por sus lucubraciones más que un escritor nicaragüense, parece un artista parisiense" (*Prosas*, 1:170); "qué gustos tan nobles, tan puros, tan elevados" (*Prosas*, 1:175); "lo que seduce a Huysmans, bajo cualquiera forma, en cualquiera época y por cualquiera causa, es el sufrimiento" (*Prosas*, 1:176); "estas novelas no pertenecen a ninguna escuela, no tienen hermanas en ninguna literatura, no pueden compararse más que a sí mismas" (*Prosas*, 1:178); "dentro de la casa todo revela orden, pobreza y pulcritud" (*Prosas*, 1:204). These triadic, almost classic, formulations are not unconscious structures. And if they were, the substance of our contention would not be significantly altered. However, the following example of two successive triads leaves little room to doubt the existence of a fully conscious technique: "Fruto de sus primeros amores, lo colma de agasajos, lo cubre de besos y lo estrecha entre sus brazos temblorosos. Ella siente por ello que la concha por su primera perla, lo que el árbol por su primer fruto, lo que la planta por su primera flor" (*Prosas*, 1:205).

Balance, symmetry, and measured structuring—stylistic hallmarks in an age of imbalance and rapid metamorphosis, in a troubled society repugnant to the writer—can only suggest, once again, an implied protest, an abstraction, a state of suspension, and, finally an ironic contrast with the constancy of injustice amidst Cuba's crying need for change.

Frío, brumas, infinito, hastío, enumeración interte, sintagmas no progresivos, are images, motifs and structures whose function within Casal's prose and poetry reflects the Cuban's personal psychological reactions to the iniquities of colonial society. Casal's descriptions of "La sociedad de la Habana" hardly admit speculation regarding his critical view of Cuba. Even though his point of view was elitist, his social preoccupations those of an esthete, his social chronicles lay bare the open wounds of the colony. His social action was nil, and attempts at flight frequent. It would be futile to deny his escapism, for numerous are the expressions which echo the lines of "Pax animae":

Tan sólo llega a percibir mi oído
algo extraño y confuso y misterioso
que me arrastra muy lejos de este mundo.

But, more significant than his yearning for distance, either as physical displacement or as a metaphor of spiritual attainment, is the appreciation of the stamp of Colonial Cuba that he himself undertook to analyze—albeit in his limited fashion—and that obviously occupied his thoughts, molded his style, but thus far has been neglected in the scant body of imaginative Casal criticism.

NOTES

1. Cintio Vitier, *Lo cubano en la poesía* (La Habana: Instituto del Libro, 1970), p. 285.
2. Julián del Casal, *Prosas* (La Habana: Consejo Nacional de Cultura, 1963), 2:54. In preparing this study we have used the three volumes of prose of the Centenary Edition published by the Consejo Nacional de Cultura, 1963–64. References to this edition will be made within the text in abbreviated form: *Prosas*, 2:54. For the poetry we have used the Mario Cabrera Saqui edition: *Poesías completas* (La Habana: Dirección de Cultura, 1945). References to the poetry will be made within the text by title only.
3. Vitier, *Lo cubano*, p. 297.
4. "La perla" constitutes a rare example of allegorical embodiment.
5. Eduardo López Morales in his "Prólogo" to Jorge Isaacs' *María* (La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1970), p. ix.
6. José María Monner Sans, *Julián del Casal y el modernismo hispanoamericano* (México: El Colegio de México, 1952), p. 73.
7. Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres* (Paris: La Pleiade, 1932), 2:647.
8. See our study, "Las estructuras, polares en la obra de José Martí y Julián del Casal" in *Génesis del modernismo* (México: El Colegio de México, 1966), pp. 153–87.
9. We are using this adjective in the sense of Monner Sans's characterization of Casal as "el primer lírico de formación cubana." *Julian del Casal*, p. 118.
10. Mario Praz, *Mnemosyne, the Parallel between Literature and the Visual Arts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 163.
11. See note 2.
12. Compare:
 Porque al oír tu voz, amante y tierna,
 la tristeza del alma, se evapora,
 cual la sombra de lóbrega caverna
 al resplandor resodado de la aurora.
 ("Versos azules")
13. Needless to say we cannot present a full study of Casal's analysis of Cuban society here. Instead, we have chosen those aspects that have a direct bearing on the explication of the stylistic elements of his work singled out for study in a social context. Among the significant essays not studied systematically are the articles entitled "La sociedad de la Habana" (*Prosas*, 1:131–57) and Casal's specific comments on General Salamanca (*Prosas*, 1:154–55).
14. See Tulio Halperin Donghi, *Historia contemporánea de América Latina* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1970), pp. 278–79.
15. Praz, *Mnemosyne*, p. 164.
16. See note 3.
17. Quoted by Jean Paladilhe, *Gustave Moreau* (Paris: Fernand Hazan, 1971), p. 32.
18. José Pierre, "Gustave Moreau au regard changeant des générations," in Paladilhe, *Gustave Moreau*, p. 80.
19. Vitier, *Lo cubano*, pp. 309–10. These lines were originally written in prerevolutionary Cuba.
20. Vitier, *Lo cubano*, pp. 291–92, n.3.

21. The enumeration of section 2 is based on terms of purity. But Casal's preoccupation with its antithesis is evident in the last three lines which precede the *Envío*:
Tal es, oh, Dios!, el alma que tú has hecho
vivir en la inmundicia de mi carne,
como vive una flor espesa en el cieno.
22. In verse, an interesting parallel might be drawn with Casal's use of the monorrismo in "En el campo."
23. Dámaso Alonso, with Carlos Bousoño, *Seis calas en la expresión literaria española* (Madrid: Gredos, 1951), p. 25.