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Despairing Realities and Utopian Desires in Reinaldo Arenas's *Antes que anochezca, autografía* and *El color del verano o nuevo jardíns de las delicias*

by

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Abstract

Reinaldo Arenas's *Antes que anochezca, autografía* and *El color del verano o nuevo jardíns de las delicias* can be read as a broadly-based representation of the author's experience of Cuban life and pursuit of literary and sexual freedom. In Part One, I consider how the novel and the autobiography can be united in literary genre. Arenas challenges the border between fiction and autobiography. The two texts are also closely associated in content and themes. The overlapping events and issues are studied through the lens of despair. In Part Two, I examine Arenas's pursuit of a critical utopia. In his autobiography, Arenas reveals the government's oppressive policies; in the novel he expertly employs carnivalesque techniques to debase Cuba's political and social hierarchies and creates a Cuban utopia. It is a world which sees Castro's regime overthrown and where homosexual desire is elevated while the heterosexual macho ideal is mocked and subverted.

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Introduction

The centrality of the author was the fundamental perspective from which critics conducted literary analysis in the nineteenth century and into the first few decades of the twentieth. Everything about a writer's life was considered useful to literary critics, who frequently focused on determining the purpose of the individual text or body of work being studied. With the emergence of New Criticism, authorial influence lost its prominence and close readings revealing textual evidence to support hypotheses about a text's meaning and purpose came to the forefront.

The movement away from associating an author's persona and presumed or stated intentions with his/her work was further espoused by the renowned structuralist Roland Barthes in his essay "Death of the Author." Although the disassociation of the writer from the text is a common approach to literary analysis, I raise the issue of whether there are times when the authorial voice can, and indeed should, provide relevant information for the development of a credible and sound analysis of a given work or body of work.

Questioning the necessity of considering authorial influence has guided my examination of Reinaldo Arenas's autobiography *Antes que anochezca, autobiografía* and his novel *El color del verano o nuevo jardíns de las delicias* as two works that can be read as one comprehensive representation of the author's life in Cuba and in exile. I explore how they challenge the border between fiction and autobiography, creating an imaginative and aesthetically compelling portrait of Cuban homosexual reality.

An autobiography ends at a given point in a writer's life; at times at the literal end of life, resulting in the rest of the story remaining untold or unfulfilled. This is the case with Arenas, a Cuban exile, political dissident, writer, and homosexual who committed

suicide in 1991 to stop his suffering from AIDS before his dream of sexual and artistic freedom in Cuba was realized (1992, 11). With time running out, Arenas turned to his considerable writing skills and created a utopian fictional world in *El color del verano*, where existing Cuban laws and social hierarchies are subverted. In the novel, the dire reality of the homosexual and artistic communities in Cuba is eased and a degree of hope and optimism develops into a new utopian society. Arenas created a fictional utopia while living in what many regarded as a "real-life" utopia: post-revolutionary Cuba. It is ironic that Arenas considered the revolutionary government's leadership as being oppressive and dictatorial, given its premise as being the voice of the people. While a section of the Cuban population, and others in the Caribbean and throughout Latin America, turned to the Revolution as a source of inspiration for a more just society, Arenas criticised and adamantly refused to concede any support for, or observance of, post-revolutionary policies.

I have divided my thesis into two parts reflecting the primary themes I am exploring. In Part One, I examine how *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano* are united in literary genre and thematic content. A comparative study of the two texts is problematic given that one is fiction and the other an autobiography. They must be brought closer together, blurring the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, so that one is indeed comparing work of similar structure in order to conduct a credible analysis. My research has revealed that an autobiography contains a fictional essence and a carnivalesque novel comprises a similar degree of non-fiction. I review the basic tenets of autobiography, placing greater emphasis on the discussion of its inherently fictional nature. I also provide a brief introduction to satire as it is a component of carnivalesque

writing and prominent in *El color del verano*. The satirical style of the novel captures the despair that provided the impetus for Arenas's creation of a Cuban critical utopia. In addition to literary theory, I consider the similar events and issues contained in both works through the lens of despair, thereby joining the two texts on an emotive and thematic level. The specific themes I focus on are the brutality and absolute control of the island's citizens by the socialist government and the repression of individual rights and freedoms, especially in relation to homosexuality and artistic expression.

The theoretical and thematic foundation established in Part One will enable the movement beyond the despairing reality portrayed in both texts to a much better, or at least, more equitable world. The focus of Part Two is the creation of a critical utopia which Arenas reveals primarily in his novel, and to a limited degree in his autobiography, where he is just beginning to lay the foundation. Drawing on the despair he and others experienced while in Cuba and in exile, Arenas poignantly writes of a fantasy world in *El color del verano*, one that in many ways is utopian as it allows for freedom of artistic and sexual expression, in which homosexual desire is elevated while the heterosexual macho ideal is mocked and subverted.

Beginning in the autobiography, the necessity of a new and improved society is revealed by Arenas's many memories of the difficulties he experienced at the mercy of the government's oppressive policies and societal norms. In the novel, Arenas expertly employs carnivalesque techniques to debase Fidel Castro individually, his entire military regime, and state policies, thereby, subverting Cuba's political and social hierarchy. Through both works, Arenas reveals the discourse of the pro-revolutionary dominant social order and challenges it by presenting the desire of the homosexual and artistic

communities to acquire a voice and achieve a degree of power. Seeking a better world is a central element in carnivalesque and as such necessitates a thorough understanding of this style of writing. I include a detailed review of the characteristics of carnivalesque and apply it to the novel.

My theoretical analysis of *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano* is governed by the definition and characteristics of autobiography and carnivalesque. The work of Sylvia Molloy, Barthes, and Philippe Lejeune inform my discussion of autobiography and how it can be viewed as being close to fiction. Molloy is important because she captures and explains the tropes typically found in Spanish American autobiographies. What is more pertinent to my thesis is her identification of the typical overlaying of memories that extend beyond the individual author's experiences to that of the broader community. Although Molloy focuses on nineteenth century works, her scholarship on the testimonial nature of Spanish American autobiography is particularly relevant given the documentary style of *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano*.

Mikhail Bakhtin and Michael Gardiner are the primary theorists I use in my discussion of carnivalesque. Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher, was the foremost authority on carnivalesque with his seminal text entitled Rabelais and his World and his equally important Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics. Gardiner's essay "Bakhtin's Carnival: Utopia as Critique" is essential as it explores Bakhtin's identification of utopias as an outcome of carnivalesque writing.

My thesis is rather unique as I am conducting a comparative analysis of two works in which there are only two articles also examining both works together. I refer to Suzanne Kaebnick's "The *Loca* Freedom Fighter in *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del*

verano" quite extensively and Laurie Vickroy's "The Traumas of Unbelonging: Reinaldo Arenas's Recuperations of Cuba" to a lesser degree. Kaebnick's article is centred on how *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano* depict the brutality and folly of Cuba's socialist government and its President. She points out Arenas's subversion of the power structure and reveals the general homophobic attitudes of Cuban authorities and the creation of a more democratic gender politics in which erotic relations between macho virile heterosexual and homosexual men are exposed. Kaebnick's argument is well-supported by other research and previous criticism whereas Vickroy's is not similarly rigorous. Although it is relevant, I hesitate to rely too much on Vickroy's article given its lack of theoretical basis. In "The Traumas of Unbelonging," Vickroy paints a picture of Arenas as one who writes to overcome adversity by using it to fuel his imagination and influence his art. It is a thesis that sounds very plausible to me but one that does not contain sufficient supporting evidence besides the author's interpretation.

El color del verano is the fourth in a cycle of five novels Arenas referred to as his *pentagonía* or five agonies (Arenas 1992, x). The other novels, in sequential order, are: *Celestino antes del Alba*, *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*, *Otra vez el mar*, and *El asalto*. Since it is a cycle, as opposed to a series, each novel can be read independently and not necessarily in the sequence they were written. Further, they can each be studied on their own as individual works. At the same time, a reader can certainly choose to read them in order and will see the *bildungsroman* features Francisco Soto points to in his book Reinaldo Arenas: *Pentagonía*. Soto has written at length about Arenas and his body of work. Two of Soto's analyses applicable to my thesis are his books Reinaldo Arenas: The *Pentagonía* and Reinaldo Arenas. The former explores the entire *pentagonía* cycle

as a subversion of the Cuban documentary novel genre. The latter is an analysis of the homoerotic themes and issues prominent in Arenas's writing and how his portrayal of homosexuality became more blatant after he had left Cuba and was living in exile.

El color del verano contains the basic tenets of carnivalesque. It challenges Cuban authority and traditional social hierarchy and it successfully mocks post-revolutionary Cuba's state-sanctioned attitudes, values, beliefs, and practices. In the novel, Castro, his government, policies, and revolutionary ideals are mocked and subverted. The fictional work completes Arenas's life work, speaking out against the state's repression of individual rights and freedoms. The repression is an attempt to shape Cuban men into versions of the revolutionary ideal: macho, virile, and with heterosexual identities.

The novel has two main story lines: The President, Fifo, is planning his fiftieth anniversary celebration, a grand carnival. At the same time, there is a plot by the citizens to sever the island from its base and remove Fifo from power. A reader quickly understands that the island in question is none other than Cuba and Fifo is clearly Fidel Castro. In addition to these two events, the institution of writing is undermined and the tenacity of homosexuals in Socialist Cuba to live life to the fullest and to resist repression is revealed through the telling of a variety of short stories, tongue twisters, letters, and a dramatic comedy at the beginning of the novel. A myriad of subversive antics by members of the marginalized homosexual and artistic communities, as well instances of ineptitude and violence by those in authority, ensue.

A vast array of characters, all based on real people, are included in the text. The ones most pertinent to my analysis are a number of the writers and poets, both currently

living and those deceased but brought back to life for the anniversary celebrations: the trinity of Reinaldo, Gabriel, and Tétrica Mofeta, three separate characters who periodically become one individual; Fifo Kastro; Fifo's high ranking officials as well as his soldiers, such as Tiburón Sangriento, the vicious leader of the army of sharks; Arenas's family members; and Arenas's friends and enemies, members of the writing and homosexual communities.

El color del verano ends with the island in a state of chaos. The base has been severed setting it free and the President is trying to escape in his hot air balloon. When the balloon is punctured it dives into the jaws of Tiburón Sangriento. Meanwhile, the island is drifting away but eventually sinks into the sea under the weight of its inhabitants, who are arguing over where they should moor and what kind of government should be formed. Readers find the Gabriel, Reinaldo, and Tétrica Mofeta trinity frantically attempting to cast bottles filled with pages of the treasured and illicit manuscripts out into the ocean so that they may be preserved, and hopefully found and read. With this as one of the concluding sections, Arenas situates his real-life attempts to save his manuscripts within a fictional story as a final link between the desperation he felt while in Cuba and his desire for freedom. The boundary between fiction and non-fiction is clearly compromised.

In the "Introduction" to *Antes que anochezca*, Arenas tells of the last years of his life lived in exile, stricken with AIDS. He determinedly finishes what he regards as his important literary work, the completion of his *pentagonía* prior to committing suicide. Arenas begins his autobiography by introducing readers to his poverty-stricken childhood in rural Cuba. He emphasizes the degree of freedom he enjoyed as one of many living in

an overcrowded house, an illegitimate son born to a young, beautiful but scorned woman, as well as the development of his creativity, and the rampant sexuality of rural Cuba, particularly his. From his childhood years, Arenas follows a loosely chronological line to his joining the revolutionary rebels in the fight against the existing Batista dictatorship. With the success of the revolution came a state-funded degree in agricultural accountancy and Arenas's first job on a chicken farm. He eventually secured a position at the National Library and took the opportunity to further develop his knowledge and appreciation of literature. It was during this time he developed his writing and his literary social network.

Becoming a writer, and wanting the freedom to publish his work, became both his passion and his downfall in Cuba. His success at smuggling out manuscripts under a publication ban earned him a reputation for dissention. Dissidence, coupled with homosexuality, is the reason for his being placed under constant suspicion and surveillance by the state. His struggle for artistic and sexual freedom led to incarceration at the notorious *El Morro* jail and ultimately to his inclusion in the Mariel exodus in 1980, when thousands of Cubans were permitted to immigrate to the United States. The autobiography ends with an overview of the challenges and limited successes of his years in exile and ultimately his decision to end his life. The despair was too much for Arenas, he succumbed and committed suicide.

> Hope is the emotional signature of a special type of expectation. It is a unique amalgam of expectation and desire that our brains fashion to allow us to escape the present and pursue goals that are designed to enhance our future well-being. To make predictions about the future,

> however, we need a 'working model' of the objects and events involved. Much of the genius of our species rests on our ability to construct such mental replicas of the world inside our head, as this is what enables us to imagine and pursue the futures we desire. (Reading 1)

El color del verano is the literary representation of Arenas's longing for a just society, it is the world inside his head. The novel is a natural progression from Arenas's despair; the construction of a strong and defiant new world, a critical utopia. For a complete and comprehensive portrayal of Arenas's, and fellow Cubans' experiences, I argue both works ought to be read in tandem and with an awareness of Arenas's persona and his authorial objectives.

Part One – Despair

Part One of my thesis sets the stage for considering the importance and relevancy of authorial influence. I begin with a theoretical analysis of *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano*, which provides a general overview of the characteristics of autobiography most relevant to this thesis, a brief introduction to carnivalesque, and a review of satire and its application in the novel. Interspersed throughout will be an exploration of the various instances in which feelings of despair are revealed. The theoretical analysis, focused on the autobiographical genre, will demonstrate how *Antes que anochezca* conforms to the fictional nature of autobiographical writing. Although carnivalesque will be more thoroughly discussed in Part Two, an introduction to it at this point offers important foundational knowledge when considering how it supports, supplements, and in some ways completes Arenas's autobiographical project. An introduction to satire is also a necessary inclusion given its prominence in the novel both in terms of the overall tone of the text as well as it being an inherent characteristic of carnivalesque.

Despair overshadows the content of *Antes que anochezca*. Arenas clearly states that his time is running out; in order to finish the autobiography he began in Cuba, he is in a race against a sinister and permanent darkness: death. In his words:

> *Había empezado ya, como se verá más adelante, mi autobiografía en Cuba. La había titulado Antes que anochezca, pues la tenía que escribir antes de que llegara la noche ya que vivía prófugo en un bosque. Ahora la noche avanzaba de nuevo en forma más inminente. Era la noche de la*

muerte. Ahora sí que tenía que terminar mi autobiografía antes de que anocheciera. (1992, 11)

In exile, Arenas is frantic to finish his body of work and the retelling of his life story before he succumbs to AIDS. He writes with a sense of urgency and rage about the years of repression and persecution under Castro's regime and his final few years in exile. His anger and vengeance explode from the pages of *Antes que anochezca*. Like the autobiography, a mixture of utter dismay, frustration, indignation, and scorn is found in *El color del verano*, where sharp wit and humour create satiric images of Castro's socialist regime and the epitome of a revolutionary man. Socialism's basis, its leaders, and its policies are attacked and there is no hope that Cuba's President will change his ways. Many of the events that Arenas experienced or witnessed included in his autobiography are also found in *El color del verano*, serving to strengthen the picture of the dictator's absolute maniacal, violent control over the island, and the plight of homosexuals in post-revolutionary Cuba.[1] A dominant theme in both texts is criticism levied against the notion of polarized opposites of homosexuality and macho[2] heterosexuality. Beyond similarities in themes, Arenas includes many of the same characters in both works. As Francisco Soto points out, Arenas's fictional characters "are considered 'real' because although they might not be made of flesh-and-blood, they nonetheless reflect life in all its vitality" (15). In *El color del verano* the characters are quite close to reality as many of the same individuals are in both texts, with either the

[1] Throughout both texts, male same-sex desire is referenced as homosexuality with its perpetuators labelled *loca, maricón, and bugarón* (these terms are defined further on). The term "gay" is not found in Arenas's work. As Kaebnick explains, "gay" is not a culturally relevant designation when referring to homosexuality in Cuba as it is a North American label referring to identity which does not fit with the Latin American, in this case Cuban, focus on passive versus active, and penetrating, partners.

[2] Kaebnick defines macho as being "synonymous with the active masculine identity" (102). She advises of the expectation that a macho man is the epitome of strength, independence, and sexuality. His conquests are generally women but he is also open to "other outlets sufficing under limited conditions" (102).

exact names or slight, loosely veiled, variations. A number of examples in support of this assessment include: Fifo and Raúl Kastro, Halisia Jalonzo, and Zebro Sardoya in the novel and Fidel and Raúl Castro, Alicia Alonso, and Severo Sarduy in the autobiography. Soto also notes the play on names, placing them into two categories, those faithful to the Revolution and those in exile: "By parodying members of both groups Arenas avoids the propagandistic attacks based on ideology that have polarized Cuban politics. In *El color del verano*, as in all Arenas's texts, no one subject, either literary or 'real,' is spared the full force of the writer's subversive attacks" (Soto 1994, 87). There are times when the historical data in the novel suggest fabrication or exaggeration hindering the novel's classification as being closer to non-fiction than fiction. However, as Soto explains in Reinaldo Arenas, "The precision of historical facts and figures is sacrificed for the vital and dynamic 'documentation' that only fiction can provide" (63).

Philippe Lejeune defined autobiography as a "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality" (3-4). Elizabeth W. Bruss moves beyond Lejeune's definition with her concern about determining the authenticity of self-writing. In her essay, "Eye for I: Making and Unmaking Autobiography in Film," Bruss puts forward three criteria to confirm the accuracy of the autobiography: truth-value, act-value, and identity-value. Truth-value refers to the text's consistency with other evidence or samples of the author's body of work rendering it a truthful account. Act-value is whether the work is representative of the actual nature of the writer. Identity-value is the inter-relation of the normally distinct roles of author, narrator, and protagonist with the same individual occupying each role (299-300). In contrast to *Antes que anochezca*, the

protagonist, narrator, and author in *El color del verano* are not consistently the same individual. However, a trinity of three characters, Gabriel/Tétrica Mofeta/Reinaldo,[3] who periodically merge into one, do appear throughout the novel as writers of the various anecdotes, letters, tongue twisters, and stories that "give voice to Cuba's excluded and marginal homosexual subculture of the 1960s and 1970s" (Soto 1994, 58). These three fictional characters are in fact differing realities of the real Arenas, resulting in one individual being the author, narrator, and protagonist in the novel. The realities represented by the personas reflect Arenas's fragmented identity. When with his mother, Gabriel pretends to be a good and dutiful heterosexual son with a wife and child; Reinaldo emerges when the persecution of writers is commented on; and Tétrica Mofeta comes out when the desire and right to live in sexual freedom must be boldly proclaimed. The protagonists in the novel's various chapters are not always a member of this trinity, but they are closely associated with the events Arenas testifies to witnessing and the various issues he addresses in his autobiography.

I advise against comparing an autobiography with an author's other work to determine authenticity or truth; it is a potentially misleading comparison. As Wallace Fowlie explains, an autobiography is that which generally stands "apart from a writer's principal books, it is an adjunct book, an exercise book in the somewhat shameful art of confession" (165). This implies that seeking validation in an author's other work is a futile endeavour. At the same time though, an author's body of work may serve to promote or initiate an intertextual dialogue which may have a positive influence on the work's importance. Although the objective of my thesis is not centred on revealing the intention or truth or accuracy of Arenas's mnemonic activity, since I am comparing *Antes*

[3] The trinity and its purpose are also discussed in Part Two.

que anochezca and *El color del verano*, it is relevant to consider how each text contributes to the dialogical process.

When Roland Barthes "Death of the Author" is taken into consideration, seeking to gain insight into an autobiography through the author's other work can lead to a misreading or a non-critical reading of the autobiography. This assertion is strengthened by writers being "anxious to unite their person and their work through diaries and memoirs" (Barthes 1470) and, therefore, not necessarily willing to separate themselves from their literary production. Further, in Barthes' era, an explanation of a work was often sought in the person who created it; the sway of the author was powerful. Barthes' thesis is that, traditionally, a reader has looked to the author to find the meaning or to influence our interpretation of the work. In order to read a text critically, one must let go of the author's personality and reputation: "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" (1470). In terms of autobiography, it may be difficult or impossible to resist being influenced by the author, given the interrelationship between author, narrator, and protagonist. This works quite well with Barthes' thesis because although he calls for a lessening, if not complete destruction of the authorial influence, he also sees the outcome of the destruction as a creation of a new plurality. The text, then, is made up of a number of different voices, different relationships with previous work and other influences. These concepts connect with Mikhail Bakhtin's work on the dialogical and polyphonic nature of carnivalesque as well as Julia Kristeva's focus on intertextuality. Kristeva is an important theorist who led the discussion of how a work of literature may be influenced by previous work and knowledge with her development of the concept of intertextuality. A single authorial influence is not the way literary

production works, as Megan Becker-Leckrone says about Kristeva's theories: "Intertextuality questions the traditional idea of the author as the singular omniscient creator of a literary product by shifting attention to dynamic textuality and readerly engagement" (95). Dialogism, or intertextuality, and polyphony are inherent characteristics of Arenas's two texts.[4]

Freedom from the fetters of authorial influence and embracing the notion of dialogism challenges Lejeune's work on the autobiographical pact. An agreement between the writer and reader, the autobiographical pact, was conceived by Lejeune in his book, On Autobiography which considers how a pact is formed. Through the establishment of the relationship, the notion of time,[5] which one could assume would interfere with the communication, is eliminated. The result is a seemingly personal exchange between the writer and the reader in the reader's present time (Lejeune 143). With the formation of the pact, there is also affirmation by the reader in the belief of the author-narrator-protagonist as one individual (Lejeune 14). A natural extension then, is the presumption of the autobiography's truth and validity, reducing, if not eliminating, Bruss's desire to confirm truth, act, and identity-value.

Paul de Man, in his essay "Autobiography as De-facement," minimizes the issue of truth-value with the assertion that autobiography does not reveal reliable self-knowledge but that it demonstrates the impossibility of closure or of totalization (922). De Man considers the telling of a complete life story as impossible because he regards autobiography as a figure of reading or understanding between the writer and reader, thereby changing the meaning or understanding of the life story with each reader. It is

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[4] These terms are further explored in Part Two.
[5] When the autobiography was written or the events took place versus when the work is being read.

Sylvia Molloy's view that the retelling of memories is controlled by the self-image the writer has when the autobiography is being written. This image is either one the author wants to project or one "the public demands" (8). Therefore, who the writer is at the time of writing will determine which memories are recalled. De Man suggests that an autobiography is a construction of a life; Molloy goes further and says that besides being an individual construct, it is also a "social artefact, as revealing of a psyche as it is of a culture" bringing the venture into the broader community (8).

The Fictional Element of Autobiographical Writing

In his essay, "Narrative and Chronology as Structures of Reference and the New Model Autobiographer," Paul John Eakin points to a fairly recent trend in thinking about autobiographical writing as works of fiction. He draws on the theories of de Man, who wrote that the references readers believe they see in a text are only illusions and are a part of their imaginative interaction with the text (qtd. in Eakin 32). According to de Man, it is not a life that produces an autobiography but the autobiography that produces the life (920). This sentiment suggests the form an autobiography takes is dependent upon the specific focus the writer has adopted, leading to the text having a creative and fictive element. The notion of autobiography as fiction is also considered in Fowlie's "On Writing Autobiography." He describes his personal experience of writing a series of recollections and memoirs as a memory of the past and the attempt to recreate it, to record those details that may "stir the imagination of a reader" (164). Fowlie quotes the line "It is myself that I remake," from W. B. Yeats's Autobiography (165). In contrast to de Man, Fowlie does not see self-writing as a reconstruction of a life, instead, he regards

it as a deconstruction. Essentially, Fowlie considers autobiographical writing as a process of self-alteration. He argues that memories are recalled and used for differing purposes and certain images or events persistently return; it is these images and patterns that reveal the identity of the writer (166). The construction or deconstruction of a self brings a fictive element to autobiography and relaxes the boundary between fiction and non-fiction.

De Man addresses the issue of what can or cannot be read as an autobiography. He argues that all works of fiction can conceivably be read as non-fiction and vice versa. However, this creates a problem when attempting to place the text within a certain classification; the boundaries are too loose (921). The fiction is derived from a writer choosing to recall different events depending upon the intent of the autobiography. Since it can be said that fiction is an inherent component of autobiography, Arenas's *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano* are brought closer together as one becomes more fictional and the other more autobiographical. This theory is supported by Soto's discussion of the intertwining of fiction and autobiography in Arenas's work. He sees the two as nurturing each other and violating their margins (1998, 96). Laurie Vickroy, in "The Traumas of Unbelonging: Reinaldo Arenas's Recuperations of Cuba," sees Arenas's work as addressing unofficial versions of reality (110), suggesting a creative and fictive element to it. Vickroy's article focuses on the application of aesthetics in Arenas's work, specifically how he used his imagination to resolve the traumatic events in his life. Ultimately, I argue *El color del verano* can be considered as much of an autobiography as *Antes que anochezca*, even though it is a sample of a subversive

documentary novel using carnivalesque attitudes, techniques, and motifs to create a utopian Cuban society.

Although I normally support the principle of authorial death, in the case of Arenas's autobiography, my agreement is challenged. Soto's study of Arenas's writing supports my belief that one cannot ignore Arenas's fictional work when conducting an analysis of *Antes que anochezca*, given the information contained in the autobiography. In fact, in the *"Prólogo,"* Arenas admits the novel covers a critical period in his life (1991, 249), rendering it an important source of information when conducting an analysis of his autobiography. The writer, the son, the friend, the lover, the Cuban citizen, the many faces of Arenas can be found in his body of work, both fiction and non-fiction, satisfying Bruss's truth-value criterion. Arenas's presence can also be regarded as a marker of dialogism satisfying Barthes' vision of a pluralistic, multi-voiced authorship. Arenas casts a web of references both explicit and implied in the two texts in the memories he recalls of his relationships with other well-known Cubans, the literary work of both Cuban and international writers, and the traumatic experiences he and others endured.

In addition to satisfying the tenets of literary criticism, the inclusion of Arenas's life experiences, beliefs, and values in his writing fits within the characteristics of someone with unresolved feelings of despair. According to Drs. James and Constance Messina, despondent individuals may exhibit some of the following symptoms:

> [They] become crusaders of a 'cause' trying to change the way things are in the hard, cruel world; are in a constant state of letting others know about their loss and how much anguish and pain has resulted from the

> loss; seek out an audience to whom they can ventilate their despair; mask their lack of coping with their loss in a veneer of strength and gusto; become convinced that no one can help them, and so they become 'lone rangers' and begin to challenge the system to change things. (Messina and Messina)

These reactions reflect the self-portrait Arenas has created and support my contention that feelings of hopelessness are prominent in *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano*. It is important to note that this thesis is not a psychological evaluation of Arenas and one cannot make a conclusive statement about an individual's emotional state by simply reading a body of work. However, there is compelling evidence in both texts that Arenas's feelings parallel the characteristics suggested by the Messinas.

In *Antes que anochezca*, Arenas makes a number of statements supporting the assessment of his being in despair. The following quotes fit within the criterion of challenging the system: *"O se vive como uno desea, o es mejor no seguir viviendo. En Cuba había soportado miles de calamidades porque siempre me alentó la esperanza de la fuga y la posibilidad de salvar mis manuscritos"* (1992, 9). Escaping also reveals that Arenas had not lost all hope.

> *Fui puesto en la mirilla de la Seguridad del Estado, ya no sólo como un tipo conflictivo que había escrito novelas como El mundo alucinante o Celestino antes del alba, que eran textos irreverentes que no le hacían apología al régimen (que más bien lo criticaban), sino que, además, había cometido la osadía de sacar, clandestinamente, aquellas obras, y*

> *publicarlas sin el permiso, naturalmente, de Nicolás Guillén que era el pre[s]ident de la UNEAC.*[6] (1992, 143)

Not only was he able to save his manuscripts, Arenas also found ways to smuggle them off the island for publication abroad, a strong act of rebellion and satisfying the need of finding an audience for his work. Arenas's defiance also meets the criterion of being a crusader of a cause: *"se nos ocurrió la idea de hacer una carta abierta a Fidel Castro solicitándole un plebiscito, más o menos como el que se le había hecho a Pinochet"* (1992, 13). Arenas was not the typical lone-wolf the Messinas describe; instead, he collaborated with his good friend Jorge Camacho and together they garnered support from many others:

> *Jorge me dijo que redactara la carta y los dos nos dimos a la tarea. Luego la firmamos él y yo: aunque no consiguiéramos más firmas, se la enviaríamos con nuestras dos modestas firmas. No fue así; conseguimos miles de firmas, incluyendo las de ocho personas que habían recibido el Premio Nobel.* (1992, 13)

Arenas's pride in his sexuality and his steadfast belief in his right to have the freedom to choose his lifestyle is a fundamental way he defied repressive state policies and attitudes. In *Antes que anochezca*, he gives a detailed account of his many sexual exploits commencing in childhood with the primacy of sex as the ultimate act of passion, creativity, and total freedom. Essentially, sexual energy overcomes all prejudice, repression, and punishment (1992, 40). Sexuality, especially homosexuality, is a dominant and recurring theme in his overall body of work as well as his opposition to Castro's regime and policies (Soto 1998, 25).

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[6] UNEAC – *Institución cultural de la Unión de Escritores y Artistas*

In addition to his dream of sexual freedom, in *El color del verano*, Arenas achieves the long-awaited and much coveted ousting of the Castro government. He advises that the rebellious goal of the novel, as a matter of fact the entire *pentagónia*, is *"cantar o contra el horror y la vida de la gente, incluyendo la suya"* (1991, 250). *El color del verano* is comprised of five themes prominent in both the play and the rest of the novel. Each theme is a testament to the difficult situation in Cuba: the challenges of living in a socialist regime; the government's subversion of the institution of writing; the equating of homosexuality as anti-revolutionary; the desire and attempts to escape from the island; and living in exile.

Arenas can also be viewed as a writer needing to let others know of his trials and tribulations. He explains in his autobiography that the inspiration for much of his writing comes from his real life: the real Arenas can be found in all of his work. Engaging in a spontaneous sexual tryst with a man in a beach cabana, while the man's wife and child lie close by on the beach, as well as the time Arenas spent at the beach, motivated him to write *Otra vez el mar* (1992, 126, 139). The inspiration for the poem *El central* was the enslaved youth he encountered in the sugarcane fields when he was sent to work in the Manuel Sanguily Sugar Mill in 1970 (1992, 155). The selection of the name Fortunato, his protagonist in *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*, was in memory of a former lover (1992, 130). These few references, of many possible examples, support Bruss's truth-value criterion since a reader can easily refer to Arenas's body of work to validate its authenticity. At the same time, the examples challenge Barthes' contention that authorial presence is both undesirable and detrimental. In this case, Arenas's presence provides insight into the choice of characters and their individual traits and significance.

References to his other works are also indicative of the dialogical nature of Arenas's writing. Further, the examples meet the criteria of an individual suffering from despair, who must keep re-telling and re-creating memories and seeking out audiences to hear them.

The role memory plays in the writing of an autobiography is germane to the genre with respect to an autobiography being a selection of an individual's past experiences. Historically, "memory has been accepted as a faithful replicating mechanism, its functioning seldom questioned, its deceptions rarely contemplated," especially in the nineteenth century but to a lesser degree in the twentieth (Molloy 5). In contrast, recent critical analysis of the autobiographical genre asserts that memory moves autobiography into the realm of fiction. Traditional autobiographical writing has typically been a chronological mnemonic activity which is not necessarily reflective of how the act of memory works, thereby reducing the truth-value of the self-writing process. Theorists argue against the notion that a sequential account of one's life is a natural or an automatic representation of previous experiences (Eakin 33). Retelling events in the order in which they occurred erroneously suggests "what follows after follows from" (Eakin 33). This serves to falsify the mnemonic act and when the spatial and temporal ordering of events is strictly chronological, contrary to how memory actually functions, a fiction is created. The recalling of memories based on the order in which they come to a writer, with the most significant or relevant being at the forefront of the mind, will identify the situations and feelings that have had an impact on his/her development and are important to reveal in the autobiography. Clearly, these events may follow a degree of temporal order but what is critical is that the individual can reflect upon how s/he was influenced and then

choose to alter the sequencing as appropriate. A strictly chronological account is one that has the potential to mask aspects of one's life that are either repressed, difficult to talk about (Eakin 34), or would rather be ignored. In short, a glossing over of deeper, perhaps more difficult feelings, is certainly possible but not necessarily a given.

Antes que anochezca follows an ordered sequence but, at the same time, it is the focus on specific memories and experiences that become more prominent than a precise timeline. This is evident by the headings and the content of various chapters in the autobiography such as "Fidel Castro," "Raúl," and "Lezama Lima." These sections describe Arenas's relationships, with respect to his mentor and friend José Lezama Lima and his former lover Raúl (1992, 109-113; 88-90), whereas in "Fidel Castro," Arenas tells of his reaction to one of the President's many speeches (1992, 77-78). Although the autobiography traces Arenas's life from childhood onward, it does not appear to be strictly sequential. Further, Arenas does mention keeping a diary *"el Diario de Occidente"* to record daily events (1992, 156), suggesting that the autobiography is not necessarily purely chronological and that the order of events was determined by significance or relation to the overall story. Like the autobiography, *El color del verano* is clearly not a chronological mnemonic act. Rather, it is circular:

> *El color del verano es un mundo que si no lo escribo se perderá fragmentado en la memoria de los que lo conocieron. Dejo a la sagacidad de los críticos las posibilidades de descifrar la estructura de esta novela. Solamente quisiera apuntar que no se trata de una obra lineal, sino circular y por lo mismo ciclónica, con un vértice o centro que es el carnaval, hacia donde parten todas las flechas. De modo que, dado*

> *su carácter de circunferencia, la obra en realidad no empieza ni termina en un punto específico y puede comenzar a leerse por cualquier parte hasta terminar la ronda. Sí, está usted, tal vez, ante la primera novela redonda hasta ahora conocida. Pero, por favor, no considere esto ni un mérito ni un defecto, es una necesidad intrínseca a la armazón de la obra.* (1991, 249)

According to Soto, the circular nature of *El color del verano* is also a parody of the Cuban documentary novel form, structure, and pro-revolutionary stance.[7]

Arenas as a Witness in *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano*

In addition to Arenas's memories being centred on specific themes and not a simply chronological account of his life, the autobiography reflects the author's experience of the government's leadership, societal homophobic attitudes, and their impact on both Arenas personally and on his fellow Cubans, particularly homosexuals. Arenas as a witness, shifts the focus of mnemonic activity from the individual to the realm of community. Given Lejeune's definition of autobiography, this broadening of the subject from the individual to the community could reduce the specific autobiography's classification as one. In fact, Molloy addresses this issue by pointing out:

> This combination of the personal and the communal restricts the scrutiny of self so frequently associated with autobiography (a view that applies to just one type of autobiography), on the other, it has the advantage of capturing a tension between self and other, of generating a reflection on

[7] An introduction to the Cuban documentary novel will be provided in Part Two.

> the fluctuating place of the subject within its community, of allowing for other voices, besides that of the "I", to be heard in the text. (9)

However, this style of writing is a common feature in Spanish America as authors see themselves as witnesses and include testimonies as a significant part of their autobiographies (Molloy 8). Jo-Marie Claassen also examines the concept of an autobiography capturing the experiences of a community and explains that, although it is generally the first person singular that dominates autobiographical writing, it is the voice that expresses experiences, fears, hopes, and longings of a silent majority (12). Soto classifies Arenas as a Spanish American writer who has incorporated a testimonial perspective in his autobiography (1).

The link between *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano* is reinforced by Arenas's recounting of events and experiences both he and others endured, creating a polyphonic, multi-voiced account of life in Cuba. As a parody of the Cuban documentary novel, *El color del verano* subverts the official position of Castro's regime being the best leadership for the Cuban people (Soto 1994, 24). A community-wide voice is a characteristic of carnivalesque; however, a declaration of reality regardless of how cruel is not necessarily representative of an entire community's experience. It may be a writer "bearing witness to that which is no more – not only aggrandizes the author's individual persona but reflects the communal dimension sought for the autobiographical venture" (Molloy 8-9). A witness's supporting evidence can also take the form of individual memories being reconstructed as shared events (Molloy 9). If that is the case, then one can assume it is possible for others' experiences to be commandeered and used as one's own. The potential for the appropriation of experiences in *El color del verano* is

supported by the portrayal of various protagonists, in addition to the Gabriel/Tétrica Mofeta/Reinaldo trinity, to reveal a diversity of reactions to the Dictator and his regime. The result brings the novel into the realm of autobiography with its definitive connection to Arenas's view of life in post-revolutionary Cuba.

In autobiographies with a testimonial style, "the *loci* of memory [...] is in family homes, the sleepy provinces, strongholds of tradition, the cities that time has irrevocably changed, if not destroyed" (Molloy 9). Molloy argues that the collective memory of a community is brought forward through "what might be called a mnemonic lineage" (9). The venture into the past is "through familial lines [...] most often maternal reminiscence" (Molloy 9). In *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano*, the evidence is that of both Arenas individually and the various communities he was a member of – writers, family, homosexuals, and exiles. His memories are centred on his loss of freedom of expression especially in relation to his sexuality and his writing. In addition, the prominence of Arenas in both of these texts, renders him another *loci* of memory. The various experiences of others he captures are depicted through his unique vision and understanding of Cuban reality.

In *Antes que anochezca*, maternal reminiscence is used as a departure point for remembering to a much greater degree than the novel; there is a significant amount of time devoted to Arenas's childhood and his relationship with his mother and other members of his family, most notably his grandparents and Aunt Agata. In comparison, the time-frame of the autobiography that corresponds with *El color del verano* has a limited amount of content related to the maternal *loci* but it is still present, especially with respect to his relationship with his mother and his Aunt. In his autobiography, Arenas

recalls visiting his mother, in the chapter *"Una visita a Holguín,"* and feeling deeply saddened about not being able to grant her one wish: for him to marry and have a son so that she would not be so lonely in her old age (1992, 168). I interpret this passage as a comment on the trap set by societal expectations: grow up, get a job, get married, have children, and support your parents. When he remembers his return to Havana following this trip, maternal reminiscence brings his memories to Aunt Agata and her reaction to his sexuality making this evil aunt the focus of Arenas's visit with his mother. Unlike his tragic mother wishing he could be a typical son who marries and has children, Aunt Agata's response is to turn against him for her own benefit; she wanted him out of her house so his room can be given to her son. She cunningly uses the State Security informer system to her own advantage and causes nothing but problems for her nephew and others (1992, 169-170). The result of Aunt Agata's efforts is the State obtaining details about Arenas's personal life, propelling Arenas further into the public sphere. Interestingly, there is a similarly named section ("*Viaje a Holguín*") in *El color del verano,* focusing more intensely on Arenas's relationship with his mother and to a much lesser degree on those relatives, such as his aunt, who spy on him. It is Gabriel, the good son, who is visiting and while there his alter egos Tétrica Mofeta and Reinaldo periodically emerge. Clearly, this section addresses the need to hide aspects of his life and to play the role of a good and dutiful son during his visit, even at the expense of masking what constitutes personal happiness and how it eludes him:

> *Cómo podía ser feliz un pájaro casado, con un hijo, integrado oficialmente al régimen. Cómo podía ser feliz una persona cuya verdadera existencia era clandestina, alguien que casi siempre tenía que*

> *estar poniéndose una máscara, fingiendo, representando, simulando que creía, que amaba, que confiaba plenamente en el régimen que aborrecía y en el cual aparentemente militaba y contra el cual además temerosamente conspiraba... Feliz, no me hagas reír. Cierto que a veces, cada vez que podía se escapaba de su papel de esposo y padre, se transformaba en otra persona y tenía esas aventuras con algún hombre o por lo menos con alguien que lo parecía.* (1991, 102)

With this passage, Arenas expresses his pain over having to hide his authentic self. Vickroy addresses this issue in her article; she sees Arenas's writing as bearing witness of a "suppressed past" (110). She interprets Arenas's body of work as carrying "the imprint of overwhelming, psychologically disruptive events, and [his] attempts to reshape cultural memory of these events in his focus on artists' authenticity and survival, and in imaginatively revisiting emotionally over-determined contexts symptomatic of traumas" (110).

One more public and prominent *loci* of memory in both texts is Havana. Since the Revolution, little has been done to maintain the city's buildings and they have physically deteriorated. Further, due to the government's policies, the cosmopolitan atmosphere has been destroyed. Life is as oppressive there as everywhere else, although there is certainly a greater degree of safety for homosexuals and writers in a larger city than in a smaller one – safety in numbers if you will. The oppression stems from a particularly strong and continuing tradition: the machismo attitude. The revolutionary ideal of a real man are those men who identify as heterosexual and the dominant partner, regardless of whether the partner is a man or a woman. Soto's interpretation is a little

different; he defines a revolutionary man as one being chastely virile.[8] Although he uses the following quote from one of Castro's speeches to support his definition, I do not see a clear connection to the chastity and heterosexuality being referred to: "[W]e would never come to believe that a homosexual could embody the conditions and requirements of conduct that would enable us to consider him a true revolutionary, a true Communist militant" (25). It may be valid to say that heterosexuality can be compared to purity, thereby rendering it chaste and unspoiled. This term, *castos*, in Spanish is also used by Arenas in his autobiography. He is retelling the story of his escapade with Hiram Pratt and Tomasito La Goyesca[9] when they are in Revolutionary Square and being subjected to *castos* shouting insults at them (1992, 120).[10]

According to Suzanne Kaebnick, it is not that macho men do not have sexual relationships with other men, but they are the active, penetrating partners. It is the passive participants, the ones being penetrated, who are considered effeminate and not macho (102). This model has been used in other Spanish American writing, most notably, in *El laberinto de la soledad* by Octavio Paz. In this particular essay, the author examines the dichotomies of male/female and dominant/dominated. The Mexican people, according to Paz, were born from a violation of the Malinche by the Conquistador. The indigenous woman, the *"Chingada"* becomes the symbol of weakness and inferiority (212). By extension, men who identify as homosexual and are the passive, penetrated partners are equated with femininity and become objects of humiliation. Arenas tells us that it is these men, such as Arenas himself, who are

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[8] Soto's interpretation is rather ambiguous, as it does not align with the quote from Castro's speech.
[9]There is a considerable amount of gender flexibility in reference to the homosexual characters. I have tried to capture the fluidity of gender in my analysis so that a clearer picture of the novel is presented.
[10] This story is discussed in greater detail in Part Two.

stigmatized and labelled as homosexual and non-revolutionary.[11] Homosexuality in post-revolutionary Cuba was expressly forbidden and those in same-sex relationships experienced institutionalised persecution and repression, culminating in the forcible detention of homosexuals and other nonconformists, in the Military Units to Aid Production camps (UMAP), which eventually closed in 1968, to convert them into virile revolutionary men through hard labour (Lumsden 65-72).[12] The presumed inherent resistance to the socialist government's policies by homosexuals is rooted in their sexual orientation, therefore, by definition homosexuals are enemies of the state and their conversion into heterosexuals will automatically make them better citizens as they will be conforming to the state's policies. The macho is ridiculed in *Antes que anochezca* and is clearly a subject of attack in *El color del verano* to reveal the hypocrisy of macho virile men, especially those in the government, and to lessen the distance between them and the *maricón.*[13] As a result, Arenas's quest for vengeance over being socially and politically vilified was likely satisfied.

The two texts share the same events and opinions which reveal the despair Arenas portrays in his autobiography, but the novel transforms a number of the similarities into graphic satirical imagery. Satire, as a style of writing, seeks to expose those attitudes and beliefs the satirist has identified as undesirable and needing to be changed; it is grounded in the negative. The desired enlightenment is created through the presentation of an object or objects of attack, the subject(s) deserving scorn. Objects of attack are

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[11] Kaebnick reports that the "vilification of the homosexual in Cuba [...] has not emphasized a heterosexual vs. homosexual identity, but an active masculine identity versus a passive, feminine identity" (102).
[12] Forced labour camps for homosexuals (those who acted homosexual by being the passive partner or effeminate as opposed to those who engaged in homosexual sex but were macho at the same time) (Kaebnick 108) and other deviants, instituted during Castro's initial reign (Lumsden 65-72).
[13] This theme is fully explored in Part Two.

presented, according to Jewell Brooker, juxtaposed between the literal and the ideal; decay versus human ideal; rottenness with a hint of intelligence – a dualism in nature is represented by the dualism of the satirist (11). Satire can be described as a transformation of day-to-day issues into "permanent symbols of human folly and corruption" to create characterizations of different types of people (Nokes 3). Further, satire in fiction tends to flatten characters toward caricature; they are depicted as unchanging while their individual traits are overemphasized and made larger-than-life, creating ludicrous portraits of human vice and folly (Griffin 4). The imagery in satire is generally dismal and bleak, portraying the object of attack without the triumphant regenerating tone found in carnivalesque. To illustrate this, Brooker quotes a particularly relevant passage from Alvin Kernan's The Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance:

> Typically, the scene is obsessively physical, showing not only a fascination for flesh, but for all animal functions of flesh. The scene is also obsessively materialistic, with decay, rottenness, brokenness, filth, everywhere in evidence. Finally, in regard to structure, the satiric scene is characterized by density and by disorder. The over-abundance of flesh and matter conveys the impression that the world it depicts is on the verge of collapsing under its own weight. On the other hand, the satiric scene always contains at least a hint of intelligence, of mind, of spirituality, of [...] the human ideal. (11)

Satire is rooted in the real world; it is a tone or style of writing that addresses wrongdoings as identified by the satirist. The voice is an individual commentary, a

testimony, on the state of things. Satire is a component of carnivalesque, which is the overall structure of *El color del verano*. Within the carnivalesque world, the satirical tone has an element of rejuvenation and rebirth to it, contrary to pure satire.

Arenas uses satire to graphically portray his perception of the horrors and folly of socialist Cuba. Arenas presented his opinions as the undeniable truth. By reading both the autobiography and *El color del verano*, I became aware that Arenas would not have tolerated any opposition to his understanding of the post-revolutionary experience. He and fellow Cubans had been wronged; he saw it as his mission to point out the offences and the reasons for them. The sheer magnitude of the satiric imagery in *El color del verano* illustrates the depth of Arenas's anger and despair.

Markers of Despair

In his autobiography, Arenas describes his emotional condition in these terms: "*[me] sentía perseguido,*" after writing of his legal obligation to care for his new wife's baby (1992, 179). It provides a lead in to being under constant surveillance and intimidation causing fellow Cubans, such as his friend Miguel Figueroa, to be so desperate to flee that they are willing to try anything, even swimming away, to escape the government's control (1992, 179). The inclusion of this feeling between the two completely different life conditions portrays the all-encompassing oppression Arenas was experiencing. The oppression took the form of government policies and attitudes towards dissidence and the impact of the island's economic situation at the hands of the socialist government. [14] Throughout the autobiography there are references to the pompous,

[14] Dissident refers to anyone who does not conform to the ideal of a revolutionary man or to anyone who acted in opposition to or disagrees with the regime or to anyone who does not ascribe to official policy and

ineffectual, and harmful behaviour of Castro and his regime. Arenas testifies that Castro, early in his reign, appointed himself district attorney and judge to sentence a number of air force pilots to twenty to thirty years in prison when an honest court did not want to falsely condemn the pilots for bombing the city of Santiago de Cuba. The displaced judge, who sported the rebel insignia of a long beard, shot himself when he learned of the conviction and sentence (1992, 85-86). One can only imagine the disillusion and despair he felt when he realized the absolute control Castro desired. Apparently, it was too much for this judge and he could not live knowing he had been an inadvertent supporter of revolutionary ideals. Even though in this instance Castro did not pull the trigger, the Commander in Chief is reputed to kill his own people if they go against him. As Arenas testifies:

> *Han pasado más de treinta años y todavia Fidel Castro sigue celebrando esos juicios teatrales y, desde luego, de vez en cuando, también los televisa. Pero ahora Castro ya no fusila a los esbirros de Batista, fusila a sus propios soldados y a veces hasta a sus propios generales.* (1992, 70)

The President's brutality and poor decisions are graphically portrayed in *"Una inspección"* in <u>*El color del verano*</u>. In this section, Fifo takes a helicopter tour of the island with an entourage comprosed of government ministers, la Dama del Velo,[15] technical advisors, two physicians, an escort, pilot, and co-pilot (1991, 141). His intention is to inspect the entire island before his anniversary celebrations begin, but

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doctrine. An example of a dissident would be a writer smuggling manuscripts out of the country for publication when they had been banned by UNEAC. Another example is a homosexual; the very fact that someone's sexual orientation was not heterosexual rendered them a non-revolutionary man and therefore a dissident.

[15] La Dama del Velo is an individual who is travelling incognito and who is only known as a prominent figure in the Arab world (1991, 141).

things get off to a bad start. The Prime Minister neglects to bring along a sack of human body parts to be thrown to Tiburón Sangriento,[16] the first stop on the tour. As the following quotes indicate, Fifo is irate but he does spare the Minister's life, and only orders one of his arms cut off and thrown to the shark.

> *-¡Cómo! - bramó Fifo rojo de furia mientras Tiburón Sangriento seguía dando saltos con la boca abierta en espera de la apetitosa dádiva- ¡Eso es el colmo de la indisciplina! ¡Debería de mandarte a fusilar ahora mismo por alta traición!* [17] (1991, 142)

"*-Bien, te perdono la vida por esta vez – concedió Fifo -. Córtate sólo un brazo y tíraselo*" (1991, 142). In response to Tiburón Sangriento's gratitude, shown by an impressive pirouette out of the water, Fifo coldheartedly remarks, "*–El brazo de un Primer Ministro debe ser un bocado exquisito-*" (1991, 142).

The depiction of Fifo's brutality and ineptitude continues throughout the section. Fifo orders a mountain levelled so that *malanga* can be planted in its place even though the Minister of Agriculture advises that the fruit will not grow in the area (1991, 143-144). Fifo accuses the minister of being *"un canalla, agente de la CIA, [y] hijo de puta"* who wants to deprive him and the country of what he had promised forty years ago but is still unable to provide (1991, 144). Like a spoiled child, what Fifo wants Fifo gets. He orders that once the carnival is over, the mountain will come down. In the meantime, the Minister is stabbed for sabotaging the Dictator's glorious, but as yet unrealized, plans for the island (1991, 144). These scenes are examples of satire; Fifo's attitudes and brutality

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[16] The sharks were trained to exterminate dissidents such as homosexuals. Fifo has other soldiers to do his dirty work for him, specifically, thousands of diligent midgets who are first introduced in the play (1991, 15).

[17] Arenas does not use quotation marks, instead he uses dashes to indicate when a character is speaking.

are the subjects of the attacks and he is portrayed as being evil to the core and with no chance of change. They are also indicative of one of carnivalesque's basic tenets, to mock the authority of the referent world.

Satirical depictions bring to life a number of sections in *Antes que anochezca* that require the humorous portrayal to emphasize the President's ineptitude and violent behaviour. The autobiography bears witness to the government's inability to drive its labourers to meet the unrealistic promise of a ten million ton sugarcane harvest. In an effort to deflect any negative publicity about the failed harvest, a sudden conspiracy about the CIA kidnapping fishermen is successfully deployed (1992, 158). In another example of the government's failings, Arenas explains how he managed to secure a few plastic bags to protect his manuscripts: he stole them when he was forced to plant coffee seedlings around the city, making it into a coffee plantation which never produced a single bean (1992, 146-147). Based on the content in *El color del verano*, a reader can easily replace the *malanga* with the coffee beans.

Clearly, Arenas despaired of the government's representatives and official doctrine but public policy touched him on a very personal and private level as well. From his autobiography, readers learn of Arenas's sense of frustration with his situation but in *El color del verano*, it is vividly brought to life. Strong examples of this portrayal are found in the two sections entitled *"Viaje a la Luna."* In the first one, Tétrica Mofeta is incensed over the technology to send a man to the moon but the ignorance or lack of concern about the human rights violations in Cuba, such as allowing the practice of homosexuals being held captive and toiling for years in the UMAP labour camps (1991, 106). In the second *"Viaje a la Luna,"* there is an overwhelming sense of despair,

desperation, and profound desire to escape (1991, 313-315). The *loco's* obsession with the moon and the meticulous way he completes his job of filling the tank with water using an eye dropper reflects the tenacity necessary to stick to his plan and to escape from his miserable life.

As this second trip to the moon reveals, disillusionment and despair were also experienced by others after the revolutionary government took control of the island. Although many of Arenas's classmates in the agricultural accountant program *"llegaron después a ser dirigentes del regimen de Castro, otros se suicidaron"* (1992, 73). In spite of the despair some felt at that time, Arenas tells us there was still hope: *"Sin embargo, todavía había ciertas esperanzas; siempre hay ciertas esperanzas; sobre todo para los cobardes. Yo era uno de ellos; uno de esos jóvenes cobardes o esperanzados que aún pensaban que aquel gobierno podía ofrecerles algo"* (1992, 86). There was dissidence and dissatisfaction but a great many citizens continued to be supporters of the revolutionary government. Some were compelled or coerced into placing their loyalties with Castro, some chose to join the socialist camp to serve their individual goals, and others joined simply because they believed in the Revolution. There is considerable discussion concerning the conversion, both voluntary and forced, of non-supporters into *castritos.*[18] Writers, such as Virgilio Piñera and Lezama Lima resisted the pressure to use their writing to support the Revolution and earned Arenas's respect. From Arenas's perspective, others such as Cintio Vitier, Eliseo Diego, Alejo Carpentier, and Nicolás Guillén succumbed to the coercion (1992, 116). Soto challenges this position with a quote from Seymour Menton's Prose Fiction of the Cuban Revolution:

[18] Followers of Fidel Castro - a diminutive.

> The period was characterized by the strong desire of many Cuban artists to expiate the guilt of their bourgeois past in order to focus on the work of the Revolution (what José Rodríquez Feo termed *exorcismo*). The self-criticism and sense of guilt felt by many writers made them avoid polemical issues that would be considered counterrevolutionary. (Soto 1994, 15)

Not all writers necessarily felt they were wronged by the revolutionary government. In contrast, Arenas provides a rationale for what he saw as the State's systematic demoralization of dissident writers, to stop the public turning them into symbols of strength and rebellion. As the persecution of the people intensified, the writing of censored authors became increasingly sought after. The regime considered it very dangerous to have a significant number of people follow the writers, therefore the institution of writing and individual writers had to be subverted, humiliated, and cut down (1992, 161). In *Antes que anochezca*, the memories recalled are centred on the publication roadblocks created by UNEAC. The union decides what gets published and what does not, and Arenas describes the organization as a centre of Communist propaganda (1992, 109). It is interesting to note that three of its prominent members, Nicolás Guillén, Alejo Carpentier, and Cintio Vitier, are internationally acclaimed writers and are identified by Arenas as selling out and becoming spokesmen for the Revolution.

In addition to UNEAC's control, the government sought to weaken both the institution of writing and specific individual writers. This was achieved by censoring their work, instituting strict content and publication laws, and forcing writers to use the Revolution and its ideals as both the inspiration for and the actual content of their work.

The message was a clear one; there was no place in post-revolutionary Cuba for material challenging or questioning the Revolution. Under Fifo, in *El color del verano*, many citizens endure the repression of their freedom: to create any form of art they wish; to openly criticize the State; to leave the island and return whenever they wish; to succumb to pressure to conform to what is regarded as the characteristics of a good revolutionary; and to live their lives anyway they choose. Confirmation of this cloistered stronghold is included early in the novel, in the play:

> NICOLÁS GUILLÉN. *Partir no podrás.*
>
> *El partido te lo impide*
>
> *y la patria aquí se mide*
>
> *con vara de capataz...* (1991, 20-21)

According to Arenas, in order to save their lives, writers must say things against their beliefs and conspire against each other. Even though the reason many of them do not maintain their integrity is the result of the repressive system they live in, Arenas judged them as being weak. Arenas did in fact find himself in the difficult position of being detained by State Security in the El Morro prison until he finally relented and signed a confession written for him (1992, 229). State Security selected a poet, Heberto Padilla, to "usher [sic] in a new era of conservatism and vigilance on the part of the government, which was determined to prevent attacks against the Revolution" (Soto 1994, 21).

"The Padilla 'Case'" is one of the most notable examples in the autobiography of the government silencing writers. Padilla, an internationally recognized writer, submitted a book critical of the Revolution to an official competition. The writer and his wife, Belkis Cuza Malé, were seized and Padilla was jailed and beaten into confessing his sins

against the Revolution. In a public forum, in which fellow dissident writers were invited to attend, Padilla admitted to his counter-revolutionary work and apologized for it (1992, 162-163). Not only did he discount his body of work, Padilla also named many of his friends who fell within the anti-revolution camp. These writers, *"entre golpes de pecho y lágrimas en los ojos, tenian que acudir al micrófono donde estaba Padilla, asumir sus culpas y reconocer que eran unos miserables y unos traidores al sistema"* (1992, 163). One man refused to participate in Padilla's apology, Arenas's mentor Lezama Lima. I interpret the inclusion of Lima's refusal as more proof of the degree of integrity Arenas felt Lima possessed. [19] Soto further states that the apology forged a deep rift between two groups of writers: those who "pledge unwaivering alliance to the Revolution and those who refused to compromise on the principle of artistic freedom of expression" (1994, 22). In response to the confession, Arenas testifies:

> *La humillación pública ha sido uno de los métodos más utilizados por Castro: la degradación de las personas ante un público, siempre dispuesto a burlarse de cualquier debilidad ajena o de cualquier persona caída en desgracia. Y no sólo la acusación, sino el arrepentimiento, entre golpes de pecho, ante un público que aplaudía y se reía. Y después, naturalmente, rapados y esposados, la purificación de sus debilidades en un campo caña o cualquier otro trabajo agrícola.* (1992, 165)

Padilla's self-denunciation took place at the same time the *"Primer Congreso de Educación y Cultura"* was being organized. [20] The Congress was, according to Arenas, opposed to everything the title implied. Castro's government was not strengthening

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[19] Dr. Dolores M. Koch, translator of *Antes que anochezca* into English (Before Night Falls), agrees with my reading of the refusal's inclusion in Arenas's autobiography (personal correspondence).
[20] The congress took place in April, 1971.

education and culture, instead it was being weakened with the intent of stifling the expression of Cuban culture (1992, 163-164). Soto confirms Arenas's allegation as he advises the Congress instituted a "definitive and rigid revolutionary cultural policy" (1994, 16). Arenas tells of the Congress's cruellest attacks, those against homosexuals. He speaks of a system called *parametraje* in which all homosexuals who held positions in cultural organizations had to have their employment immediately terminated (1992, 164). Arenas describes how the system worked:

> *Comenzó el 'parametraje', es decir cada escritor, cada artista, cada dramaturgo homosexual, recibía un telegrama en el que se le decía que no reunía los parámetros políticos y morales para desempeñar el cargo que ocupaba y, por tanto, era dejado sin empleo o se le ofertaba otro en un campo de trabajos forzados.* (1992, 164)

The climate which Arenas and fellow writers existed in is clear from the following quote: *"Evidentemente, llegó la noche oscura para todos los intelectuales cubanos* (1992, 164). The restrictions gave writers few options. They could continue writing regardless of the danger it posed, as Arenas and a select few of his friends such as the Abreu brothers chose to do, or they could become state informers (1992, 165).

Padilla's forced apology is also portrayed in <u>*El color del verano*</u> in the section entitled "*La confesión de H. Puntilla.*" There are two intriguing differences between the section's title in the novel and in the autobiography. In <u>*Antes que anochezca*</u>, Arenas refers to the incident as a case and then describes Padilla's recanting as an apology. In <u>*El color del verano*</u>, we find the word *confesión*, likely an allusion to Fifo's (desired) omnipotent and god-like status; believers in the Revolution must confess their sins, be

repentant, and finally, perform a penance. The second difference is found in the spelling of Padilla's name: Puntilla. According to the Oxford Spanish Dictionary, the English translation of *Puntilla* is dagger – used to administer the *coup de grâce* in a bullfight. This is rather interesting since Padilla was forced to confess to his ideological weaknesses and to publicly name those friends who shared his criticism of the socialist government. It is not implausible that Arenas thought of him as a backstabber and a traitor to the institution of writing. In fact, in *El color del verano*, Arenas devotes a derogatory tongue twister entitled *"Alla, ella, illa, ollo, ulla..."* to Puntilla (73).

Soto provides some history on the thirty tongue twisters included in the novel and referenced in *Antes que anochezca*. He confirms Arenas's allegation in his autobiography that he had invented them as literary weapons against those individuals who betrayed him in one way or another (Arenas 1992, 261-262; Soto 1998, 60) and that he did not spare himself criticism and devoted one to himself, which he included in *El color del verano* (Soto 1998, 61; Arenas 1991, 107). The bullets fired from these weapons take the form of scathing attacks aimed at fellow writers for their various "literary egos, sexual inclinations, or hypocrisy in supporting the Castro regime" (Soto 1998, 61). Soto considers them as "lampoon[s] [of] the diabolical and backstabbing literary scene in revolutionary Havana as well as that of the international literary establishment" (1998, 60). Further proof of the tongue twisters' notoriety in Cuba is found in a quote from Roberto Valero's book *Desamparado humor de Reinaldo Arenas*: "The majority of the tongue twisters circulated extensively throughout Havana. Writers knew them by heart, and a kind of oral and satirical samizdat was achieved" (qtd. in Soto

1998, 62).[21] Soto also discusses the impact of their being printed for the first time in the novel. He states they are "finally free to express what was once prohibited and censored in Cuba" and they are "powerful literary documents of Arenas's turbulent years in Havana after falling into disfavour with the Castro regime" (1998, 62). As I previously noted, *"Alla, ella, illa, ollo, ulla..."* is the tongue twister directed at *Puntilla*; it reflects the anger and disgust Arenas felt about the forced confession:

> *Esa ladilla pilla llamada puntilla que todo lo mancilla por una pesetilla, chilla y se humilla porque no brilla y huye y destruye porque no halla hoyo, valla, boya, bulla, bollo, bugabello, muelle, quilla o gran morcilla que la aboyen y la embullen a boyar. Ella quiere ser estrella, ocupar una gran silla, ser del mundo maravilla y dirigir la tortilla; pero es sólo una putilla que ostenta grandes patillas y no puede escribir ni una cuartilla que no sea de pacotilla.*
>
> *(Para H. Puntilla, cuyo verdadero nombre es Leopoldo Avila).* (1991, 73)

The island's President is physically involved with the confession in <u>*El color del verano*</u>, in contrast to <u>*Antes que anochezca*</u> in which it was only implied. During the novel's confession, shots are fired by Puntilla's wife (Baka Kosa Mala)[22] and not realizing that she is behind the gunfire and thinking it was one of Fifo's soldiers, Puntilla breaks down and begs Fifo to spare his life:

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[21] Samizdat: Derived from Russian *sam*, "self," and *izdatelstvo*, "publishing." It is literature usually critical of the Soviet government, especially in opposition to the State's restrictions on the freedom of expression of major dissident Soviet authors following Joseph Stalin's death in 1953. It was written, copied, and circulated underground to ensure secrecy (www. britannica.com).

[22] Baka Kosa Mala: I translate as: drop something evil (*baja cosa mala*) which is what she had intended to do based on the passage of text – kill the commander in chief.

> *H. Puntilla lanzó un aullido hórrido y dijo que no lo mataran, que se arrepentía de todos sus delitos, que amaba a Fifo desesperadamente y que quería pedirle perdón de rodillas por lo cual le rogaba al Comandante de la Aurora (así lo llamó) que subiera al escenario. En realidad lo que perseguía H. Puntilla era que Baka Kosa Mala con sus locos disparos matara al Comandante en jefe, liberándose así de dos enemigos terribles, el comandante y la esposa. Pero varios enanos antes de que Fifo subiera al escenario desarmaron a la desenfrenada poetisa.* (1991, 331)

This passage depicts the President's participation in the confession through the fear Puntilla expresses when he believes Fifo will retaliate for Baka Kosa Mala's actions. The rationale for his fear and the reinforcement of his docile behaviour is Fifo's malicious brutality. Puntilla supplicates at Fifo's feet, begging the Commander in Chief to kick him and to urinate on him, which the President does happily to applause from the audience (1991, 331-332). There is, evidently, good reason for Puntilla, and others, to be fearful. In this story, Fifo is presented as a leader craving attention and affirmation. Prior to the confession, the Commander in Chief is to be bestowed Spain's highest distinction but his moment of glory is stolen when Gertrudis de Avellaneda announces she has a sonnet for a man of truly heroic proportions, to Fifo's surprise, it is not him, it is George Washington (1991, 330).[23]

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[23] The namesake of the play at the beginning of *El color del verano* is Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y Arteaga. She was an accomplished poet, playwright, dramatist, and novelist in the mid-1800s (Harter 17). Avellaneda was an assertive feminist who felt ambivalent about marriage due to her strong feelings about gender inequities of the time (Harter 27, Scott xiv). Avellaneda's writing was her method of expressing her struggle against social constraints; in fact, "she advocated free and open relationships with – or preferably without – benefit of clergy" (Scott xv). "She was often at the forefront of establishing the right of women to see themselves not only as narrated objects but also as writing subjects" (Scott xiv-xv). Like Arenas, some of her work, most notably *Sab* and *dos Mujeres*, was banned in Cuba due to thematic content but was published in Spain. *Sab* advocated for the abolition of slavery which was still very much in practice in

Another prominent form of demoralizing state control revealed in the autobiography is the pervasive system of State informers. Arenas frequently referred to friends, most notably his friend Hiram Prado, who had become informers and were ordered to obtain information on him.

> *Supe, al salir de la cárcel, que Hiram Pratt, bajo presión de la Seguridad del Estado, había ido a visitar a casi todos mis amigos averiguando dónde yo estaba escondido, cuando estaba prófugo. También fue a ver a mi madre.*
>
> *La noche en que supe que Hiram era un delator, regresé a la celda bastante deprimido.* (1992, 228)

These memories come to life in <u>*El color del verano*</u> in the section "*En el jardín de las computadoras*." Although Arenas devotes considerable time in his autobiography to the impact of state informers on life in Cuba, it is through the depiction in the novel that readers come face-to-face with an image of the hungry military machine churning out reports on suspicious citizens.

> *En efecto, cada uno de aquellos aparatos abría su boca metálica y saltaba como queriendo desprenderse de su base, clamando por las delaciones para sus estómagos de hierro. Esas delaciones constituían el alimento que hacía funcionar a aquellos artefactos. Y en aquellos aparatos voraces e implacables radicaba el verdadero poder de Fifo.* (1991, 400)

Cuba so the government did not publish any literature against the practice; and <u>*dos Mujeres*</u> which presented a tolerant view of an adulterous relationship was in violation of societal norms and practices and the government again felt it prudent to ban the publication (Scott xv). There is a parallel between Avellaneda's struggles and those of Arenas, rendering her a realistic choice of a poet who would not want to live within the boundaries of post-revolutionary Cuba.

These reports were compiled from information supplied by family members, friends, neighbours, lovers, and work colleagues, and deemed truthful accounts of the suspects' lives. The following quotes are samples of the imagery Arenas uses to make his point about the lack of veracity and utter foolishness of the evidence provided by State informants: *"Amas de casa se autoacusaban de haber malgastado la manteca forastera"* (1991, 402); and, *"También se presentó una denuncia contra la Madre Teresa por haber propagado el SIDA en toda la India"* (1991, 404). In this scene, the President's efficient computers devouring the truth provides readers with the opportunity to fully comprehend the pervasiveness and inaccuracy of the informant system.

The portrayal of the absolute control Fifo demands is especially effective in the play when he tries to foil Avellaneda's attempt to escape from the island. He forces eminent poets and writers to convince Avellaneda to turn her boat around and head back to the island. Fifo has resurrected a number of poets to participate in his anniversary celebration by using their talents to profess their love and admiration for Cuba. Given his insistence on their inclusion in the repudiation against Avellaneda, it is ironic that Fifo had brought back poets, generally those writers who speak from their hearts, and forced them to turn against fellow writers. Despite their attempts to convince her to turn her fishing boat around, by professing their desire to remain on the island, she refuses. The lack of cooperation angers Fifo and he reveals his true colours as a bully when ordering the act of repudiation against Avellaneda. Fifo's use of brute force is felt with the coercion of artists such as Halisia Jalonzo, an aging prima ballerina, to praise life on the island when they apparently feel otherwise:

HALISIA JALONZO. Y a te alejas, puta vieja.

Y yo aquí, también pelleja,

Sin poder decir mi queja... (1991, 16);

FIFO. Harán ahora lo que quiero:

¡Dispárenle en el trasero

a ese engendro traicionero

que por mí ha resucitado

y mi gran fiesta ha amargado! (1991, 18)

In the following passages, Arenas is testifying to the double talk some writers had to use to survive.

VIRGILIO PIÑERA (Alzando desesperado la voz):

¡Niña! ¡niña!

Ten cuidado

que los hados

son fatales.

Quédate aquí, sí aquí,

en estos platanales.

Aplatánate, querida,

para que salves la vida,

que los hados son fatales.

Quédate aquí, sí aquí.

Pues estando yo en París

me robaron cuatro reales. (Arenas 1991, 17-18)

In this quote, the writer Virgilio Piñera cautions Avellaneda about the terrible destiny she will meet in a dangerous capitalistic world such as the one in Paris. It would be much better to stay on the *platanales*, thereby creating a link with Cuba's former slave trade. The significance of the connection between the present socialist regime and slavery is that the current system is also all encompassing and that the prosperity of a few is at the expense of many. This is rather ironic given the revolutionary roots of Castro's regime.

VIRGILIO PIÑERA (para sí mismo):

Estos versos son horrorosos
y no hay dioses que los alaben.
Los digo, ustedes lo saben,
porque si no me destrozo.
Y yo quiero hallar reposo
aunque esta noche me muera
como prometió ya la fiera.
Ay, que no sea en la carretera.
Que mi cadáver lo laven
que los ángeles lo claven,
que Olga Andreu lo bendiga
que Arrufat lo santifique,
y que digan lo que digan
el tiempo me justifique... (Arenas 1991, 18)

Piñera's remorse and self-loathing over what he has said publicly is revealed. In <u>*El color del verano*</u>, Arenas is portraying an issue he raised in his autobiography. Try as it might,

Arenas believed the socialist regime could not force writers with integrity to blindly, and without reservation, accept official doctrine. In Kaebnick's words, "passages such as these mock the President's strong-arm tactics and 'top dog' identity" (107).

The poets still in Cuba and the many spectators in Key West applaud Avellaneda's desire to flee the island; moreover, some of those in Cuba who have been labelled as staunch supporters of the regime reveal that deep down they too wish to escape. Intimately connected with the hope of flight and escape is the risk of punishment and death, if caught trying to flee, and living in exile if the flight is successful. The scene in the play with Delfín Proust and Endinio Valliegas mutating into codfish and swimming away begins the consideration of living in exile. Proust arrives in Key West and sees life is not necessarily better when in exile and learns that he will still be under suspicion in the United States and decides to swim back to the island (1991, 46-47).

The concept of exile is explored both in the play and the rest of the novel. Although living in exile has the potential to allow escapees to be reborn and live in freedom, it is not done on his/her beloved homeland and is not necessarily a positive experience. José Martí and Avellaneda engage in a poignant exchange about their respective views on the subject. The two poets have had different experiences while living in exile, Martí in the United States and Avellaneda in Spain. Life in the United States is described as being devoid of warmth, vibrancy, and opportunity unless driven by the desire for money. Martí likens living in the States with the colours of fall and winter:

MARTÍ. *¿Las razones? Acaso ya no te las dije.*

Además de acabar con los bribones,

mis razones

son las hojas amarillas que aquí se arremolinan a mis pies.

La prestada casa,

el bárbaro lenguaje

el vivir una vida al revés

y envuelta siempre en este horrible traje.

Los inviernos amargos,

los calzoncillos largos.

Me voy.

Aquí cáscara de mi sólo soy.[24] (1991, 56)

Of his desire to return to Cuba, Martí speaks of missing the island's sun and sky, of wanting to lie under *guasímas*, of letting the arms of a *jubabán* hold him, and of being tired of always living in humiliation (1991, 53). He is compelled to return to Cuba to pursue liberty.

MARTÍ. *Se llama libertad.*

Y no es una mujer,

es un deber. (1991, 53)

Martí wants to die in the color of the summer he was born in; the connection with his homeland is a strong one (1991, 59). The portion of the novel's title *El color del verano* connects with Martí's thoughts, suggesting that the novel is closely related to the sentiments he expresses. In contrast, Avellaneda has high hopes for her exile, she has grand ideas of publishing a collection of her poetry and anticipates that she will be welcomed into the writing community (1991, 57). Martí does not consider her experience in exile as honourable as his:

[24] Martí's poetry is underlined to differentiate it from Arenas's.

MARTÍ. *Tu condena*

Es volver a las tertulias y a los homenajes.

Vestir bellos trajes,

Que te besen la mano.

Y ser Coronado por un tirano. (1991, 55)

In Martí's opinion, Avellaneda's expectation of life in exile is contrary to his noble pursuit of liberty (Arenas 1991, 53).

The exchange between Martí and Avellaneda captures the hopes and dreams Arenas naively believed he could realize in exile. Like Martí, he was in pursuit of personal and national liberty. I believe that he had anticipated informing, educating, and bringing awareness to the free world about the reality of life in Cuba. Much to his dismay, people either did not want to know or did not care about the plight of the island's citizens. His voice was not being heard even when living in supposed freedom. Although he had been trying to tell others about what he had endured and the plight of the Cuban's still on the island since his arrival in the United States and during his travels to many countries, the only thing people listened to was whether or not he could provide some financial gain for them. At the same time, Arenas was also frustrated and angered by his ostracism by the literary powerful, the academics and publishers. Firstly, he was not compensated for the publication of his manuscripts smuggled out while he was still living in Cuba (1992, 309). Secondly, his notoriety and resulting demand for his work lessened once he escaped from the island (1992, 287-288). Although he may have dreamed of literary success while still in Cuba, his dreams, and those of other writers he held in high regard, were not fully realized in exile.

Arenas's disappointment and eventual despair in exile retold in *Antes que anochezca* is also included in the exchange of four letters between Gabriel, Tétrica Mofeta, and Reinaldo in *El color del verano*. Like the autobiography, the letters cite loneliness, isolation, a sense of fragmentation, of not belonging, and a longing for Cuba as the emotional reality of exile. The novel becomes a window into the personal and intimate world of exile which equals that of the autobiography. What is significant about the correspondence in the novel is that each identity's experiences and feelings are revealed, thereby, providing a comprehensive portrait of the one person the three personalities represent: Arenas. Soto's interpretation of the letters is that they "poetically and intuitively capture the complex feelings of fragmentation, dissatisfaction, and confusion that the protagonist experiences living both in and outside Cuba" (1998, 63).

The portrayal of Arenas's and others' experiences in *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano* depict the author's disparaging feelings about the insidious nature of Fidel Castro and his revolutionary government. Through fiction's great potential for imaginative storytelling and autobiography's focus on retelling specific memories to reflect real life experiences, Arenas reveals the brutality of the socialist regime. He portrays its sexually repressive policies and the disappointing reality of exile. Together, the texts reveal a uniquely Cuban comprehensive recreation of public and private life. *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano* are united in thematic content as they both contain anger, vengeance, rebellion, despair, and misery but the novel heightens the reader's awareness and understanding of the horrors of Castro's regime. Building on the experiences included in his autobiography, Arenas employs a carnivalesque style of

retelling events to emphasize his belief in the absolute necessity of changing existing societal norms.

I have provided evidence to support the contention that fiction is an inherent feature of autobiographical writing which allows for a blurring of the boundary between fiction and autobiography. In addition, the direct commentary on the Cuban referent world in *El color del verano* steers the novel into the autobiographical sphere. By joining the two texts structurally and then thematically, through the portrayal of Arenas's feelings of despair over life in Cuba, a credible link between them, beyond the fictive and non-fictive nature of both works, is formed. *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano* can legitimately be combined to create a broader-based, more complete account of Arenas's experience of life in post-revolutionary Cuba. In response to the difficulties presented in these two works, Arenas channels his creative energy to realize the glimmer of hope he has nurtured throughout his many adversities, the desire for a more equitable society.

Part Two - Utopian Desire

From the depth of despair, the seemingly insurmountable struggle to maintain one's integrity and nourish creativity in post-revolutionary Cuba, Arenas challenges and subverts Cuba's social and political hierarchies to construct a critical utopia in *El color del verano*. As I have shown in Part One, in both his autobiography and this particular novel, Arenas recounts the feelings of hopelessness he and others experienced while living in Cuba and then in exile. At the same time, Arenas reveals the hypocrisy of the macho revolutionary ideal along with the absurdity and violence of Castro's regime.

In Part Two, I examine the application of carnivalesque techniques in the novel to demonstrate how Arenas's despair drives his quest for freedom in a Cuban utopia. Arenas's incentive to contemplate what a utopian world may be like comes from the need to reveal and then challenge the situations that caused him and others to feel hopeless when their liberty was restricted (Kaebnick 110). This assessment is supported by the work of Dr. Allan Wade in "Despair, Resistance, Hope: Response-based Therapy with Victims of Violence," where he quotes Adams and Reynolds: "Despair both embodies and engenders resistance (Adams 2005) while it affirms the insatiable desire for freedom and dignity. What a person *despairs against* points to what she *hopes for* (Reynolds 2001)" (66).

The starting point for Arenas's search for utopia begins with the memories retold in *Antes que anochezca*. The longing for freedom and empowerment, which caused Arenas to experience feelings of despair, is first introduced in the autobiography and then gains momentum and actualization in *El color del verano*. What is hoped for is a world that sees the overthrow of Castro's repressive regime and one which successfully

challenges the social stigma associated with homosexual desire. As readers learn from the autobiography, Arenas has multiple dreams: freedom of artistic and sexual expression; subversion of the macho revolutionary ideal; and a bridging of the gap between the ideal and the treasonous nature of homosexual desire. [25]

El color del verano is a carnivalesque novel containing typically fragmented and disjointed text. I identify and consider the various techniques and images used to frame it and to create the fictitious second world capturing the utopia Arenas seeks. The subversive carnivalesque structure is strengthened by the association with Hieronymus Bosch's painting The Garden of Earthly Delights and its portrayal of carnal desire and the oppositions of heaven and hell. The significance of the connection between the painting and *El color del verano* is explored here in Part Two.

Carnivalesque serves to debase inequitable social hierarchies and empower the marginalized of a society by creating a temporary new world, in this instance a critical utopia. This type of utopia is one that realizes political and social freedom as opposed to the more common definition of a perfect fantasy world. A critical utopia is a natural outcome of carnivalesque writing since the current social order is inverted, providing an opportunity for marginalized voices to be heard. Existing societal hierarchies are subverted by the mocking of common attitudes, values, beliefs, and practices. The result is an exposure of a society's ills, what needs to be changed is revealed:

> The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed

[25] As I discussed in Part One, homosexuality in Cuba was considered inherently unrevolutionary and therefore a national threat.

> on the world of redemption: all else is reconstruction, a mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. (Theodor Adorno qtd. in Gardiner 20)

The subversive endeavour is successful when the marginalized, both individuals and communities on the fringe of society, are able to challenge the authority they are denied by those in power. In Kaebnick's interpretation of Arenas's two texts, the controlling force in Cuba is the machismo sensibility, taking the discussion of power and freedom of expression into the realm of sexuality with the subversion of sexual norms and assumptions. A commentary on life in socialist Cuba is provided, especially in relation to the macho and the homosexual and the tension created by the homoerotic desire they sometimes share. The friction is exacerbated by the state-sanctioned attitudes and policies that denigrate homosexuality.

Narrative Frames in *El color del verano*

Carnivalesque, both as a style of writing and its representation in the painting The Garden of Earthly Delights, frames the novel in two ways: imagery and thematic content. The painting is a three-panelled triptych, an altarpiece, by the sixteenth century Dutch painter Heironymus Bosch. It contains the essential characteristics of folk humour and grotesque realism, the details of which are discussed below.

Within the thematic frame, there are two interconnected layers, the revelation of Cuba as an earthly hell through the novel's association with Bosch's painting and the

creation of a critical utopia to eradicate the island's repressive, suffocating, and tortuous living conditions. The painting's two side panels depict the Garden of Eden and Hell respectively, the centre panel portrays carnal delight, and the shutters represent the earth's creation. The entire piece is described by Walter Gibson as a reflection of the folly of man, showing viewers "a false paradise whose transient beauty leads men to ruin and damnation" (86-87). The false paradise finds its equivalent in Cuba. Arenas portrays the country as a beautiful island where citizens, at least those who express their artistic and sexual preferences, are tormented and punished by the evils of the revolutionary regime. Arenas's vision is contrary to that of members of the Latin American left, who saw the island as a political haven. The contradiction reveals that either Arenas or the leftists were misinformed about security for people with more liberal views. The entire triptych is a narrative in itself; it depicts evolution from the creation of earth to Adam and Eve in the earthly paradise of Eden. The story moves from the site of original sin to the centre panel, an orgy of physical pleasures with its perpetuators descending into hell in the third panel, the ultimate punishment of sin.

The triptych's transitional narrative can also be applied to *El color del verano*; the novel addresses the concept of sin, what the state defines as sinful physical pleasure, and the resulting punishment in hell, life in post-revolutionary Cuba. The novel's dramatic comedy, *"La fuga de la Avellaneda,"* moves the link with Bosch's painting beyond the similar titles. The connection occurs at the beginning of the play when la Avellaneda recites a few lines from one of her best known poems, a sonnet entitled *"Al partir"* (Harter 52), while she is trying to escape from the island.[26] Her poem is interspersed with

[26] As discussed in Part One, Avellaneda is trying to row her little fishing boat away under a deluge of rotten eggs thrown by fellow eminent poets under Fifo's orders. At the same time supporters in Key West are

other lines Arenas has inserted; they are infused with anger, disgust, and determination to flee.

LA AVELLANEDA *(echando un bote al agua en el Malecón habanero).*

¡Perla del mar! ¡Estrella de occidente!

Me marcho ahora mismo aunque me parta un diente

de perro. Ni siquiera tu brillante cielo

La noche cubre con su opaco velo.

¡Pero voy a partir! La chusma diligente

me obliga a marcharme del nativo suelo.

¡No puedo soportar más a esta gente!

¡Adiós, patria feliz, edén querido

donde hasta el gran esbirro a otros esbirros teme!

Por mucho que en tu suelo fatigueme

jamás pude encontrar un buen marido.

¡Ah, pero ya miro la lancha!

Mi pecho aún más se ensancha....[27] (1991, 15)

The connection is deepened by a number of presentations at a fictitious conference *"La conferencia onírico-teológica-político-filosófica-satirica."* The application of the painting as a narrative frame is strengthened by the discussions of heaven, earthly pleasure, and hell. In addition to the spiritual concepts found in the panels, the association with divinity is made by leaders of the world's religions in their

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encouraging her escape by showering her with chocolate bars, California apples, candies, and fake pearls (1991, 15), tempting Capitalistic, and therefore forbidden, treasures.

[27] Avellaneda's poetry is underlined to differentiate it from Arenas's.

proclamation of there being only one God: Fifo (1991, 385-386). One of the participants, Salman Rishidie,[28] interjects and says that if there is a God then there must be a direct opposite, the Devil. Further, Tomasito La Goyesca[29] reads an attestation written by Tétrica Mofeta stating Fifo's very existence is proof that the Devil exists. Fifo is enraged by this proclamation and sentences Tomasito to death[30] (1991, 386).

During the conference, Tétrica Mofeta presents a paper to explore the notion of hell and paradise in relation to socialism:

> *-Ya que hemos hablado de Dios y del Diablo lo cual a la larga es una misma cosa siniestra, tenemos que adentrarnos en el infierno, o en el paraíso, lo cual desde luego, es lo mismo.*
>
> *En toda vida, en toda obra, en todo libro (es decir en todos los infiernos) hay un descenso al infierno absoluto. Desciendan conmigo. El viaje será breve, pues sólo les mostraré Las Siete Maravillas del Socialismo Cubano.* (1991, 386-387)

The presentation describes forty years of horror, the most recent Cuban inferno (Arenas 1991, 387); undoubtedly, life under the dictatorship. Another thesis commenting on the theme of heaven and hell is the paper written by Oliente Churre, a *loca*[31], but read by la Reina de Holanda. The presentation argues that the reason for the expulsion of homosexuals from the Garden of Eden, in reality Cuban society, is due to the ban on

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[28] Undoubtedly the real life person referred to is Salman Rushdie. As previously noted, there are numerous instances of real names being slightly altered.

[29] Tomasito was a young man who worked with Arenas at the National Library. He is described as: *"era como una figura de Goya; enano, grotesco, caminaba como una arena y tenía una voracidad sexual incontrolable"* (1992, 103).

[30] It is a secretive order he gives Raúl Kastro, his brother, to be carried out during the height of the carnival festivities so that it may go unnoticed as Fifo does not want any negative publicity.

[31] The literal definition of *loca* is crazy woman and it is a label applied to homosexual men. *Loca* is resignified in the novel and it becomes representative of the potential to break out of the confining closet or island of normative identities (Kaebinck 103).

homosexuality (Kaebnick 107). In addition, Oliente explains the mission of those who partake in carnal delight is the struggle to create a world in which everyone can live in happiness and peace. *Maricóns*[32] are fighting to recover the paradise[33] they have been expelled from because they are seen as challengers to the macho and revolutionary way of life (1991, 388). Their expulsion is presented as being fundamentally unjust through the introduction of an ancient homoerotic painting of Jesus Christ and John, his youthful and beautiful disciple (1991, 388). This suggests that homosexual pleasure in *El color del verano* is associated with righteousness and divinity, and therefore should not be oppressed.

As previously noted, the name of Bosch's painting is incorporated into the novel's title. It suggests a degree of similarity in the meaning behind the elements of grotesque realism featured in the painting and the novel. Furthermore, in the section *"En busca del Bosco,"* there is a direct reference to Bosch's painting and the necessity for Clara Mortera to see the original in the Prado Museum in Madrid, to use it as a *"modelo para pintar las calamidades que padecía y todo lo que la rodeaba"* (1991, 133). The following series of quotes from the section *"Pintando"* demonstrate the style of Mortera's painting. Grotesque realism is used to depict chaotic, sexual, and violent images of the plight the *locas* endure both in the referent society and during the construction of the critical utopia of *El color del verano* (Kaebnick 106):

> *Yo pintaré la lengua desesperada de Tedevoro desplegándose por toda la ciudad [...] Pintaré la desolación de Reinaldo por no poder escribir la*

[32] Kaebnick provides two common definitions of *maricón* from Sánchez-Boudy's *Diccionario de cubanismos*: 1. To be a *maricón* is to be cowardly; and 2. to be a *maricón* is to be traitorous (103). In addition, generally *maricón* signifies pejoratively gay/homosexual.
[33] Paradise is inclusion in mainstream Cuba.

novela gracias a la cual aún no se ha quitado la vida que está a punto de perder... Pintaré las recogidas de todos los jóvenes para ser enviados a un campo de trabajo forzado. (1991, 74)

Pintaré ejércitos de tiburones erotizados, devorando, por orden de Fifo, la franja azul oscura de las aguas donde comienza el mar abierto. Pintaré un palacio con un acuario siniestro donde hace sus ejecuciones Tiburón Sangriento [...] Sobrevolando la ciudad pintaré a Oscar buscando incesantemente a un adolescente [...] Pintaré un banco y un árbol y en el banco dos enamorados que se acarician y sobre el árbol a Rubén Valentín Díaz Marzo, el Aeropagita, masturbándose [...] La ultima parte del cuadro será muy oscura, casi negra, en ella se aglomerarán todos los expulsados, es decir los que han intentado vivir y por lo mismo han sido condenados a muerte por el Dios Siniestro que rige todos los destinos vitales [...] Mi cuadro salpicará de horror toda la isla. (1991, 75)

Soto also considers the connection between Bosch's painting and the novel as a significant one. He views the three-panelled triptych and its title as an allusion to the three identities of Gabriel, Tétrica Mofeta, and Reinaldo, with each character representing one of the panels (1994, 59). In Part One, I identified these personas as representing Arenas's various realities. According to Soto: Gabriel represents the right panel of the Garden of Eden and its association with innocence and obedience; the Tétrica Mofeta, a homosexual, reflects carnal desires and activities; and, Reinaldo the writer's living hell is found in the left panel (1994, 59). Furthermore, the threesome is reminiscent of the Christian Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Arenas parodies the Triune God by

casting Reinaldo as God the Father because of his abilities as a writer and, therefore, creator; Gabriel is the devoted son which parallels Jesus Christ and is the namesake of an Archangel; and, Tétrica Mofeta represents the Holy Spirit and the responsibility of bringing the true, homosexual nature of God to life (Soto 1998, 58). There is textual proof that the trinity of personas is representative of one individual, for example, in the text Gabriel imagines himself revealing his three alter egos to his mother:

> *No soy una persona, sino dos y tres a la vez. Para ti sigo siendo Gabriel, para aquéllos que leen lo que escribo y que casi nunca puedo publicar soy Reinaldo, para el resto de mis amigos con los cuales de vez en cuando me escapo para ser yo totalmente; soy la Tétrica Mofeta.* (Arenas 1991, 101; Soto 1998, 58)

There are passages in which the three characters interact with each other and, at times, become one, *"Entonces, una sensación de plenitud total envolvía a la Tétrica Mofeta, a Gabriel y a Reinaldo fundiéndolos en un solo ser"* (1991, 234). For the most part, the content of this layer is not written in grotesque realism. Instead, the very existence of the three separate realities coming together as one satisfies the tenet of an incomplete body becoming whole. At the same time, because they lead individual lives, the trinity addresses the reality of having to hide behind masks when faced with society's repulsion over homosexuality (Soto 1998, 59). The three personalities correspond to different aspects of Arenas's personality and the fragmentary nature of his identity (Soto 1998, 58). The following quote from an interview Arenas gave reveals the issues at the heart of the trio's realities:

> The gloomy skunk[34] undergoes a metamorphosis so he can extend his existence through that of various characters. He is a homosexual who lives in Cuba, the victim of all sorts of persecution. In spite of it all, he's trying to write a novel which the government is trying to find and destroy. He's got a double in the US, Gabriel...[who] has a series of complexes he can't overcome... because he didn't fulfill his mother's dream. (Soto 1998, 59)

Although the content related to the three alter egos is not written in grotesque realism,[35] it does adhere to the objective of giving voice to the marginalized. Both the homosexual and authorial identities, Tétrica Mofeta and Reinaldo, hide behind the mask of Gabriel, the good and dutiful son. In the novel, the masks are removed and the reality of life in Cuba for those on the periphery of society is revealed. The government is criticized as one that defines a revolutionary Cuban in very narrow terms, as a macho virile man who would not experience any of the three realities the trinity represents.

One of the ways Castro's regime perpetuated the image of a revolutionary man is through literature. As I discussed in Part One, those writers who did not embrace and include revolutionary ideals in their work were persecuted and effectively silenced through publication bans, incarceration, intimidation, and harassment. In contrast, the writers espousing the benefits of the Revolution were handsomely rewarded with the publication of their work and general government support (Arenas 1992, 90, 153). The government particularly favoured the new Cuban documentary novel as a literary genre that sufficiently supported and endorsed the revolutionary spirit. Kaebnick also makes

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[34] Skunk in a Funk is the English translation of Tétrica Mofeta.
[35] Characteristics to be discussed in detail below.

this assessment, especially in relation to the portrayal of the ideal male (111). A fundamental objective of the documentary novel is that it seeks to "articulate the collective memory of the Cuban people" (Soto 1994, 18) that had not been previously captured. It is important to note that the shared history being documented is written from an official revolutionary perspective (Soto 1994, 24-25). Soto outlines its six main characteristics as defined by Miguel Barnet, the first author to write a Cuban documentary novel. For the most part, these attributes are also are found in *El color del verano*, suggesting it may be placed within the genre. However, despite the similarities, there is sufficient evidence to designate the novel as being subversive to the genre and a parody of Cuban documentary novels. Besides the differences in structure discussed below, there is a reference in *El color del verano* to Barnet and his protagonist, Esteban Montejo in the seminal *Biografía de un cimarrón*. The one hundred and thirty year old Montejo is depicted in drag as he prepares to attend the President's carnival. He is being visited by his grandson who had been raped by his grandfather as a child. This grandson is now some ninety years old and a self-proclaimed *bugarrón* (1991, 66).[36] Montejo's portrayal in *El color del verano* is a parody of the upstanding character this witness has been granted through Barnet's novel (Soto 1994, 47). In addition, he challenges the official standard of macho virile heterosexual men. Arenas also ridicules Barnet in his novel, *"Miguel Barniz, un pajaro de la peor catadura"* (360). My position is supported by Soto, who views the parody as evidence of Arenas's desire to undermine the machismo attitude, as well as to mock the placement of Barnet and his novel "within the canon of Cuban revolutionary letters" (1994, 47).

[36] This term is discussed at length below.

Documentary novels are written in a first person narrative voice. The narrator is a witness from the community being represented and documents a previously unrecorded history (Soto 1994, 33). *El color del verano* also contains such a narrative voice. The trinity of Gabriel, Tétrica Mofeta, and Reinaldo is arguably representative of the torment and multiple personalities any given homosexual male may experience. In *Antes que anochezca* and then in *El color del verano*, the homosexual is prominently featured and in the following quote from the novel's "*Prólogo,*" Arenas references the world of the homosexual as one that has been made invisible because it has been restricted from media publications: *"Predomina aquí la visión subterránea de un mundo homosexual que seguramente nunca aparecerá en ningún periódico del mundo y mucho menos en Cuba"* (1991, 249). In order for a people to have a history, they must officially exist and this existence is weakened when they are excluded from the public sphere such as the media. In contrast, Soto points to the trinity as writers of the novel as being ambiguous, subverting the official genre. He states: "This *mise-en-abyme* undermines the authority of traditional authorship that is central to the documentary novel" (1994, 43).

In addition to the first person narratives, 'real' witnesses are included (Soto 1994, 33). The characters in *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano* are based on actual people. Even though there has been a degree of creative play with the names, there is clearly a sense of realism in the novel. Soto also notes Arenas's continued defiance of the documentary characteristics with the author's focus on aesthetics (1994, 35). The austere truth lacks the kind of creativity Arenas applied to his fiction. The imaginative retelling of differing experiences contradicts the documentary stance of "tightly woven significations" (Soto 1994, 44). Apparently, the truth can only be revealed with staid and

unambiguous depictions. Arenas weakens the boundary between fiction and non-fiction; which, in turn, renders the designation of the novel as a documentary inappropriate since non-fiction and fiction should have been kept clearly separate (Soto 1994, 43).

Another feature of a documentary novel is the necessity to prove the accuracy of the witness's testimony (Soto 1994, 34). The proof takes the form of documents, papers, photographs, and memoirs included to authenticate the testimony. A concrete example of authenticity in *El color del verano* is its close association with the autobiography. Further, the inclusion of the letters by Gabriel, Tétrica Mofeta, and Reinaldo concerning their experience in exile provides documentation, albeit of a fictional nature.

In Part One, I discussed how following a time-line when retelling memories creates a degree of fiction. In contrast, recounting events in a chronological order is a highly desirable trait of documentary novels (Soto 1994, 33). With this characteristic, Arenas is in complete opposition to the government's obvious preference for recounting stories in sequential order given its endorsement of the genre. *El color del verano* is a circular text as its various stories are not narrated in chronological order.

The veracity of the documentary genre is attested to by its recording of oral testimony. There is a perception that what is spoken is a better representation of reality. This characteristic is similar to a basic tenet of carnivalesque; it is the voice of the people finally being heard. However, the reinterpreting and rewriting of recorded history in a documentary novel is from the perspective of an official revolutionary position (Soto 1994, 32). Likewise, Arenas reinterprets and rewrites recorded history to reveal distorted accounts, but it is from his perspective and not the government's, further proof of the

novel subverting the genre. Given the characteristics of Cuban documentary novels, *El color del verano* does not neatly fit into the genre and should not be classified as one.

The Carnivalesque World

Mikhail Bakhtin in his seminal book, Rabelais and His World, defines carnivalesque as a "non-literary or nonconforming" type of writing lacking the dogma, authoritarianism, and aesthetic standard of literature (1984a, 3). The carnivalesque creates a world where everything officially sanctioned by both the state and its citizens is vilified and rejected by the entire marginalized community as opposed to a single individual. In *Antes que anochezca*, there is no global community-wide resistance beyond Arenas assuming the role of witness to the opposition of the revolutionary ideal, there are only the attempts of Arenas and his circle of friends and loved ones to retain their integrity and to fight back against political, artistic, and sexual repression. In the novel, however, there is such a joint effort; the collaboration required to gnaw away at the island to sever it from its base. In addition, *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano* are written in a testimonial voice representing the various communities Arenas belonged to. This agrees with the carnivalesque characteristic of a community seeking to change the norm.

The casting aside of a society's normal order by marginalized communities enables their members to acquire a greater degree of power and authority for a period of time. By removing the elevated status the elite few possess, space is forged to allow for the less powerful to move up into the higher echelons of society. This space is indeed created in *El color del verano* through its grotesque realism and carnivalesque structure.

The subversion of the status quo is achieved with folk humour as it serves to debase the current social order and then supports the creation of an entirely new fictional world where all members of society can participate. To gain further insight into the roots of carnivalesque humour, one should look to the carnival rituals originating in medieval Europe. The rituals were influenced by African masking traditions during the time of slavery in the European colonies, in Latin America, and the Caribbean.

Carnivals mark specific religious and seasonal periods by parodying and reversing reality in preparation for, or to symbolize, a change that is about to occur. They have also been events to expend or release the frustrations felt by the masses for a lengthy period of time. Their festive and gay nature, together with the opportunities for role reversal, temporarily empowers the marginalized to invert the current social and hierarchical orders. The most well-known contemporary one is in Rio de Janeiro, which is held to mark the first day of Lent. Havana also hosts carnivals and Kaebnick refers to one which "challenged the patriarchy through its celebration of the aggressive feminine sexuality of the slaves" (Kaebnick 106). In his autobiography, Arenas tells of the essential nature of a month-long carnival held following the failed sugar-cane harvest discussed in Part One: *"Había que olvidar a toda costa que se había hecho el ridículo, que todo el esfuerzo de aquellos años había sido inútil y que éramos un país absolutamente subdesarrollado y cada día más esclavizado"* (1992, 159). Furthermore, in <u>*El color del verano,*</u> Fifo uses a carnival to honour his fifty years in power, even though it is actually his fortieth anniversary (64). During his tour of the island in the section *"Una inspección,"* Fifo refers to his forty years of broken promises of prosperity (144). Instead of being revered, the dictator and his regime are continually debased throughout the novel and are

desperately trying to flee from the island when it has been severed from its base. The significant event being anticipated, the fiftieth anniversary of Fifo's reign, ends in destruction and chaos. As it is stated in the ritualistic resurrection ceremony in the section *"La elevación del Santo Clavo:"* *"Este rito sólo podia realizarse en un momento como aquel, momento sacro, en que Fifo celebraba la apoteosis del triunfo de sus cincuenta años en el poder"* (426).

Historically, the themes found in carnival laughter originated in village squares, decks of ships, taverns, bathhouses, roads, and streets; basically, wherever the general population gathered (Bahktin 1984b, 128) suggesting a significant degree of similarity between them and folk humour. Folk humour brings to the forefront the pulse of the people, whose perspective is likely contrary and challenging to official discourse, and mocks or refutes the existing societal norms and hierarchy (Bakhtin 1984a, 6). The debasing humour Bakhtin references are the sixteenth century's "parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings, and uncrownings" (1984a, 4, 11). Some four hundred years later, Arenas applies these same forms but modernized with contemporary language and issues.

As I have discussed, *El color del verano* can be read as a parody of the Cuban documentary novel. The genre's objective of espousing revolutionary ideals is subverted and Arenas creates a travesty of the value the Cuban government places on this genre. In addition, throughout the entire text revolutionary ideals are subjected to the degree of insult only satire can achieve. Fifo's prestige as the island's President is usurped, and he is successfully uncrowned.

Carnivalesque Imagery – Grotesque Realism

Carnivalesque has been mistaken for satire and although both forms of writing have a moralistic basis, there is a difference between the two. A satirical portrait is one that is completely negative instead of containing a positive, rejuvenating, gay, and triumphant tone following on the heels of the satirical sting (Bahktin 1984a, 278, 304-306). A satirist is a solitary individual fighting against something or someone perceived as unjust, in contrast to the community-wide voice of carnivalesque. As Bakhtin explains:

> It is not an individual reaction to some isolated 'comic' event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people. Second it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity. Third, this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking and deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. (1984a, 11-12)

As explored in Part One, the images of Fifo are negative without any of the positive features of grotesque realism, his authority and control are undermined but he is not being recreated. Because he is static, there is no hope he will change and the portrait becomes purely satirical. In *El color del verano*, the overall post-revolutionary climate is subject to the bite of Arenas's satirical attack. He points out the ills of society and portrays them very clearly for readers to understand what he considers to be the 'right and wrong ways' of being.

The fundamental attributes of carnivalesque that are similar to those of satire are: exaggeration, hyperbolism, and excessiveness (Bakhtin 1984a, 303). When these elements are employed emphasis is placed on the human body with its food, drink, and defecation, with special importance assigned to sexual activity. The resultant imagery, labelled as grotesque realism, stems from four inter-related categories: language of the marketplace, banquet imagery, the body and its sources, and the material bodily lower stratum. Once again, debasement is featured as it is the essential principle behind the imagery; the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, or abstract (Bakhtin 1984a, 19). The grotesque reflects the act of transformation from the low to the high; it is a work in progress. It is a metamorphosis of death and birth and of growing and becoming (Bakhtin 1984a, 24). Grotesque realism is the literary enactment of the premise carnivals are based on: debasement to express and provide relief from frustrations over the current social hierarchy.

The language of the marketplace comes from sixteenth century folk humour and establishes the framework for the carnivalesque style: carnivals, comic verbal compositions that are both oral and written parodies, and vulgar forms of language such as curses, oaths, and popular blazons (praise or blame poems shouted in medieval public squares to provide information on wars, the quality and price of goods sold at the markets, etc.) (Bakhtin 1984a, 5; Kristeva 53). Julia Kristeva claims that "laughter of the carnival is not simply parodic; it is no more comic than tragic; it is both at once, one might say that it is serious" (80). Therefore, readers should not expect to actually laugh when reading *El color del verano*, but they can expect to view it as droll irony.

Within marketplace humour there is a focus on indecencies as well as diseases resulting from overindulgence in food, drink, sexual intercourse, defecation, and urination that connect with the principle of gaiety, regeneration, fertility, and renewal (Bakhtin 1984a, 161). With this connection comes a degree of ambivalence as these images debase, regenerate, and renew simultaneously. When the vulgar is presented in a comedic manner, depictions of excrement and urine are "gay monsters created by laughter" to replace the "terror" that has been defeated (Bakhtin 1984a, 151). Gaiety is associated with the indestructible properties assigned to bodily matter which creates a human connection with the cosmos. The term 'cosmos' does not necessarily refer to mysticism or spirituality, instead it is equated with something that is so vast it cannot be conquered by typical human effort (Bakhtin 1984a, 335). Bakhtin posits that the cultivation of this fear is sought by those in power "to humiliate and oppress man" (1984a, 336). In retaliation, an individual turns inward to find the internal strength to overcome the fear. The internal cosmos constitutes the vulgarities of the body, the fortifying properties of dung and urine together with the memories of an agonizing birth encouraging the weakened individual or community to find strength to overcome adversity (1984a, 336).

Banquet imagery represents the triumph over an unjust social hierarchy, it speaks of victory and of better days to come (Bakhtin 1984a, 281, 282, 286). In addition to being centred on public consumption of food, the imagery also presents the occasion for "wise discourse and gay truth" (Bahktin 1984a, 283, 296). It is through grotesque realism that the ability to speak freely is gained by the marginalized in the following way:

> Elements of speech create a specific, free atmosphere. They lend a bodily character to objects and degrade them, fuse the body and the world, thus introducing a concluding theme; for example, the transformation of the belfry into a phallus or a nose into a phallus. (Bakhtin 1984a, 311)

Through the acquisition of a greater degree of authority, albeit temporarily, there is a change in how the powerful and the weak interact and communicate. The change is the result of being freed from the status quo and a relaxing of the norms of decency that enables speech and gestures to become frank and free to reduce the distance between the two groups (Bakhtin 1984a, 10).

The body and its sources, that is, its requirements for subsistence and growth, primarily food, portray all that is both inappropriate and appropriate in a highly exaggerated manner, often within one image (Bakhtin 1984a, 308). The parts of the body emphasized are the bowels and phallus, followed by the human face, especially the head, ears, nose, and mouth, and lastly, the anus (Bakhtin 1984a, 317). What makes the body grotesque is its depiction as larger-than-life and its opposition to the normal one of a complete whole individual. The metamorphosis commences with those parts that are open to the outside world, areas through which the world enters the body or departs from it or through which it comes into contact with the world: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, and the nose are prime examples (Bakhtin 1984a, 26). The smooth and impenetrable surfaces, such as skin and limbs, are ignored because they maintain a body's limited space and do not have renewing or regenerating potential (Bakhtin 1984a, 317).

The material bodily lower stratum seeks to reduce all that is high and esteemed by moving the relative centre of the universe from the upper and middle layers, representing the current social order, to the underground (Bahktin 1984a, 369). There is a downward movement from heaven into hell within the lower stratum, the site of true wealth and abundance. Bakhtin describes the descent as a swing between heaven and hell that brings the two together in the descent (1984a, 371). Within carnivalesque texts, a descending spiral occurs when there is a debasement of the higher stratum attributes, with the world of the powerful and the elite being spun downward and turned upside down and inside out (Bakhtin 1984a, 370). The positive aspect of the lower stratum is that it is productive and represents birth and growth and ultimately, successive generations. The downward motion is a primary image as it seeks to question and redefine what the existing societal hierarchy has deemed sacred and exalted (Bakhtin 1984a, 370).

Carnivalesque, according to Bakhtin, is inherently polyphonic since there is a focus on multiple perspectives from the lower strata of society. These perspectives interact with the usual social order creating a form of communication. Kristeva goes beyond polyphony and supports Bakhtin's assessment of carnivalesque encompassing the dialogical nature of literature. There is continual interaction between other works of literature and other authors. A dialogue is a meaningful exchange and/or reference which operate simultaneously on several levels. It does not merely answer, correct, silence, or extend previous writings, but informs and is continually informed by the work.

Arenas's writing, in this case his autobiography and *El color del verano*, contributes to the dialogical process that occurs on a number of levels: Literary classics are mentioned in both of Arenas's texts, such as The Iliad and Thomas Mann's The

Magic Mountain which no doubt are intended to influence a reader's critical reading. One may equate Arenas's life with the fatalistic Romans of The Iliad, for example. Arenas's inclusion of a substantial amount of information on others in what is supposed to be his autobiography direct a reader to look to the individuals, such as his mentors José Lezama Lima and Virgilio Piñera for insight into Arenas's life story. The result is the lessening of Arenas's authorial voice in his autobiography, aligning it with the novel. The dialogism contributes to the novel's subversive qualities and expresses the need for a better world: a critical utopia in which there will be space for a voice other than the revolutionary ideal.

A Cuban Utopia

The objective of carnivalesque is to reveal injustices and hypocrisies. Once these aspects of the referent world are successfully challenged and overturned, a society is formed which the marginalized might deem a perfect one since they will be able to acquire voice and power. In fact, Michael Gardiner in his essay, "Bakhtin's Carnival: Utopia as Critique," views carnivalesque as automatically having a liberating potential (38). There are a number of different types of utopias, but it is a critical utopia that challenges and opposes the existing social hierarchy (Gardiner 26, 35) and develops into a society that is not as oppressive and exploitative. Gardiner considers feelings similar to despair are the fundamental drive behind the creation of a utopian world:

> The basis for the creation of a critical utopia is the personal experience of unfulfilled human need, the citizens reject domination in order to explore emancipatory ways of being as well as the very possibility of utopian

> longing itself. They attempt to realize the contours of a desired future society in their very textual form via the incorporation of elements of contradiction, ambiguity, and openness. (26)

Another noteworthy feature is that utopias are not inherently liberating, as they may simply mask the referent world (Gardiner 25). What is fundamental to the equation is the refusal to acquiesce (Gardiner 35), since there is marked determination in carnivalesque writing to resist the norm and to imagine a new, more equitable, society.

The imagery and thematic content in *El color del verano* do indeed create a critical utopia. The referent world is the repressive official policies and attitudes of Fidel Castro and his regime, especially in relation to the suppression of homosexuality, artistic creativity and freedom in general expressed in both the autobiography and the novel. The utopian Cuba is fundamentally the same as similar oppressions exist, but there are two significant new developments: the voices of the marginalized are featured and the macho men of the revolutionary government are portrayed as desiring the male body. The foundation for this new world is developed in *Antes que anochezca* through Arenas's testimony of life in Cuba. Because the autobiography is critical of the regime, the existing social hierarchy begins to weaken. *El color del verano* realizes the collapse of the living hell members of the homosexual and artistic communities must endure. *"La fuga de la Avellaneda,"* the play at the beginning of the novel, begins the subversion of the order, authority, and credibility of the Dictator and his regime as well as the institution of writing in Cuba, setting the tone for the rest of the novel.

Where the quest for a critical utopia is successful is in the loosening of boundaries between the ideal of a revolutionary man, a virile macho heterosexual, and the vilified

passive or effeminate homosexual. In addition to the examples of sexual exploits between the two in the autobiography and novel, Arenas includes an intriguing classification system, *"Las cuatro categoriás de las locas"* in his autobiography (103-104). In this scheme, Arenas depicts *la loca de argolla*[37] as boldly outrageous and repeatedly incarcerated for sexual exploits in public baths and on beaches. Tomasito La Goyesca is cited as a typical member of this group. *La loca común* is one who leads a fairly conservative life, seeking committed relationships with other homosexuals, and is never sexually involved with a real (macho) man. Arenas placed another of his friends, Reinaldo Gómez Ramos, into this category. *La loca tapada* represents homosexuals who are not open about their sexuality, and, as such, are difficult to identify. Further, it is often the members of this group who condemn other, more obvious, homosexuals. Arenas chose the dramatist Nicolás Díaz as the prime example given his activities as a member of the Communist Youth Organization and his embarrassing and damaging escapade involving a light bulb being stuck in his anus. Lastly, there is *la loca regia* who is equated with royalty and its typical protectionism. According to Arenas, this type is unique to communist countries. Once a homosexual is trusted and highly regarded within the government, in fact often closely connected to the *Máximo Líder,* he can do pretty much whatever his heart desires. Presumably, Arenas believes this to be the case with Alfredo Guevara,[38] since he has been placed in this category. In addition, Arenas had previously noted in his autobiography that Guevara, unlike others, did not have to face any negative consequences for his scandalous homosexual life (102).

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[37] Arenas also appropriates the expression *"loca de atar"* to emphasizes the militancy of the homosexuals in this category to fight back and bring the macho's active participation in homoerotic dynamics into the public sphere (Kaebnick 109). The literal meaning relates to being so totally crazy that he/she must be tied up or confined to a jail cell.

[38] Alfredo Guevara (1925 -), founder of the *Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos.*

The four kinds of *locas* are expanded in *El color del verano* to include three more for a total of seven new categories: *Las siete grandes categoriás de la locura.* The difference between the two systems is their respective focus. In *Antes que anochezca*, the categories are in a specific order, people listed according to their courage about being open and obvious about their sexuality (Kaebnick 106). In contrast, the categories in *El color del verano* are sufficiently broad and all encompassing to include just about everyone, as all men are potentially homosexual.

In *Las siete grandes categoriás de la locura* (78-79), we find *la locura sublime* in which heroes, martyrs, and geniuses are engendered. The members are inherently good, brilliant, and pure, examples include Leonardo da Vinci, Cervantes, and Jesus Christ. *La belleza* are artists and those who commit crazed impassioned suicides, examples include Fyodor Dostoevsky, Virginia Woolf, and Marcel Proust. *La intuicíon* are talented writers who produce quality work, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Herman Hess. *La inteligencia* is rather self-explanatory in that the individuals are members of academia, literary agents, notable journalists, and Karmen Valcete.[39] It refers to those who do not produce art but are knowledgeable about it and can manipulate it. Members of the *El sentido practico* are those who are far too practical and task oriented to appreciate art and the beauty of life, including business men, hardworking bureaucrats, and significant but not well-known traitors such as John Davison Rockefeller and Armand Hammer.[40] *La normalidad* is a terrible form of the *loca* and is actually the least normal. All men can potentially be afflicted and when they are, they become permanently mediocre even though they

[39] I have not found any information on who Karmen Valcete may be and whether or not she is a real person.
[40] Armand Hammer (1898-1990): Son of a Russian émigré to the United States, became a very successful business tycoon and maintained close ties with Soviet Union. He was suspected of being a spy but developed a degree of influence in US politics.

consider themselves as superior to others; Rafael Alberti[41] is cited as an example. The final category, the extreme opposite of the first's sublimity, is *La locura grotesca.* Members of this group tend to be in the public eye and include presidents of republics, dictators, and vagabonds with a historical significance such as Hitler, Stalin, and Fifo; apparently, no one escapes the classification of *loca.* This continuum of *locas* begins with purity and godliness, as the saviour Jesus Christ represents, and ends with the ultimate oppressor Fifo as the virile devil incarnate. Essentially, all men are *locas* and it is just a matter of determining which category best describes them.

Power has traditionally been held by men and their reputation is extremely important to them. Revealing desire for the male body could create the potential for them to lose face, be ostracized, and be labelled a *maricón.* Arenas's work breaks down this prominent stereotype of only effeminate men desiring other men (Kaebnick 103). While the macho is subverted, the *loca* is recreated, rejuvenated, empowered, and always importantly, is sexually satisfied. Their re-creation parallels the middle panel of Bosch's painting, the depiction of a garden of carnal delight. The *loca's* empowerment is the adoption of the macho stereotype of self-confidence, even militancy about sexual and political autonomy (Kaebnick 103).

Homoerotic desire by the macho is revealed in the autobiography and the novel. As Kaebnick notes, macho men are represented in two different ways: objects of affection and lust, and as subjects to be mocked both individually and in the societies they represent (Kaebnick 102). Desiring penetration creates a link with passive effeminate men and challenges all that is associated with the terms *maricón* and *loca;* "In the following works, Arenas not only presents discrimination against the homosexual, but

[41] Rafael Alberti (1902-1999): A Spanish poet who spent close to 40 years in exile.

resignifies *maricón* to mean determined, creative, and representative of the Cuban people" (Kaebnick 103). The boundary between macho and *maricón* is brought into question in *Antes que anochezca*, with Arenas's recollections of the same-sex desire he experienced with many military recruits. One particularly telling adventure was the trip Arenas took with his friend Hiram Pratt,[42] an erotic journey through the island. During their trip, the two travellers encounter a military camp. Arenas describes the men at this camp as *"desesperados por fornicar"* and eager to participate in an erotic encounter (1992, 119). The recruits depicted in this story are not necessarily homosexual but rather simply desperate for sex after many months of abstinence (1992, 119). Regardless, they act upon their attraction to the male body. Kaebnick considers the impact of Arenas's texts as the following: "showing their desire for men, and by deconstructing the distance between *bugarrón* and *loca*, Arenas queers and transgenders the macho" (Kaebnick 107).

Supporting evidence of bridging the gap between *bugarrón*[43] and *loca* is the passionate romance between Tiburón Sangriento and la Mayoya in the section "*El descomunal acoplamiento*" (1991, 336). Until that point, Tiburón Sangriento is portrayed as Fifo's most ferocious shark-soldier. The shark falls in love with la Mayoya, a citizen he had been raised to hate and eliminate, a member of the homosexual community. The love affair between the shark and la Mayoya, the most beautiful *loca* on the island, was orchestrated by a group of *locas* who, like all the others on the island, were certain of Tiburón Sangriento's true identity as a *bugarrón* and were determined to prove it (1991, 343). The anticipated result is the revelation of the macho revolutionary ideal's desire of the male body rendering the shark an ally instead of a dangerous threat.

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[42] As noted in Part One, Pratt eventually became a state informer and a traitor to Arenas.
[43] To be defined and discussed below.

La Mayoya, under the *locas'* tutelage, learns the art of seducing sharks, and dons a sequined bikini and a long dagger, and dances seductively on a rock by the ocean to attract the shark (1991, 336). The dagger can be viewed as a phallic symbol[44] of fertility, sexuality, rebirth, etc, giving la Mayoya a sensual edge on seducing Tiburón Sangriento. The love that develops between them creates the opportunity for dialogue to take place. As it is pointed out in the novel, the shark was raised with no principles and his sole purpose in life is to obey Fifo and to kill traitors and homosexuals (1991, 337) but the shark has put aside his military training to be with his love. La Mayoya believes she has found a prize, the magnificent dimensions she had been saving herself for. Meanwhile, the shark broadens his mindset and becomes receptive to loving that which he had been reared to hate and destroy. The transformation of Tiburón Sangriento into a loving and sexually satisfying partner for the virginal queen is an example of the rejuvenating outcome of grotesque realism of the body and its sources. The significance of the shark turning his back on his upbringing is celebrated by his spectacular sexual encounter with la Mayoya, turning the ocean into a garden of carnal delight. Arenas explains how sexual activity creates another space for personal growth and change. La Mayoya saved her virginity for one worthy of her, the characteristics she is searching for is found in the well-endowed shark. The selection of her first sexual partner is rather ironic considering this is the same shark responsible for enforcing the repression of sexual freedom of the island's citizens (1991, 337).

While the romance is rejuvenating for the two lovers, it is portrayed as simply negative for Fifo. He is enraged by the treasonous act of his number one soldier-shark

[44] Considering Bakhtin's view of towers as phallic symbols, it is not a huge stretch to apply the concept to daggers as well.

and he is jealous of the affair because he is secretly in love with Tiburón (1991, 339). I interpret this as lowering Fifo's status without something positive resulting from the debasement aside from the revelation to readers of the President's secret desire of the macho male body, and bestiality. Ultimately, la Mayoya is burned at the stake for her love and the shark directs the energy from his profound sadness and agony to gnawing away at the base of the island to help thwart Fifo by setting it free. He, and some of his fellow sharks, join forces with the citizens they had been bred to eliminate (1991, 342). Arenas guides his readers in understanding the challenges that both Tiburón Sangriento and la Mayoya faced. In a number of ways the novel does not encourage readers to think freely about the issues presented, instead, it is rather didactic. This assertion is supported by the significant lack of banquet imagery which suggests free and open conversation is not welcomed or is not needed. The message is clear, with the revelation of the *loca* in the macho, Arenas effectively breaks down the stereotype that sexual preference for men happens only by feminine men (Kaebnick 103), as Tiburón Sangriento is anything but feminine. This relationship is a compelling example of how carnivalesque techniques transform a negative aspect of the current social order into a positive and rejuvenating feature of the developing second world.

Included in the novel is yet another classification system, macho men who secretly desire the male body. Kaebnick interprets this system as the lens through which Arenas identifies and analyzes homoerotic desire in the macho as *bugarrón* sexuality and it is broken down into *"Las cuatro grandes clasificaciones de los bugarrones."* The four types are: *El bugarron de occasión o bugarron dormido* who leads a heterosexual life and has many children but occasionally succumbs to repressed and secret impulses. *El*

bugarron acomplejado is a good father but feels immense guilt over his desire. *El bugarron nato* is one who was born a homosexual and has no interest in women. And lastly, the rare *El superbugarron*, who is also not interested in women, only other *bugarrons* and is likely a public figure such as an actor or a high official in the government (1991, 207). This system is a commentary on how Arenas has defined the macho label. As previously noted, Arenas viewed the macho male as having to use bully tactics to maintain [his] top dog position" and masculine identity (Kaebnick 107). Throughout the novel, the homoerotic nature of the bully is portrayed offering a fictional documentation to the stories. They assign labels to specific types of actions, a typical occurrence in all societies.

The classifications provide a theoretical base to such character sketches as *"El viejo bugarón"* and *"La dualidad de Fifo." El viejo bugarón* is an aging macho man who admits to desiring the male body; he tells of engaging in sex with Fifo. He considers himself as the epitome of male dominant heterosexual power, but he has a dark secret (1991, 64). In *"La dualidad de Fifo,"* Fifo is described as being influenced by his mother resulting in a deep desire to be feminine, *"Por un lado la influencia de su madre campesina, ex-criada y ex-puta, católica y sufrida, ejerció en Fifo un deseo entrañable de ser femenino"* (1991, 411). But at the same time, he is influenced by his father's *machista* attitude, "*El ejemplo machista de su padre que violaba a las yeguas, a las gallinas, a las tortugas y a su propia madre que primero habia sido la cocinera de aquella mansión, despertó en Fifo un incontenible deseo heterosexual, aunque el autor de esta novela (una loca de atar) lo niegue"* (1991, 411). As Kaebnick points out, the

norm of the macho versus *loca* dichotomy is questioned as the *loca* is revealed as being part of the macho (103).

Arenas discloses the *loca* in the macho through the various classification systems and many of the stories he recounts in his autobiography and his novel. In *Antes que anochezca*, Arenas recalls an encounter his friend Tomasito La Goyesca had with an official in the Ministry of the Interior. While on a public bus with Arenas and Hiram Pratt, Tomasito grabs at a young man's crotch and endures a retaliatory beating despite the signs the man was giving to encourage the sexual advance (120). During the scuffle, wallets accidentally exchange hands and the three friends decide to visit the official later that evening to swap wallets. The ministerial official greets them at his door freshly showered and still drying himself with a towel he then seductively wraps around himself (120). The official insults their morality and then surprisingly asks that they sit with him and tell him their life stories. During this exchange, he is sexually aroused and this creates a degree of sexual tension within the group. However, Arenas and his companions are hesitant to act upon their desire for this man at the risk of being reported to state security: *"Los tres no mirábamos atónitos, deseosos de extender la mano y tocar aquel bulto promisorio."* It is suspected the official would have liked nothing better than to engage in a sexual tryst with them (121).

A carnivalesque debasing and renewing event linked with the *bugarón* persona is the *"Crucipinguificación"* in *El color del verano*. In this tale, Arenas transgenders the macho of normative gender politics (Kaebnick 109). The spectacle orchestrated by Fifo and occurs in his underground palace. This is clearly the Devil's lair, the ultimate downward spiral moving into the material bodily lower stratum. After considerable

clamouring by the participants for the coveted mass penetration, Fifo chooses the victim from the many volunteers: Yaser Arafat, *el Líder del movimiento por la Liberación de Panamá* (1991, 214). In real life, Yasser Arafat was the head of the Palestinian Liberation Movement for nearly a half century; and Manuel Noriega was Panama's notorious military dictator between 1983 and 1989. I posit that both of these leaders are being debased and reborn. The Arafat/Noriega combination, stripped naked, is standing with his back to the room against the *muro de las crucipinguificaciones*, arms and legs spread apart and bound to strong rings attached to the wall, and red bulls eyes painted on his body (1991, 214-215). Over a hundred men were ready, naked and erect, to penetrate the captive's body (1991, 215). The debasement began with the preparation of Arafat's body, stripping him of his clothing, presumably his military uniform, as he was rarely seen in public without it. Tied standing naked, his strength is diminished. Noriega would also normally be wearing a military uniform and its public removal would lower his stature as well. With this one action their power is decreased. The penetration by the many phalluses is a forceful and all encompassing act of rejuvenation given the renewing properties of carnivalesque. That their renewal is occurring in Fifo's underground palace reveals the depth of their evil ways and the steep ascent from purgatory, not the living hell the island's citizens have to endure. It portrays strong, virile, apparently heterosexual males desiring the penetration by other men.

In contrast, at the crucifixion ceremony entitled *"La elevación del Santo Clavo,"* there is a joyous and triumphant tone to the crowd worshipping the character called La Llave del Golfo[45] and the double erection; there is both the youth's penile erection and the erection of the gigantic cross he is tied to. It is an event central to the carnival (1991,

[45] Tétrica Mofeta's former sexual partner introduced in *"La Llave del Golfo,"* (Arenas 1991, 220).

426). There is a celebratory feel to the elevation of the cross in comparison to the evil and torturous atmosphere of the *Crucipinguificación.* La Llave del Golfo was selected as the love god to be crucified based on his magnificent body and good looks (1991, 426). Unlike the Yasir Arafat and Manuel Noriega duo at the *Crucipinguificación,* who are victims penetrated by many erect phalluses; La Llave del Golfo, a naked man with an erection, commands the worship of a nation which in turn infuses him with the energy, power, and confidence to untie himself and dash off to the Bulgarian embassy in search of asylum (1991, 428). Instead of requiring rebirth or recreation, the perfect specimen of La Llave del Golfo is fortified.

The imagery is positive and rejuvenating but at the same time it reflects the misery that the island's people are experiencing which forces them to attempt to escape the repressive, oppressive, and brutal dictatorship. In the play, concepts of escape and rebirth are found in Avellaneda's verses as well as the images of escapees being suddenly transformed into swans and fish so that they may swim away (1991, 36, 46). It is evident all is not what it appears to be under Fifo; life is not orderly, tranquil, pristine, and blissful on the island; in fact, it is a living hell that is driving people away. The metamorphosis into fish reinforces the creation of the second world in which its citizens express their deepest thoughts and take action to free themselves.

The carnivalesque motif of being reborn is also explored through Mariano Brull's[46] emergence from a gigantic egg. The rebirth begins with the people in Key West dancing *"El renacimiento de don Mariano Brull"* (1991, 42). The egg is shattered by a bullet and Brull emerges from it: *"Envuelto en enormes ropajes vaporosos realiza un*

[46] Brull (1891-1956) is designated as a Cuban national poet. He used word manipulation and invention in his poetry.

descenso suave, como si cayese en un paracaídas" (1991, 43). Even though he has left the egg's protection, Brull recites a poem laden with homosexual innuendo and nonsense rhymes. A Miami Society Lady and a Nun consider the poem immoral and assume it is not written by a national poet, more likely just a municipal one (1991, 43). Their reactions attest to the boorish mentality of those who feel they are in a position to judge others that Arenas designates as writers of great quality and talent. This scene suggests Brull's rebirth and his poetry symbolizes his sexuality and that his work is poorly regarded, misunderstood, and mocked.

The President of the United States' non-mainstream sexuality is also revealed by his erotic encounter, described as combat, with a rabbit:

> *El presidente se ha quitado toda la ropa; el conejo mete su cabeza completa en el ano presidencial. El presidente suelta un alarido de placer. El conejo sigue escarbando con los dientes y con las patas el ano como si tratara de hacer allí una madriguera. Los jadeos desaforados del Presidente se mezclan con los chillidos del conejo.* (1991, 40)

The President makes wild and passionate love to a rabbit, a debasing image which lowers his status. Given their prolific ability to procreate, rabbits are viewed as signs of fertility and are thus a credible image of grotesque realism. The imagery transforms the bunny into a phallic symbol and the world is turned upside down, with the innocent (rabbit) screwing the President of the country that has instituted an embargo against Cuba. Further, the physical pleasure the President experiences is certainly not mainstream heterosexuality, therefore, even the President of the United States, a powerful position, has a taste for illicit carnal delight.

Another relevant example of *loca* strength and determination is found with Tedevoro, in the three sections entitled *"En el gigantesco urinario."* Tedevoro is a virgin *loca* who is rejuvenated in the novel. She is described as being one of the ugliest and most desperate *loca* and is on Tétrica Mofeta's enemy list for the destruction of one of her manuscripts (1991, 109), requiring punishment for her actions. The story line commences with Tedevoro armed with her ideological shield, a red bound copy of the Complete Works of Lenin,[47] in a frenzy to get to Fifo's anniversary carnival before it ends so that she does not miss the opportunity to lose her virginity (1991, 69-72). While there, she sees a young man, along with many others, enter a historic mansion: *"¡Jesús y ahora un jabao casi imberbe de ojos de ámbar entraba apretándose su bragueta, bragueta única, al parecer pintada por El Bosco, que de un momento a otro amenazaba con estallar!"* (1991, 71). Others are also holding their crotches or starting to undo their pants. With her ideological shield in hand for protection, as she is very afraid of being arrested, tortured, and condemned to death for terrorist plots, she tentatively steps forward and enters the building, discovering it is one of the mansions Fifo had ordered converted into a public urinal (1991, 71-72). With the intoxicating smell of urine and the many exposed penises, Tedevoro has found her garden of carnal delight.

In the second section entitled *"En el gigantesco urinario,"* Tedevoro makes a profound assessment: the simple fact that these men chose to relieve themselves in a public, all-male latrine automatically makes them potential partners: *"Todo hombre al entrar en un baño donde hay sólo hombres orinando participa, quiéralo o no, de la mariconería estelar"* (1991, 137). Tedevoro is known for her desperation to find a man;

[47] The volume numbers alternate between 26 and 27 and in one instance the book is referred to as *las obras completas de Vladimir Ilyich Lenin* (1991, 139). I read these changes as signs of disrespect and subversion of Lenin's Marxist philosophical stance.

in fact, she has been killed a number of times for flinging herself at them. She is forced to rise from the dead by her great "rectal fire" to keep trying to lose her virginity (Arenas 1991, 138). Her continued lives indicate there is an inherent element of rebirth in Tedevoro. While in the urinal she realizes that her shield, *las obras completas de Lenin*, is not protecting her; instead it is having the opposite effect. She believes it is scaring men away since the title is considered symbolic of the Communist Party, and, by extension, with Fifo and his soldiers who hunt down and punish all sexual deviants (1991, 139). The shield can be compared to the Christian Bible, in terms of providing a guide for living and the punishment for sinning, creating yet another association with the Bosch triptych.

In the third section of *"En el gigantesco urinario,"* Tedevoro believes she is finally experiencing a sexual encounter in the darkness of another public latrine set up in the middle of *El Prado* for the festivities.[48] Instead of the glorious and long-awaited penetration, Tedevoro is smeared from head to toe, and in all orifices, with human feces described as *"algo duro y a la vez inexplicablemente blando, resbaladizo y suave recorre su cuerpo; algo contundente e inclasificable pasa por su rostro"* (1991, 418). It is a very sensual experience for the *loca*, as the following quote demonstrates:

> *Mientras lo amasan le bajan los pantalones. Oh ¿Será un sueño? No, no. En medio del olor a orine nocturno y a semen, en la oscuridad, mientras afuera retumba el carnava, Tedevoro siente que unas manos potentes lo frotan, llegan hasta su cabeza, le acarician el cuello, le aprietan las tetillas, bajan hasta sus caderas, se regodean en sus muslos, le dan*

[48] El Prado: In addition to being a real street in Havana, it is also the name of the museum in Madrid where the painting, The Garden of Earthly Delights, is located, thus forging another link with Bosch (1991, 417).

> *masajes en las piernas, suben con fruición hasta su culo, le restriegan, soban y abren sus virginales nalguitas. Algo como un puño cerrado y envuelto en una crema espesa penetra en el trasero de Tedevoro, abriéndose paso casi hasta las mismas entrañas. El aullido de goce que da Tedevoro es tan descomunal que sólo los tambores que afuera siguen repiqueteando lo pueden opacar. Mientras es taladrado, Tedevoro recula y el artefacto contundente, carnoso y viscoso sigue entrando y saliendo de su cuerpo a la vez que decenas de manos o ventosas lo acarician.* (1991, 418)

While the unknown substance (to Tedevoro) is being applied, she is in a state of ecstasy. Finally, all of her desires are satisfied but she does not realize what she is being smeared with. Much to her horror upon leaving the building, Tedevoro discovers what is actually covering her and what did, and did not, happen in the latrine. She goes to the sea hoping to be devoured by sharks but ends up diving into the water for hours trying to wash the excrement away, but the smell will not dissipate. Meanwhile, she has been floating farther and farther away from Havana's coast, but when she tries to swim closer, she is pushed further back from the city and its carnival festivities (1991, 418). The lure of Cuba, with its inequities and injustices, is not strong enough for Tedevoro to overpower the waves and swim to shore. She is being protected from future torment by the cleansing and revitalizing nature of the sea.

Although the event is horrific and the perpetrator's motivation was likely cruelty, Tedevoro's escapades in the latrines is indicative of the critical utopian world. This series of events reveals an incomplete body being transformed into a complete one, *un*

mojón humano, through the application of grotesque realism. The exaggerated use of urine, feces, and bodily orifices are strong grotesque images of rebirth and the renewal of the body and its sources. They are a sample of what I have previously referred to as the joyful and rejuvenating properties of excrement and urine, gay matter. The abundance of waste in the story highlights the significance and magnitude of Tedevoro's rebirth. One of the ways she is reborn is through the realization that the ideology she thought protected her actually does the opposite; it prevents her from living her life the way she wants to live. Further, through the gay properties of excrement, she is fortified against the apparent attack on her sexuality. With an understanding of the tenets of carnivalesque, especially in relation to the gaiety and fearlessness associated with excrement, the moral of Tedevoro's escapade is the necessity to muster one's inner-strength in the face of adversity and remain true to one's sexuality. The excrement's fortifying properties assist with this mission as a protective coating of dung has been applied. The coating's stench has repelled the sharks in the ocean, saving her from their ferocious jaws. Tedevoro lives to face similar attacks in the future, should they occur. As a representative of the homosexual community, Tedevoro must find the courage to overcome homophobic attitudes by resisting the overwhelming sense of despair this kind of incident may produce. With this scenario, Arenas has waged war on the cosmic fear perpetuated by the government's demand for homosexual men to be rehabilitated to conform to the ideal of a revolutionary man – heterosexual, macho, and virile.

In Part Two I have focused on how Arenas has progressed from the despair he portrayed in *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano* to a place of hope. Arenas depicted the folly and brutality of Castro's regime by creating a satirical portrait of those

aspects of the President's leadership and societal norms which repress the freedom, creativity, and integrity of writers and members of the homosexual community. Arenas has gone beyond simply offering satirical commentary by applying a carnivalesque perspective and imagery to situations and individuals in which change is indeed plausible. As a result, Fifo is portrayed in a purely negative, unchanging, satirical manner. Others in his administration are also satirized but with a difference, the renewing and joyful properties of grotesque realism. They are depicted as being able to change once they have acquired sufficient knowledge and insight or their innate homoerotic desire is revealed. A character espousing both attributes is clearly Tiburón Sangriento. The shark changes because he falls in love with someone he was reared to hate, the *loca* called la Mayoya. At the same time, he is a virile heterosexual male, and one of Fifo's troops, who realizes his illicit desire. The message is clear: even though a Cuban man may long for the male body, he is not automatically a traitor; he can still be pro-revolutionary and macho.

The portrayal of homoerotic desire in macho revolutionary men is a strong, positive, and empowering reaction to the epitome of Cuban male national identity: heterosexual virility. Arenas is successful in creating a space to express his need to ridicule and undermine the machismo attitude so that it may be challenged and placed on the same level as homosexuality. Through the application of grotesque realism, Arenas creates a critical utopia in which the Socialist government and its supporters are mocked and rendered ineffectual. To uncrown and eject them from their exalted positions, the men who embody the macho persona are portrayed as being desirous of the male body.

They want what they publicly vilify, thereby easing the prejudice against passive sexual partners.

Arenas's critical utopia is not a well-defined or structured world. It is one in which the powerless acquire strength; the downtrodden take a degree of control and fight back against repressive societal norms. Arenas advocates for a resistance to the Cuban authorities' denigration of homosexuality and silencing of dissident writers, which he achieves in a number of ways. In the play *"La fuga de la Avellaneda,"* the government's employment of intimidation tactics, to turn writers into mouthpieces for the Revolution is revealed. The issue is also strongly addressed in the satire of Heberto Padilla's forced confession. In addition, there are numerous instances where members of the homosexual community acquire voice and power equivalent to the machismo elite. The most effective and significant treatment of this societal inequity is found in the revelation of male desire by macho, virile, heterosexual males, the *bugarrones,* creating a more transparent and honest society.

Conclusion

I began my examination of Arenas's *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano* with the premise that authorial voices should not be silenced. I have become familiar with Arenas's life and work through my reading of his autobiography, his novel, and critical analyses of his writing that others have developed. My research, together with my personal interest in and awareness of Cuban culture, is a multi-faceted approach with which I have gained background information critical for an insightful literary study. Although I looked to Arenas for corroborating evidence to support my interpretations, I did exercise caution with respect to centering my reading of his novel on the content of his autobiography. I was hesitant to blindly link these two texts together, given Fowlie's advice that autobiographies are typically separate from, and unrelated to, a writer's body of work. Fowlie's assessment is of the typical, but Arenas is anything but common place.

Based on my theoretical analysis, I conclude that the two texts can be united in form. I have explored how the border between fiction and autobiography is a permeable one; how their respective boundaries are weakened and infiltrated by their shared characteristics. The very nature of autobiography is based on the creation of a fiction through the various choices an author makes when retelling the story of his/her life. Like other autobiographies, *Antes que anochezca* enters the world of fiction through the selection of specific memories to foster an understanding, from Arenas's perspective, of the difficulties he endured and the reasons for them. Another important feature is the tendency of Spanish American writers to view themselves as witnesses. They document the experiences of others, often representing a silent or silenced community in the telling of their lives and personalities. Such autobiographers situate themselves within the

context of their local community or broader society and retell their stories from a more global perspective than those portraying their own, individual lives. The outcome of this approach is an autobiography not centred entirely on one life and voice but potentially on many. With the inclusion of a plurality of voices, the reader senses that the content is both comprehensive and valid. De Man posits that an interaction with a text will be different for each reader. Link this notion with Lejeune's autobiographical pact, the contractual agreement between the author and the reader, and one realizes the improbability of developing one definitive interpretation.

A similar condition is true of carnivalesque novels; there is an inherently non-fictional aspect to them. The non-fiction is the close association with a referent world's societal inequities and their perpetrators being identified, mocked, and subverted. The setting for *El color del verano* is undoubtedly based on real life post-revolutionary Cuba, Fidel Castro, and the socialist regime. The entire Cuban government, its policies, its civilian informants, and many others who are integral to the creation of Arena's critical utopia, are portrayed in carnivalesque style, at times using realistic grotesque imagery and a strong satirical sting. Readers are confronted with the chaotic images and content of carnivalesque to depict macho attitudes and policies as being hypocritical given the homosexual preferences of virile revolutionary heterosexual males. As Soto explains, the fictional nature of this text allows for some flexibility with historical dates and facts to ensure a compelling story is told and readers are captivated.

As I have also discussed, there is considerable overlap in themes and events in *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano* which serve to further strengthen my assertion that the two works can be read as one text. The similarities also reinforce an

important connection between the two texts; they both contain the clear voice and presence of the author. I have focused primarily on two themes and the stories that reveal them: the asinine character of the socialist government, and the impact of its repressive policies which restrict the rights and freedoms of the island's citizens. I examine these similarities through the lens of despair. In addition, the autobiography extends beyond the misery and captures the glimmer of hope that nurtured Arenas's dream of a just society, a critical utopia.

The study of *El color del verano* as a carnivalesque text is unique and brings an entirely new reading of this novel. Further, examining it in tandem with *Antes que anochezca* builds on Kaebnick's and Vickroy's articles. As I have noted, Vickroy lacks the theoretical base that I consider essential and include in my thesis, and Kaebnick's is not a close examination of the continuity or the dialogue between the two works. Her article is a thorough and perceptive analysis of the themes and motifs related to sexuality shared by the two works; but she does not consider, to the degree that I have, how the novel builds upon the foundation set by the despair Arenas portrays in his autobiography and this particular novel. The application of despair and desire as the lens through which these texts are examined offers new insight into the life and work of this author. Arenas has admitted to the personal connection all of his writing had with his life, consequently, studying his fictional work in relation to his autobiography will reveal a more complete, multi-faceted portrait of this picaresque Cuban exile.

My interpretation of *El color del verano* is centred on Arenas's creation of a critical utopia to find relief from, and vengeance for his lifetime of agony and hardship. I have traced the narrative progression begun with Arenas's despair to the portrayal of a

world in which hypocrisy and double standards are revealed. Arenas channelled his creativity and imagination to depict a fantasy world, satisfying his longing for a society in which homosexuality is not vilified and a desire for the male body is celebrated. In this utopian world, Arenas exercises his right to depict his sexuality in his writing in any manner he chooses and to its fullest extent.

Arenas's life, his experiences, and attitudes must be known and understood to guide an understanding of *El color del verano*. It is worth noting that literary critics have identified sexuality, especially homosexuality, as a dominant and recurring theme in all of Arenas's writing. I do not suggest that his persona determines the definitive meaning of *El color del verano*; rather, it allows for an informed discussion. Arenas is prominent in his autobiography, as the genre's conventions dictate, and he is also clearly in this particular piece of fiction. With Arenas front and centre, it is unavoidable for a reader to ponder the significance of the authorial presence and to glean background information from the association. Awareness of the dire reality conveyed in the autobiography informs a reading of the novel. Frankly, without knowing about *Antes que anochezca* or about what Arenas endured and believed, *El color del verano* loses its most important referent – Arenas himself.

A reader without sufficient knowledge of Arenas or Cuban culture and its political climate at that time will experience some difficulty in understanding the significance of the text and I suspect that it would be viewed as confusing, nonsensical, and outlandish. *El color del verano* is not a self-contained world given the explicit references to Arenas's other works and the characters obviously based on real people. Further, in his autobiography, Arenas explains that most of the inspiration for his writing comes from

his real life. Therefore, analysis must be extended to include information about Arenas and the broader Cuban society. This is in opposition to an exclusive focus on the text and the distancing of the author as espoused by Barthes; however, I find support for my assessment in autobiography and carnivalesque literary theory in addition to *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano*. I refer to my discussion of Arenas's portrayal of Padilla's forced admittance of anti-revolutionary writing and his general ideological weaknesses, as a relevant example of this perspective. Without the benefit of being familiar with Arenas's contention that the institution of writing was being decimated, a reader may not have the necessary background information to place the novel's depiction in context. In addition, without reading the detailed description of the spectacle in the autobiography, as well as the circumstances leading up to and then following his public apology, a reader will experience the section on Padilla in *El color del verano* as confusing and chaotic, and not necessarily as significant as it ought to be regarded.

The result of my comparative analysis is the designation of the two texts as one comprehensive autobiographical project. *Antes que anochezca* and *El color del verano* can be read as a broader-based, more complete representation of Arenas's life and his desire for, and pursuit of, literary and sexual freedom. The autobiography points out the salient issues; and in the novel, they are addressed through the subversion of the traditional power structure, and the offer of a better, albeit fantasy, world. A natural progression from this thesis is the consideration of the remaining four novels in the *pentagonía* as potential contributors to a wide-ranging representation of Cuban reality. A combination of autobiographical realism and the imaginative response to reality that only fiction can offer, presents the opportunity to understand Arenas's experiences of

Cuba and exile from a literary approach that is as much grounded in theory and as it is thematic interpretation – an important tenet of the comparative literature discipline.

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