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THE SPIRAL CANON.
REREADING, FOLD AND TRANSVESTISM
IN PEDRO JUAN GUTIÉRREZ.

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Summary.

For several years, students of recent Spanish American narrative have understood that they must adopt new theoretical focuses in order to carry out their work. This change has a direct relation with the positions and ideas held by many writers in the subcontinent which have come to light in recent times. These authors attribute to themselves a complex, polyhedral personality, based on a mixture of very diverse ingredients. For this reason, they rebel against schemes and approaches which have had great weight in the analysis of Latin American literature. To begin, they put forward that their works are never identified exclusively with determined artistic styles or patterns. They also reject the notion of national identity as they believe that this is unable to completely explain the principles which give form to their writing and idiosyncrasy. Consequently, they do not want to be seen as simple *emissaries* of the cultural values and traditions which prevail in their respective countries of origin.

Those who endeavour to describe and interpret these new routes taken by the Latin American writers in recent decades have understood that they cannot have recourse only to concepts which were once functional such as schools, generation, movement or national literary field. Generally, these formulas serve to draw up taxonomies and classifications which are based on well delimited criteria. Thus, they are inappropriate for defining writers who are distinguished for their wish not to fit into an established mould.

The notions summed up constitute the basic starting point for this work. Here we endeavour to approach several prose writers whose works show some of the main paths taken in recent Latin American narrative. Consequently, we try to use methods of analysis adapted to the ways in which these narrators think and create.

In order to carry out our plan, we were inspired by one of the postulates defended by Marshall McLuhan. This Canadian philosopher held that the best strategy to face up to any problem consisted of not adopting single perspectives, but multi-dimensional focuses. We believe that, by means of this technique, it is possible to provide a true portrayal of writers who never assume closed, unilateral affiliations. Consequently, we endeavour to examine their literature and personal identities from several angles.

In accordance with the principals explained, we divide this work into two grand sections. In each one of these, we address matters related to the ideas and attitudes of the narrators studied. We begin by taking into account that these are never ascribed to

bounded ideological currents nor to reduced time and space frameworks. With this gesture, they do not express a willingness to remain alien to the world which surrounds them; on the contrary, they show their eagerness to dialogue with cultural values and realities present in extensive chronological period and in vast geographic zones. For this reason, it is advisable to determine the influence some far reaching historical events and processes has had on them.

Taking into account what has been said, we demonstrate that these authors forge essential links with postmodernity. In order to achieve this objective, we begin by clarifying what our vision of a phenomenon which has given rise to innumerable arguments consists of. The term *postmodernity* has received numerous different definitions. Some theoreticians believe that this word refers to determined more or less curious and innovative approaches which only fit into the areas of art and philosophy. Opposed to this reductionist concept, other thinkers see postmodernity as a system created from values and thinking whose influence is notable in very diverse fields: science, society, culture, politics and economic. In this work, we have opted for the latter interpretation as, in our opinion, it puts forward a complete image of the meaning which postmodern ideas acquire.

Moreover, there is no agreement as regards the chronological limits of this current. For certain authors its duration was brief, being reduced to the period between the 70s and 80s of the XX century. This postulate often implies the theory that, due to its short existence, postmodern thinking never became a consistent entity. However, other students of the theme consider that this movement has a greater dimension as it expresses changes which have become decisive for western societies. In accordance with this view, they defend two cardinal arguments. On the one hand, they maintain that several attitudes and convictions linked to postmodern mentality originated in the 50s of the xx century; and, on the other hand, they state that in some areas this thought conserved its validity until the beginning of the second millennium. These principles are convincing, thus we adopt them in our analysis.

Finally, we must not ignore an essential question. Through the name it assumes, the postmodern *episteme* establishes a direct relationship with its immediate precursor in time: modernity. For this reason, numerous critics and thinkers have tried to exactly define the links between these two world views. With regard to this matter, diverse opinions have also been formulated. There are those who assure that postmodern discourse lacks

originality as it simply copies notions which already functioned at full capacity in the modern epoch. Among the followers of this thesis there is no lack of authors who even attribute a perverse and mediocre condition to postmodernity. Thus, they proclaim that this movement engenders frivolous watered down versions of the *valuable* modern ideals.

Opposed to this, other voices sustain that the postmodern era makes a definitive break with its predecessor. Nevertheless, based on this general premise, two opposing conclusions are reached. Several thinkers declare that postmodernity entails an involution because it terminates the *grand modern narrations*, centred on guiding the human being to a utopic future. However, other authors stress the positive values of the new mentality as they believe that this dismantles thought whose eagerness to institute univocal truths led to all types of catastrophes in the western world.

The criteria explained give rise to valid and certain theories, but we believe that, alone, none of these is sufficient to describe the complex network of relations which postmodernity establishes with its immediate predecessor. Therefore, we wish to propose an alternative way of inquiring into these connections. In order to achieve our objective, we begin by providing general definitions of modernity and postmodernity, a task carried out in the first chapter of this work.

Here we see that these currents are forged in historical stages marked by changes which influence all the areas of western civilisation. However, we endeavour to point out the emblematic features which distinguish these formulas and to do so, we base ourselves on an analysis carried out by important students of these points such as Matei Calinescu, Octavio Paz, Marshall Berman, Gérard Raulet, Albrecht Wellmer, Andreas Huyssen, Jürgen Habermas, Fredric Jameson, Jean-François Lyotard and Jesús Martín-Barbero among others.

This enables us to discover that modernity and postmodernity coincide in revealing a polyhedric character. Thus, we can verify that both have an extraordinary ability to develop numerous diverse facets which can even contradict each other. This fact appears to us too be crucial as we understand that it determines the nature of the links they have with each other. These links also adopt several meanings, therefore, they do not respond exclusively to the concept of imitation nor to the idea of an absolute break.

In the second, third and fourth chapters of this thesis we try to confirm the notions put forward recently. To achieve this, we confront postmodernity from a theoretical perspective which is based on two complementary presuppositions. In the first place, we

assume that this new *episteme* is characterised by its taking components proper to modernity in order to submit them to several operations. Furthermore, we consider that such practices are due to a number of intentions and generate disparate results since they are applied to a movement which has a multiplicity of facets.

So, in the second chapter we demonstrate that some aesthetic and ideological currents linked to postmodernity make a creative reinvention of modern guidelines and formulas. In order to achieve this objective, we examine the countercultural movements which arose first in the United States and then in Europe during the 60s of the XX century. These tendencies, which were the foundations of many postmodern principles and values, were engaged in recovering concepts which were essential for artistic schools with unquestionable modern affiliation: the avant-garde schools. Nonetheless, we can also observe that, in their diverse manifestations, counterculture never makes mere copies of the avant-garde models as it adapts these patterns to new historical circumstances and adds clearly original features.

The third chapter deals with showing how postmodernity carries out a critical analysis of the grand tales forged by its predecessor. Modernity is characterised by its creation of ideologies which aspired to provide a definitive solution for all the problems of the human being. This situation led to the creation of an ideal ambience for the flourishing of radicalism and belligerence. In any environment – science, art, politics, philosophy, etc. – there arose categorical doctrines, which defined themselves as the essential guide for the construction of a perfect society. Those who sponsored these dogmas believed they were in possession of absolute and irrefutable truths. Consequently, they discarded points of view different from their own, proclaiming that only their point of view was right.

Within the framework of postmodernity there was a strong reaction against the points just mentioned. Thus, thinkers such as Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard and Michel Foucault appeared and question the grand modern tales, displaying their flaws and inconsistencies. These authors do not construct their theories from nothing; they take advantage of and complete ideas which were already developed by modern philosophers such as Sigmund Freud, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. In the third chapter we endeavour to prove this last fact, which enables us to discover that postmodernity never restricts itself to a definitive break with its predecessor.

Finally we should show how, during the postmodern epoch, processes whose origins are in the modern period are consecrated and highlighted. This objective is addressed in the fourth chapter, where we analyse one of the most important milestones which western societies lived through in the XX century: the rise of symbolic goods manufactured through industrial mass production techniques. These articles are easy to understand and affordable in economic terms as they are intended for mass consumption. For this reason, not only do they generate unheard of ways to understand culture, but they also make it necessary to rethink the concept of aesthetic value. In fact, they modify or invalidate the attributes which, by tradition, have been considered inherent to artistic works: excellence, sublimity and an unrepeatable character. In order to define these innovative realities, expressions are created and disseminated and progressively acquire more validity, as are the cases of *kitsch*, *camp* and *mass culture*.

The aforementioned phenomena led to an authentic revolution in the West. Artists and students of aesthetic forms will be forced to adopt a clear position as regards the symbolic mass produced goods. This dynamic, which began in the modern period, reaches extraordinary intensity during postmodernity. So, this movement will give rise to continual polemics concerning the nature and meaning of art. Precisely in the fourth chapter, we deal with analysing all these questions.

In order to address the three points which we have just summarised, we are supported by three grand notions: rereading, fold and transvestism. These terms designate exercises which question or redefine the canonical value of a pre-existing model, either by altering its original features or revealing facets of the model which had been masked. Therefore, they are shown to be adequate to describe what postmodernity does with a substantial number of modern formulas and ideas. In addition, these categories of analysis make it possible to inquire into a variety of matters since they are flexible and multi-purpose. This is why they serve to create broad frameworks of study, within which we place diverse facts in relation to each other.

In short, the first four chapters of this thesis are intended to examine postmodernity from different angles. With this, we intend to establish rigorous definitions for socio-cultural dynamics and for the theoretical principles which take shape within this very complex current. However, we must not forget that this work is intended to go into the field of recent Latin American narrative. This is why it is advisable to answer an essential

question, Do postmodern tendencies and attitudes fit into areas which occupy subordinate or peripheral positions within the global geopolitical order?

The fifth chapter focuses on searching for a solution for this unknown factor. Here we begin by seeing how many critics and thinkers believe that a cultural and ideological movement from the former colonising metropolises cannot fit in naturally in Latin America. Below we attempt to propose an alternative point of view to this without committing the error of assuming a Eurocentric perspective. In order to achieve this, we again use the notions of rereading, fold and transvestism. Thus we demonstrate that these categories, already used to define the most relevant foundations of postmodernity, also enable us to analyse outstanding events which have occurred in Latin America from the colonial era until our time. In order to corroborate this hypothesis, we have the support of five authors who have investigated the relations of the American subcontinent with postmodern values: Rosa María Ravera, Margarita Schultz, Nicolás Rosa, Héctor Daniel Dei and Alfonso de Toro.

In the sixth chapter we go on to study some of the routes taken by recent Latin American narrative. To carry out this analysis, we concentrate on authors of several nationalities who create their works at different times of an extensive period of time, between the end of the 60s in the XX century and the first years of the new millennium. This method of work serves to detect the links which unite persons situated in different historical and socio-cultural environments. In this way, we take into account a feature which is proper to the narrators we intend to approach, which is that they do not want to be located in reduced territorial and chronological frameworks. Moreover, in order to address the literatures of these prose writers, we adopt another two fundamental strategies.

In the first place, the authors we speak about demand not to be ascribed to limited literary currents. With this gesture, not only do they seek to be attributed with a radical originality, but they also wish to demonstrate that they have recourse to very diverse artistic and intellectual models when constructing their narrations. Owing to this, when we analyse their works, we assume open perspectives which help us to discover the wide variety of components in these works.

On the other hand, although they tend to present themselves as unique in their species, many of these narrators design similar writing proposals, with which they forge links between each other. Nevertheless, they reject the possibility to form conventional

literary groups as this would oblige them to follow guidelines which are too strict. So, they come together around more lax principles which do not represent a threat to their identities. Bearing this fact in mind, we use the concept of literary galaxy in order to establish relations between the authors we study.

This notion refers to a group of writers who have two essential characteristics: on the one hand, they all have in common the fact that they avail themselves of the same artistic pattern; and, on the other hand, each one of them carries out this action in a particular, unmistakable fashion, adapted to their personal beliefs and to their narrative style. Thus, the centre of a literary galaxy must be occupied by aesthetic formulas which have sufficient flexibility to become an object for multiple uses and interpretations. Considering these premises, we examine three literary galaxies which have been created in the field of recent Latin American narrative based on three models: realism, baroque and *kitsch*.

In order to carry out our analysis of these constellations, we must address several tasks. Above all, we prove that their cohesive axes, as corresponds, have a multi-purpose sense. Moreover, we see that realism and the baroque have a special degree of elasticity as they have acquired trans-historical values. Finally, we demonstrate that the three aesthetic categories chosen for our study have played important roles in Latin America.

Once these objectives have been attained, we speak about the literary galaxies which interest us. In the case of realism, it has been verified that, during recent decades, several Latin American narrators have used this artistic code to inquire into the darkest and most lurid aspects of their respective social environments. Consequently, we see that a realist aesthetic has been forged centred on the abject features and we endeavour to define the main characteristics which define this pattern.

In order to define the term *abjection* we follow Julia Kristeva, a fundamental authority on the matter. According to this authoress, the idea of the abject arises because the individual needs to organise his reality through fixed, closed parameters. This eagerness leads to the generation of exclusive antinomies where one element always occupies the marginal position. These *condemned* presences refer to whatever violates the aspirations of purity, harmony and balance manifested by the human being. This is why the usually have a relationship with the environment of physiology.

This field and its manifestations show features which become terrifying for the rational ego. In the first place, they are never due to regulation based on logical or moral

criteria because they express primary instincts, whose demands may be shown to be as random as they are inevitable. In this regard, the biological impulses testify to our incapacity to exercise firm domination over nature which often reveals anarchic behaviour. In addition, the needs and experiences of the organism lead to humans remembering a disturbing fact: the uncontrollable power of their material side, which will inevitably lead them to absolute putrefaction. The circumstances mentioned explain that both body fluids –faeces, blood, semen, urine– as well as certain physiological processes –dying, defecating, copulating, growing old, and menstruating– are described as abject.

The entities which assume this denomination are considered to be alien to the ego. Therefore, they are located outside, a strange and threatening territory where individuals do not want to be recognised. This operation gives rise to a strategy conceived to separate from all that might instil us with fear and rejection. However, when carrying out this distancing, an unsurmountable obstacle appears: as the *ignominious* presences come from the subject, the subject sees itself reflected in them. Consequently, the abject produces aversion, fear and repugnance; but, at the same time, it exercises considerable attraction because it is close and familiar to us. This ambivalence is not only in relation to the physiological, as the rational psyche handles the principle of abjection at other levels. Thus, it uses it to define the identities, cultures and space which infringe its convictions. These realities also provoke contradictory sensations and, although they seem to be rare and even monstrous, the dominant ego glimpses something of itself in them.

The concept of abjection occupies an outstanding place in human psychology. This justifies the fact that several artistic models of a realistic type –picaresque, grotesque, naturalism– have shown a great interest in their expressions. With regard to Latin America, the use of this notion as a key tool for describing and examining reality has been especially productive. As we have pointed out, the category of the abject establishes a direct relationship with three binomials which perturb the individual: intellect-nature, norm-difference and civilisation-barbarity. In Latin America, these dichotomies and their conflictive implications have repercussions on the nature of many cultural, social and identity phenomena. So, we understand that, there, the idea of abjection has become fundamental for realist writers belonging to diverse epochs and countries.

Considering what has been stated above, it could be postulated that we are speaking of a trans-historical template. Nevertheless, in this thesis we focus especially on a version of this model which takes shape during the 90s. In this decade several narrators appear

who show a clear predisposition to show aspects of the Latin American areas and societies characterised by their abnormal, eccentric or opprobrious features. These creators do not form a group in the strict sense of the term as all of them follow different literary patterns and reveal that they have unmistakable personalities. However, they are linked by a proclivity to base their themes and styles on abjection, a basic concept which enables them to appropriate a real world. Looking at things in this way, it can be argued that they make up a galaxy whose cohesive axis lies in the handling of realist aesthetics focused on abject phenomenon.

In addition, this constellation of authors responds to another unifying ingredient. Its members prolong and redraft both literary ideas and strategies which have played an important role in the history of Latin American narrative codes. Above all, they avail themselves of the inheritance bequeathed by modern writers which contributed to renovating the prose genres, forging literary universes where the principle of abjection had crucial weight. With regard to this fact, we must consider the contributions of Roberto Arlt and Pablo Palacio. These creators transformed the artistic and intellectual patterns which had been used in the subcontinent to construct narratives with a realist register. Both chose to address human and socio-cultural realities which, owing to their anomalous, irrational or transgressor nature, were the subjects of an analysis which was prejudiced and insufficient, when they were not silenced in literary works. Moved by this option, they developed exercises which would appear forcefully in the 90s. First of all, they questioned the identity of the ideological pillars which sustained the political and social orders established in their respective countries. They also proposed revolutionary theories on marginalisation, described in their literatures as a way of life and thought which subjected the instituted values to very appropriate criticism.

Nevertheless, above all, the formula which we study in this work has its more immediate references in three currents arising at the end of the 60s: the novel of violence, the literature of witness and the teen novel. These models, which are analysed in-depth in the sixth chapter, depict realities which are described as abject owing to their different, disturbing or frightening nature. The first examines the features and effects of violence, presenting this notion as a destructive, ignominious force which has two linked aspects: one of a universal nature as it materialises barbaric instincts present in every human being, and another related to determined historical vicissitudes. The literature of witness creates

spaces where subordinated individuals, who belong to different ethnic, cultural or social groups make their voices silenced by the established system heard.

To finish, the teen novel is focused on the adolescent, a human type to which the reigning socio-political order, created by adults, normally attributes an abject condition. The young adult has a *strange* identity because he is situated halfway between infancy and maturity. This transforms him into a lurid, bothersome personage, which is why he must often be subjected to repressive or arbitrary dictates. He also sees how he is ignored as he is not provided with environments where the manifestation of his beliefs and concerns is visible and fruitful. These situations mean that he develops a rebellious character and decide to reject and continually fail to comply with the norms in force.

As a result of his way to address the matters mentioned, these literary forms undertake changes which will become crucial for Latin American narrative. In fact, they question the dominant patterns which are forged by the authors linked to the *boom* as their tactics imply a renunciation to generate mythical or all-embracing visions of Latin America. In this respect, they adopt four innovative measures which should be mentioned.

First of all, they concentrate on precise times and spaces, assuming the testimonial value of the *canonical* realist novel. They also confer immense protagonist value on relegated and antihero subjects, installing their *little stories* in the centre of the literary works. In line with this operation, they create a raw, graphic portrait of marginality, with no idealising filters. Finally, they depict a phenomenon which the writers of the subcontinent pay progressively more attention to: the crisis suffered by the paradigms of identity and the concept of nation. Thus, they show how there are numerous real events and problems in Latin America which surpass or belie ideological fiction. In this way, they demonstrate that the *grand tales* fail in diverse cultural and socio-political environments marked by the notions of chaos, violence and instability.

During the 90s, several narrators appeared who perfected the strategies mentioned in order to transfer capital aspects of their reality to the literary text. Precisely in the sixth chapter we deal with studying four of these authors: the Mexican Gonzalo Celorio, the Chilean Roberto Bolaño, the Peruvian Óscar Malca and the Colombian Fernando Vallejo.

Furthermore, we also show how, in the field of recent Latin American narrative, there has been a recuperation of techniques and ideas linked to the historical Baroque. Both in the Caribbean and in the Southern Cone, this process has given rise to neo-baroque literary tendencies which are shown to be influenced by postmodern ideas. These

currents have an open character s they do not impose strict standards of unity. In this way, they group subjects with their own strong identities, whose styles are very personal. This flexibility is inspired in a feature which already existed in the first Baroque, prone to making diverse mixtures of artistic and cultural traditions. Guided by this trend, this movement designed an extensive catalogue of expressive formulas and ideological patterns which admitted multiple uses. For the Latin American authors we are studying in our thesis, this characteristic becomes crucial, instigating to a great extent their vindication of the Baroque. So, this code attracts them owing to its intrinsic laxness, which forges a very attractive option: adopting an aesthetic pattern freely and through actions which transmit the individual preference.

Despite what was said, in their handling of the Baroque, these narrators foster principles and strategies which reveal common motivations. For all of them, one facet of the typical mentality of the XVII century will be especially valuable: a radical scepticism. In opposition to its Renaissance precursor, this ideology promoted dystopian visions which revealed a terrible absence of trust in human acts and decisions. This fact gave rise to numerous baroque thinkers and artists making furious criticisms of society in a cruel, aggressive and incendiary tone.

These phenomena were of great interest to the Latin American narrators we speak of because they will assume a vocation of dissidence as an emblem. Most of them are rebellious and quarrelsome; they long to challenge or transgress institutional precepts. It seems natural, then, that they re-establish and orientate the taste of the Baroque for furious invective in accordance with their ideas. In this regard, as pointed out by Néstor Perlongher, they us this model in order to transform their literary works into “trenches”, from where they undertake two capita exercises: they launch offensives against the generalised beliefs, showing their flaws and they denounce the wicked parameters which support the reigning socio-political order.¹

The postmodern neo-baroque writers agree with another feature of the artistic current which they make their own: the interest in the realities which subvert or challenge the accepted moral and aesthetic standards. The first Baroque not only admired the forms which had spectacular and sumptuous beauty; their attention was also drawn to what they considered to be perverse and grotesque. This last principle will be fundamental for the

¹ Ulanovsky, Carlos, “El SIDA puso en crisis la identidad homosexual. Entrevista a Néstor Perlongher”. In Perlongher, Néstor, *Papeles insumisos*, Buenos Aires, Santiago Arcos Editor, 2004, p.332.

authors we study in this thesis as the atypical or different identities acquire immense prominence in their works. This often implies searching in the *sewers* of the social map, showing miserable territories which portray the marginalisation suffered by eccentric personalities. So, neo-baroque writing prioritises the abject, submerging us in sombre, sordid and disturbing atmospheres. In line with these values, they also investigate the dark pulsations of the human being, which neutralise any rational dictates: violence, madness and the lower instincts.

These directives boost the recuperation of the Baroque, which not only attracts owing to its influence on the strange and the abnormal. The Latin American narrators also believe that this recuperation provides ideal techniques for representing all that might challenge the epistemic system in force. On this point, they are interested in a particular aspect of the golden Baroque, characterised by assuming two primordial features. While it preferred to construct oblique messages, which did not admit clear, univocal interpretations, it also rejected the communicative standards, marginalising the principal ideas to the benefit of any adjacent or subsidiary notion.

These formulas are the result of an ideological perspective as they reject linguistic and mental patterns which seek to install closed hierarchies or absolute meanings. Observing this nuance, the Latin American authors we speak about in this thesis will convert baroque expression into a trans-historical resource. In this way they intend to institute a language which is adequate to show the phenomena which violate the rules considered to be licit and canonical in their socio-political environments.

In the sixth chapter, we deal with the analysis of all the points summed up, paying special attention to the works of five neo-baroque writers: the Cubans Severo Sarduy and Reinaldo Arenas, the Puerto Rican Luis Rafael Sánchez, the Argentinian Néstor Perlongher and the Chilean Pedro Lemebel.

To finish off, we can see how, from the end of the 60s, several authors have been revolutionising the Latin American literary scenario by including in their narrative themes and rhetorical strategies which come from *kitsch*. This renovating act has a fundamental basis in the principles defended by postmodernity. Opposed to the immobile dogmas and preceptor, this world view proposes to amend and subvert the unilateral theories on art which have become institutionalised in the West. Influenced by this approach, some Latin American writers refuse to create a literature in which only the canonical codes and

models fit. So, they introduce heterodox resources into their narratives which are contributed by mass culture.

These narrators see *kitsch* as another expressive register, which can contribute to the creation of the artistic product. They even think that this language already has formal strategies and distinctive themes, which are sufficiently secured in order to be the subject of three procedures endorsed by the grand literary traditions: quotation, pastiche and parodic rereading. Invoking these premises, they adjudicate two different but complementary tasks to the templates and iconography which do not come from *cheap art*.

In the first place, this category enables them to carry out exercises of an avant-garde, experimental nature. The writers observe that *kitsch* has engendered an immense collection of topics, styles and techniques. This archive is subjected to frequent changes and extensions so that the receivers must acquire complex knowledge in order to understand and differentiate their elements. The authors studied in this work decided to take advantage of the possibilities generated by this situation. To do so, they used the new repertory of formulas provided by the cultural industry in order to construct codified messages. This option led them to forging an *aesthetic of difficulty* as their texts become hermetic.

The narrators use themes and methods proper to mass produced art in order to transmit ideas and without these it would be impossible to understand their works. However, they never provide clues to help us to *decipher* the codified information through keys from *kitsch*. Consequently, they introduce their references to mass culture with no mediation offered. Neither do they hesitate to modify the formats and icons which they extract from the cultural industry, replacing their characteristic functions by others which are completely different. Therefore, they require readers *initiated in kitsch*, who properly evaluate their intentions when handling this code. Specifically they require us to carry out several decoding operations by applying previously assimilated competences. On the one hand, we must know the *kitsch* forms in their texts in order to be able to decipher the content which is expressed through these. Moreover, when these authors submit *cheap art* to a re-signifying process, we will have to discover the meaning and the objectives of this manoeuvre.

The writers we are speaking of in this work also appreciate that *kitsch* is ideal for carrying out another avant-garde action: the break with dogma and canons predominate

in the area of institutional art. In this context, a hierarchical system is imposed which attributes specific qualities and perfectly delimited roles to the diverse symbolic registers. Therefore, it is believed that each cultural model generates expressions adapted to their ranks, with a particular and immovable level of validity and sublimity. This postulate gives rise to the conviction that the different artistic languages cannot be freely combined nor can egalitarian relationships between them be maintained.

The Latin American authors who have recourse to *kitsch* challenge the notions mentioned as they carry out several transgressor exercises. Above all, they show that there is a possibility to forge a commendable literature using techniques and images considered to be *vulgar* or *in bad taste*. At the same time, they mix renowned aesthetic patterns with styles which, according to the principles of *high culture*, should occupy a marginal, subordinate place for two reasons: they destroy or distort the bases of *true art* and are not endorsed by prestigious traditions.

Finally, these narrators are guided by identical criteria when working with the diverse cultural patterns which appear in their works. On the one hand, they understand that all these formulas have the capacity to give rise to real and valuable artistic effects. Consequently, they decide to use them indistinctly in order to forge quality literary products. However, they never unconditionally decide for the value and suitability of the codes which they adopt. Thus, they establish a *preventive* distance with respect to these, a tactic which enables them to correct or parody their distinctive features.

On the other hand, the authors studied in this thesis not only transform *kitsch* into an instrument intended to produce literary strategies of an avant-garde nature: they also discover that this concept supplies adequate means for executing operations proper to realist aesthetics. These narrators observe how, through their patterns and creations, the cultural industry can show and even promotes very significant facts which arise in a determined socio-economic context. Therefore, they check that the analysis and the portrayal of phenomena linked to this new entity will help them truly describe precise historical realities.

These ways to conceive and take advantage of *cheap art* give rise to fundamental narrative techniques for several Latin American writers. In the sixth chapter of this work we study four of these authors: Severo Sarduy, Luis Rafael Sánchez, Pedro Lemebel and Manuel Puig.

Finally, we have proposed to demonstrate that all the forms of analysis used in our research can be applied to a single, specific example. For this reason, in the seventh chapter we concentrate on examining the case of the Cuban writer Pedro Juan Gutiérrez. The biographical trajectory of this author clearly shows all the points which are addressed in this thesis. Above all, it is an exemplary testimony of the relations opened and which are even contradictory which may arise regarding the canonical models and their peripheries. In this regard, it seems to be essential that their vital ideological and literary choices turn out to be heterodox for different reasons. Close up, this different or atypical nature refers to the combination of two factors: he is an intellectual who lives in Cuba.

The simple fact of residing in the Caribbean island gives rise to an eccentric affiliation. The geopolitical order which marked out by the liberal and democratic powers confers a strange, marginal bias regarding the Cuban reality. The fifth chapter of this work describes the reasons which cause phenomena like this one. There it can be seen that the nations with greater resources organise the world applying a hierarchical design. Thus, they place the political organisation systems which challenge their beliefs on low, inferior levels. This dynamic becomes more pronounced depending on how divisive or different the ideology assumed by the territory classified is.

Cuba, then, is clearly affected as its socialist government implies a negation of the criteria instituted by the western democracies. Moreover, the transnational economy determines that its peripheral character generate material situations of poverty. Nevertheless, the *precarious* rank of the nation is also due to internal difficulties. The practical realisations of Marxism are quite irregular and convulsive, and do not produce firm socioeconomic structures. These loss-making results lead to a serious reduction in the levels of progress and citizen's welfare.

Additionally, in the symbolic resources another *exceptional* reality is experienced. Castroism exercises a strong control over intellectual production, which must legitimise or, at least, not subvert government values. Consequently, the *culture workers* have to respect extraneous and *heteronymic* directives, not forged by their work environment. This fact makes it necessary to brandish specific ideological positions as their destiny is restricted to a radical dilemma: *to be revolutionaries or traitors*. A critical or non-conformist attitude often leads to exclusion from the national project. Thus, whoever is suspicious of or expresses doubts may suffer absolute marginalisation on being refused his *Cuban status*.

In the general panorama which we have outlined, Gutiérrez has quite remarkable conduct. He has not considered the possibility of exile and never clearly manifests his opposition to the socialist government. Notwithstanding this, at the same time he maintains a distrusting and distant attitude which can be perceived in many of his works. He settles in interstitial territories, establishing an *equitable* distance with respect to the more frequent and accepted options. In a strongly polarised context, which still handles unilateral antagonisms, this case is quite original. Of course, Gutiérrez is not an *author of the regime*. But he does not want to be expelled, so he scrapes by the limit of instituted legality but never violates it.

In order to deploy this game, he uses resources inherent to an entity which we analyse in the fifth and sixth chapters of this thesis: the peripheral intellectual. This archetype works in environments marked by strong material and symbolic hierarchies, normally circumscribed to authority-submittal relationships. In this regard, he develops a *cross-eyed* look, which simultaneously makes knowing winks at both institutional and peripheral terrains, while not brandishing a unique positioning. Thus, he expresses himself through polysemic gestures which are hybrids of opposing attitudes of tolerance, rebelliousness, marginality and integration. This power to move and act in several directions gives rise to eccentric nature of Gutiérrez.

The Cuban writer rejects unilateral and predetermined affiliations, regardless of whether these come from central or subordinate environments. This marks the particular nature of his literary creations, which combine references belonging to diverse times, places and cultural spectrums. This mixture generates personal versions of the three artistic categories which we study in our work: realism, baroque and *kitsch*. Gutiérrez takes these formulas, which in themselves are now multi-purpose and highlights their flexibility creating a style which rejects univocal cataloguing.

Due to the points mentioned, his experiences as a literary author reveal numerous atypical and heterodox facets. Above all, he is a creator who takes two bibliographically different routes: one in Cuba, where, above all, he publishes *inoffensive* texts, respectful with the values instituted by socialism, and another outside the island, which gives expression to his more personal or transgressor works. The differences between both publishing lines are very noticeable and it is even possible to talk of a *bicephalous* author. Moreover, Gutiérrez seems not to maintain links with any specific literary model gestated by Cuban authors in recent decades.

The questions analysed underline the eccentric features manifested by this author. This margin affiliation has a very special character as it does not imply an absolute separation of all the categories and schemes recognisable, but is founded on brief contacts and dialogues with the varied components which make up the representations of the centre-periphery binomial. This fact can be seen in its immediate reality as it contends with strongly delimited. In addition, the mixtures of convention and rupture indicate the place occupied in a more general sense. Although he does not follow canonical tendencies, he forges intense bonds with the environment of their epoch. This ability to integrate multiple ascriptions transforms him into an exceptional person and, at the same time, representative of quite generalised historical situations. In fact, his texts have been read with great interest in Latin America, Europe and the United States. Thus, the works of a creator who is theoretically isolated for extra-literary reasons have been published in more than 20 countries.

Considering the factors mentioned, we have decided to situate Gutiérrez in the area of postmodernity. So, in the seventh chapter we demonstrate that many of his attitudes and experiences are related to cultural and ideological processes associated to this current. In order to comply with this objective, we have the theoretical bases which are established in the first four chapters of this work.

In its origin, the postmodern mentality *rereads* previous traditions, a practice which especially affects historical avant-garde. This movement is attractive because it shows two aspects which, are opposed and complement each other at the same time. On the one hand, it defends radical or extreme concepts and, on the other hand, it rejects univocal beliefs so that it acquires considerable versatility. In the second chapter of this thesis we demonstrate that the reinterpretation of avant-garde ideals gives rise to a juvenile *counterculture* which marks the 60s of the XX century. This movement recuperates the paradoxical bases of the avant-garde schools. Above all, it chooses to solve the flaws inherent to bourgeois thinking, manifesting a rebelliousness which can be described as constructive. In this regard, it affirms that the power of the feelings and the imagination will make it possible to create a utopian society. Nevertheless, the counterculture also reveals that it has destructive facets. Its representatives brandish pessimistic attitudes as they consider that they live in a precarious and unjust reality. Precisely for this reason, they carry out acts of violence against the instituted order.

These principles sustain the thinking constructed by the heirs of the modern utopias: hippies, beatniks, rockers and neo-avant-garde. Gutiérrez identifies himself with several of the approaches vindicated by these groups. Like them, he reveres art and grants it a transcendent value, proclaiming, “In my life there are few sacred things Literature is one of these”.² He also assumes another idea representative of counterculture as he believes that, by nature, the creators must adopt a subversive attitude. That is why, he states, “A writer (...) is always (...) against the established power (...). Any writer is a potential critic, he has no other choice”.³

The Cuban also participates in the fatalism which distinguishes the currents which flourished in the 60s. His works prove this fact as they continually present us with *apocalyptic* scenarios. In these cases, the same phenomenon which engendered the pessimistic features of the counterculture materialise: the failure of a *grand tale* whose intransigence gives rise to terrible losses.

In short, Gutiérrez adheres to a trend which is fundamental in postmodernity: the recuperation of the rebellious spirit shown by the historical avant-garde. In this regard, data should be stressed which supports our argumentation. During the 80s and 90s, many Cuban intellectuals took advantage of the avant-garde ideas, using these notions to forge a rebellious, transgressor posture. The very new authors prove this dynamic as, according to Luis Manuel García, they organise a freaky (neo-hippie) culture” based on “drug addiction, sexuality as a hallucinogen, maladjustment, heavy rock and alienation”.⁴

The aspects mentioned by García make it possible to achieve a *modus vivendi* opposed to *normality*. This encourages them taking root in Cuba as they generate means which counteract socialism, oppressive and standardising. The Castro government is based on negative principles which engendered the most inflexible currents of modern thought: totalitarianism and the eagerness to handle univocal truths. That is why, it creates formulas of conduct which oppress the citizen.

Counterculture becomes attractive because it despises these canons and promotes emancipating action. This model uses *easy* resources –music, clothing, extravagant

² Bobes, Marilyn, “Animal literario. Entrevista a Pedro Juan Gutiérrez”. In *La Gaceta de Cuba*, nº 4, Havana, July-August 2004. At

http://www.pedrojuangutierrez.com/Entrevista_ES_La%20gaceta%20de%20Cuba.htm (12/01/20013).

³ Gómez Bravo, Andrés, “Mi escritura es un strip-tease”. In *La Tercera*, Santiago de Chile, April 16, 2002. At <http://tercera.copesa.cl/diario/2002/04/16/16.36.3a.CUL.STRIP.html> (10/07/2013).

⁴ García, Luis Manuel, “Crónica de la inocencia perdida. La cuentística cubana contemporánea”. In *Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana*, nº 1, Madrid, Asociación Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana, 1996, p.125.

habits— in order to give rise to techniques of subjective affirmation. It also advocates hedonism which vindicates the criteria of the imagination. Finally, it exalts the ways of being and thinking which challenge the accepted social conventions. Gutiérrez takes advantage of these utopian proposals, showing his clear eagerness to question the instituted norms and beliefs. On this point, his attitude shows the influence of some typical ideas of postmodernity.

The Cuban understands that each reader extracts intimate learning from his works. In this way, he states, “(...) You alone will strengthen yourself and fill your heart with love and compassion, strength, courage and mercy, because you will know then that it is not worthwhile living like a beast (...). And you have to do it alone because, I regret too tell you, there is nothing outside you: everything is in your interior, light, and darkness”.⁵ These notions can be related with the utopianism characteristic of the counterculture. This movement opposes the *meta-narrations*, which project a generalising look at the real world in order to extol the *little causes*.

As a result of his national context, Gutiérrez values these actions highly. Daily, he verifies the damaging character which the *universalistic* imperatives of socialism acquire. Faced with this, he assumes a moral responsibility which entails two indicative exercises. In the first place, he explores a theme which he knows well: the daily existence of the habaneros. Moreover, when dealing with this matter, he avoids tendentious focusses. He does not contribute judgements nor analyses intended to guide the interpretation of what he narrates; on the contrary, he endeavours that we carry out our own reflections on his texts.

In short, Gutiérrez intends to construct a literature capable of ennobling the individual. However, the evaluation of his objective is conditioned by a fact which interests us as it also damaged neo-avant-garde. In order to influence real life, this movement appropriated *anti-artistic* resources which it obtained from two sources: the urban landscape and mass culture. With this, it intended to create fruitful instruments of change accessible for all. However, the dominant mentality transforms this option into a way to suppress the utopian protections. This involved the cooperation of the commercial

⁵ Gutiérrez, Pedro Juan, “Apuntes sobre literatura de la violencia en América Latina”. Transcription of the conference for the session “Páginas Salvadas” given in Casa de las Américas on October 27 2010. In *La Jiribilla. Revista de cultura cubana*, n° 495, Year IX, Havana, October 30 to November 5 2010. At www.lajiribilla.cu/2010/n495_10/495_19.html (21/03/2013).

sphere, which would absorb revolutionary beliefs and products, eliminating their ideological facets.

The factors summarised give rise to the establishment of a polemic connection between capitalism and the artistic spheres. Generally the economy governs this union privileging its utilitarian directives. Gutiérrez is affected by this problem, which was already catastrophic for the divisive works of the 60s. The *marketing* resources used by the publishing companies distort their intentions; and the public notoriety achieved earns him the rejection of the specialists. In this regard, many deny that it designs *true* ethical and literary proposals.

These last ideas refer to the concept of transvestism analysed in the fourth chapter of this work. With this term, we refer to a circumstance which marks postmodernity: the change which confronts the aesthetic judgement. This fact, arising from the commercialisation of cultural goods, invalidates the metaphysical criteria which served to evaluate art. Additionally, it engenders new formulas of categorisation –*kitsch*, *camp*, mass culture– which progressively become legitimised.

In order to evaluate the situation of Gutiérrez, the aspects explained above should be taken into account. Not in vain does this author display two revealing characteristics as he has significant success and remains apart from the prestigious aesthetics. These peculiarities have conditioned the view of his literature in the academic area. We should point out here that, in order to address the collapse of the standard which establishes the symbolic value, the *enlightened* minorities design defensive strategies. So, they condemn the works which satisfy the majority tastes alleging moral and stylistic reasons.

Gutiérrez has been a victim of the aforementioned practices. For example, some specialists accuse him of two terrible *vices*: profit seeking and the patronage of totalitarianism. These same critics state that he fosters negative clichés concerning Cuba. In addition, many believe that he brings into play perverse and coarse techniques of *kitsch*, using narrative procedures intended to generate trite sensations such as scandal, intrigue or recreation.

However, in this work we endeavour to demonstrate that *plebeian* artistic creations tolerate other readings. In the first place, they reveal a serious transformation of a sociological nature as they define new human groups which do not accept the conventional hierarchies and break with the classicist model. *Kitsch* also exercises tow

beneficial tasks since it protects the citizen from an economic system which abhors creativity and becomes an expressive tool for marginalised groups.

On observing such dynamics, famous modern artists and thinkers vindicated *kitsch*. For them this modality was also attractive because it subverted the classical precepts, mixing a diversity of templates. The *post* imagination strengthens this appreciation of *cheap culture*, which invalidates the traditional artistic canons.

The questions noted enable us to justly value the use of *bad taste* by Gutiérrez. This notion provides him with viewpoints and materials which extend the merits of his literature. Availing himself of components of *kitsch* – melodrama, pornography, sensationalism – he manages to describe neurological facets of Cuban society which remain silenced. In addition, he adopts *vulgar* styles in order to fulfil one of his main intentions: to avoid the artifices which diminish the communicative potential of the language. Finally, he takes advantage of the transgressor condition of *cheap art* as he uses *low* models in order to design innovative aesthetic formulas.

It remains for us to explain the relationship of Gutiérrez with the ideas which are put forward in the third chapter of this thesis. There stress is laid on a basic achievement of postmodernity, the discovery of the negative, grim aspects revealed by its predecessor, which committed serious mistakes due to the violent, unhealthy eagerness to assume an incontestable value. Thus, modernity tended to reject the strange and paradoxical aspects which challenged its convictions. In order to solve this flaw, the new mentality redefines the principles of subject, reason and history.

Gutiérrez assumes the postmodern view of the concepts mentioned. As regards the first, he sustains that personality constitutes a plural and chaotic sum of a variety of ingredients. Moreover, persons who have considerable abnormal and monstrous features acquire a high level of prominence in his works. With this, he acts in favour of persons who are different and marginalised, which violates what is established.

With regard to enlightened rationalism, postmodernity points out that this model avails itself of two unjust resources in order to fit the existing beliefs to its dogmas. Above all, it represses the emotional forces and discards gratuitous pleasures. Moreover, it judges the real by using an intransigent conception of the legitimate-irregular dichotomy. This binomial generates two opposing categories: The *correct* possibilities and the *abominable* cases. Consequently, it leads to numerous forms of life and thought being rejected.

Gutiérrez attributes the flaws mentioned to the Marxist Government installed in Cuba, the offspring of totalitarian rationalism. The author puts forward that this regime, established to ennoble society, acts as a bastion of a dictatorial, suffocating system. Thus, he shows that the revolutionary *theory* materialises in unacceptable *practices*, which are often harmful for human beings. In order to show this situation, he describes the daily existence of the inhabitants of the centre of Havana, marked by terrible ignominies.

As regards modern historiography, the *post* ideas sustain that this discipline creates stories focused on validating the endeavours of their creators. Opposing this, the new mentality proposes making an archaeological reconstruction of voices and episodes denied. Gutiérrez addresses his nuclear theme – the Cuba of the 90s – in accordance with this principle. So, he carries out a revision of the national context which invalidates the ideas established by Castroism. To do so, he forges an *intra-historical dossier* in which he gives an account of realities which are appropriately overlapping. Consequently, he uses the literary area to rectify the gaps in the official *chronicles*.

There is another implication of the judgement made on the meta-narrations which we must pay attention to. Many *post* tendencies affirm that, due to its inflexible condition, modernity causes the linguistic resources to undergo serious deterioration. These resources are intended to legitimise unilateral postulates, therefore, they abandon their principal mission: to facilitate that persons and the world establish a dialogue. Gutiérrez shows that he is influenced by these postmodern notions as he declares that “words must lay bare reality not apply makeup to it”.⁶ In accordance with this belief, the Cuban uses a comprehensible language and avoids creating cryptic or complex discourses which prevent him from describing the real facts as they are.

Through our approximation to the themes summed up, we prove that, in Gutiérrez, several principles of postmodernity come together. However, we also propose to demonstrate that the author holds ideas and attitudes which can be considered to be typical of the Latin American intellectual. In order to achieve this objective, we take the theories put forward in the fifth chapter of this thesis as the reference point. There it may be seen how European culture fashions the diverse phenomena using its cognitive and linguistic tools. This habit directs the forms of colonisation which were implemented in Latin America. Nevertheless, the subcontinent invalidates or damages western doctrines. In a

⁶ Guntín, José Luis, “Las palabras deben desnudar la realidad, no maquillarla”. In *El Castellano. La página del idioma español*: <http://www.elcastellano.org/ns/edicion/ultima/Gutiérrez.html> (07/08/2013).

territory whose newness is unyielding, these dogmas constitute content which violate its primary affiliation. In this respect, the Chronicles of the Indies offer a foundational example.

The aspects explained play a decisive role in the writing proposal designed by Gutiérrez. The author wants to explore a motif –daily life in Cuba– which has clearly anomalous features. In this way, a challenge similar to what was interiorised by the chroniclers of the past is imposed. Thus, he attempts to define events which, owing to their strange and exceptional character, seem to be imaginary. For this reason, he chooses a declarative medium, literature, which follows internal norms of coherence and credibility, transcending the canon established in this regard. This process has a relationship with facts which are evaluated in the fifth chapter. As we explain there, for centuries, certain language constituted a vehicle for definitive certainties. This quality devolved upon the disciplines which, supposedly, organised the world: science, history and politics. However, in time it was seen that these subjects produced virtual simulations, oriented to legitimising the parameters of their administrators.

The cultural break caused by the discovery of Latin America gave an impulse to this change. As it has numerous unusual aspects, the new geography questioned the semantic range of the unreal-possible and certain-false binomials. In this way, they discuss the *universal* ontological premises and prove that the empirical facts admit infinite readings. These circumstances are the reason why the artistic principles of fantasy and creativity obtain the basis required to express *truths*.

When judging the narrative project forged by Gutiérrez, the themes summed up acquire undeniable relevance. In his country, the struggles to capitalise the genuine are extremely virulent. Not in vain, several agents endeavour to institute categorical representations of the state panorama. Concerning this problem, the unequivocal theories implemented by the government become crucial, but the enemies of Marxist management divulge absolutely totalitarian opinions.

In order to combat this situation, the author of *Trilogía...* creates an interpretative model which avoids the doctrinal yokes. This procedure subverts the epistemological rules which are the bases for the more generalised judgements on Cuba. With this, he presents ways of action and existence which do not normally appear in these analyses, circumscribed to ideologised viewpoints. This dynamic pulverises the a priori factors

which regulate totalitarian notions of congruence and authenticity, revealing invisible presences.

The facts mentioned lead to choosing a narrative format whose realism is based on the adoption of flexible and transgressor perspectives. Gutiérrez does not intend to subscribe to institutional axioms nor absorb a canonised literary mould. The realist pattern fascinates him because it investigates the multiple features of the human character aseptically and objectively. In accordance with this principle, he handles a trans-historical resource which, is analysed precisely in the fifth chapter: the grotesque look.

This formula is distinguished by its inclination to generate amendments or rereading of the official precepts and dogmas. It provides visions which take in the subject, neutralising the moral covers which ignore strange and diverse nuances. Gutiérrez avails himself of its mechanisms in order to examine vital, though silenced, instincts of our condition. Specifically, he stresses the vigour and preponderance acquired by the irrational or primary plans. Added to this, the grotesque airs the flaws and shortages of the ideological discourse which is used to explain the Cuban reality. Here lie the foundations of the ethical and social commitment assumed by the narrator: delving into ignominious situations, he denounces the acritical utopianism fostered by socialist rhetoric.

The procedures described bring to mind ideas which assume great importance in postmodernity. This justifies the fact that Gutiérrez has had an excellent acceptance in several metropolitan countries. However, his success involves damage as he has converted it into the subject of intense fictionalisation. So, many critics and readers attribute him with a temperament based on taxonomic assignments which diffuse their real entity. With this reinvention, the Cuban participates in a normal process in Latin America. The eccentric cultures and mediums have inspired artful equivalences and standardisations, gestated by a self-referring ego. These standardising comparisons impose the philosophical rules designed by the West. In relation to this factor, the fifth chapter points out a decisive example: the analysis founded on postmodern categories of facets which distinguish the subcontinent.

The problems described make it possible to evaluate the commercial impact of the “Cycle...” without establishing reasons which put the *blame* on Gutiérrez. The publishing echo does not necessarily mean that his work is intended to please a reader from the *first world*. Rather, here there is an evident change which marks the final years of the XX

century: with the *post* theories, the objections regarding what is distinct are reduced. Nevertheless, the evolution described involves risks as it often materialises the centre-periphery dualism, the generator of an asymmetric exchange. In this way, the other is restricted to the distinctive features which an ethnocentric look manages to see.

In our opinion, Gutiérrez is the victim of the situation mentioned; thus, he is attributed pre-established affiliations, judging him through inexact parallelisms. Those who criticise his renown also confer imperative rank to western paradigms: they take it for granted that this fame constitutes a clear symptom of subordination to the *ruling thought*. In any case, principles originating in the governing geographical areas are in play.

The focuses presented isolate a capital fact: the insertion of the Cuban narrator in the identifying and expressive models forged in Latin America. If we observe this point, we discover that he assumes the physiognomy of the *peripheral intellectual*. This figure, situated in securing contexts, interiorises references which he has not chosen. However, he never carries out exercises of mimesis and servile acquiescence; on the contrary, he designs rereading of the inner workings imposed which channel *his truth*.

The considerations provided refer to the second evaluative criterion which is established in the fifth chapter: the notion of fold. On reviewing this concept, we start from a basic thesis. For centuries, Latin America was seen as an ancillary organism whose gestures reproduced the dictates which were used in Europe. This image situates the true cultural heritage in the former colonising metropolises, which gave rise to a worrying consequence: many Latin American intellectuals adopt a subordinate role and are circumscribed to schemes required to obtain the *blessing* of the transatlantic receivers. Some critics think that Gutiérrez manifests this *syndrome*. Thus, they rule that he plans his work depending on the expectations inherent to the geopolitical domains.

Nevertheless, this idea does not define the authentic criteria used by the author. We believe that, rather than this, his books reveal a process of much importance: the sinking undergone by the absolutizing provisions in the marginal area. We must remember that, by nature, any eccentric area challenges the generalist imperatives. When involved in a dialogue with the inflexible European narratives, Latin America carries out this action. Its originality shows that these stories contain errors, gaps and categorical paradoxes. This diagnosis proves that no form of life or thought is sound. It certifies that all world views engender an open series of disparate pieces.

The concepts explained fracture the Eurocentric discipline, which endeavours to establish hierarchized and uniform *sums*. For this reason, several Latin American artists and thinkers have recourse to these in order to outline their plural identity. The fifth chapter underlines the obvious contributions which, in this regard, were made by Rubén Darío. The inventor of modernism suggested creating perspectives which go beyond the ordering norms and favour the diverse. This approach, which has sustained important creative and philosophical lines, is seen in the conduct of Gutiérrez.

The negation of the standardising principles guides the frame of mind in which his political reality is addressed. The narrator creates oblique, distant looks which fracture the compact messages of the revolutionary system. He traces the concealed levels of the institutional frame, exploring factors which contradict their organic, balanced appearance. In short: he seeks *folds* or *fragments* of the social panorama which challenge the instituted beliefs and verbalise their content.

Furthermore, he flees from the organisational structure which divides the Cuban intellectuals into two factions: sponsors and adversaries of Castroism. In relation to this case, he maintains a posture which strengthens his exceptional rank. He is located in the margins or gaps, rejecting any ascription which might impose fixed roles. Finally, he stresses the captious origin of the centre-periphery binomial. In particular, he challenges the ingenuous stereotypes which are forged by the governing ideas with their univocal differentiations. In this way, he ridicules the legendary attributes which the European imagination adjudicates to the subcontinent.

The options taken into account remind us of several ideas which are analysed in the fifth chapter. There we commented on the theories of Macedonio Fernández, who takes a radical approach: Any epistemological orientation is supported by fallible and adulterated judgements so that it is impossible to know the truth. This notion forces us to renege on the principles on which rationalism is based. However, Macedonio does not intend to generate impotence which might favour avenging resentment and plans; on the contrary, he states that a smile engenders an ideal mechanism for receiving inexplicable facts. Gutiérrez share the beliefs summed up and suggests accepting with humour the breakup of our certainties, which are often destroyed by real experience.

A third category of analysis remains to be reviewed: the principle of transvestism. In order to define this notion, the fifth chapter is based on a theory formulated by Héctor Daniel Dei. According to this thinker, postmodernity constitutes another *grand story*,

which justifies the western criteria and doctrines. Specifically, it guarantees the domination and global validity assumed by the imperatives of capitalism. The new governing ideology disguises its domineering rank through a deceitful operation. It pretends to appreciate the merits of the different world views, but this mechanism serves to conceal acts of absorption. Thus, it *cross-dresses* foreign cultures using languages and templates which accredit the imagination of an ethnocentric ego. Therefore, it creates real and symbolic subterfuges which favour the exercise of imperialism.

The problem described has marked the international reception of Gutiérrez. In many cases, there appears a legendary and sensationalist view of his temperament which fictionalises it. Here there is a factor of transvestism which gives rise to negative consequences: the official stamp of the narrator transformed into a lustful, barbaric artist, invokes terms which update the centre-periphery binomial.

Nevertheless, Gutiérrez does not act as a passive subject of the misrepresentation explained. He plays with the fictions imposed, while he is decided to subvert or redo the parameters which they institute. In this regard, a significant fact arises. The author certifies his publicity image with vehemence which, due to its excessiveness, inspires resentment. The photographs included in the *public testimonies offered*: books, interviews and press news. In the snaps mentioned we can see a man whose expressions and clothes emphasise the attributes of strangeness or marginality. He has tattoos and wears witchcraft necklaces and *kitsch* or miserable clothing.

The iconography described implies a chaos which seems to entail ulterior motives. The Cuban generates hyperbolic versions of an appearance which others have conferred on him. With this gesture he points out that this physiognomy has a theatrical value, linked to fraudulent exaggerations. In other words, he attempts to show the empty origin of beliefs revealing their most literal, caricature projection. Therefore, those who reduce this to a picturesque sketch are mocked.

The questions mentioned could be linked to a theme which is addressed in the fifth chapter: the acts of the poet Delmira Agustini. The Uruguayan is photographed in attitudes and clothing which depict literary icons. She materialises the feminine stereotypes which are vindicated by modernism in order to instil tranquillity, by revealing a recognisable aspect. Therefore, she creates *optical references* which favour her entry into a medium –writing– which belongs to males. In this way, a voice is heard which violates the conventions. Giving or taking some logical differences, Gutiérrez has a

similar determination. In appearance, he complies with the rules dictated by an ethnocentric system; but, using this ruse, he infiltrates gregarious circles and shakes their supporting pillars.

The game analysed engenders rereading of the roles and *masks* imposed by the official mentality. With this, he makes it possible for the registration of regulations to include ground breaking ideas. Following this line of thinking, Gutiérrez endeavours that a spurious invention confirms his basic tendency: the handling of a vital and literary credo which flees from the summons made by institutions. For this reason, he increases his reputation as an outcast and born survivor which many attribute to him.

To finish off, transvestism expresses very relevant philosophical convictions. The Cuban narrator uses simulations to describe his true, plural and dynamic ontology. In this regard, he again takes up a lifestyle which several modern Latin American writers assumed: dandyism. As we saw in the fifth chapter, this formula makes it possible to brandish an identity which produces transgressor hybrids. At the same time, it shows that deceit and pretence implement the ideal framework for revealing revolutionary certainties. Loyal to these principles, Gutiérrez achieves that the conduct of the dandy and the transvestite project his originality.

Finally, in the seventh chapter of this thesis, we analyse the prose of the Cuban, which is based on the mixture of very diverse artistic and intellectual models. Taking this circumstance into account, we endeavour to prove that it has important links with the three galaxies of authors who are studied in the sixth chapter. In order to carry out this task, we base our work on three of his works: a book of stories, *Trilogía sucia de La Habana* (1998) and two novels, *El Rey de La Habana* (1999) and *Animal Tropical* (2000).

In short, this work aspires to propose theoretical and methodological formulas which make it possible to study diverse cultural and literary within broad frameworks, where opposing perspectives converge: historicist and trans-historical, interdisciplinary and those based on the specific nature of each fact addressed. However, we also wish to demonstrate that all the ideas put forward in our analysis can be transferred to a single, specific example. For this reason, in the seventh chapter we carry out an in-depth examination of the case of the Cuban writer Pedro Juan Gutiérrez. This author is ideal in order to comply with the objective which we have just mentioned as he systematically rejects being categorised. Thus, the flexible and multi-purpose concepts which are dealt with in this thesis are suitable for explaining his literature and for defining his personality.

Conclusion.

Holy diver / you've been down too long in the midnight sea. / (...) Ride the tiger. / You can see his stripes but you know he's clean. / (...) Between the velvet lies / there's a truth that's hard as steel. / (...) Jump the tiger. / You can feel his heart but you know he's mean. / Some light can never be seen.

Ronnie James Dio, "Holy diver".

In 1999, Fernando Iwasaki published a review of *El Rey...* in which he stated the following:

One laughs with the novel of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez because it has a relaxed and stubborn tone; but the literary substance is minimal. The story is not transgressor. (...) What Gutiérrez represents has more sociological than artistic value and his novel is adapted to more political than literary readings. I again say that the story is entertaining and is read with a smile, but I have not been able to pick up a single line just like someone would pick up a gold coin if he saw it shining on the ground. The novels which are read that way are condemned to oblivion.⁷

The Peruvian author suggests that the work written by Gutiérrez lacks the qualities required to be incorporated into the literary canon. His opinion cannot be considered to be strange or exceptional as the man from the centre of Havana has continually had to face up to these kinds of negative judgements. As we have verified in this work, numerous critics have cast doubt on the quality of his literature, when they have not attributed perverse or objectionable intentions to it. Thus, they have defined him as a seller of shoddy, pornographic texts where the dramas of Cuban society become morbid entertainment intended for consumption by the *frivolous* European reader.

Therefore, there is a certain tendency to think that Gutiérrez is a second rate narrator, who does not deserve the consideration of experts in literature. In addition, in this thesis we have demonstrated that his condition as a marginal figure is accentuated by another two important factors: the dissemination of simplistic clichés about his narrative, presented as a mere copy of North American dirty realism, and the resistance of the writer to openly declare himself to be a supporter or an enemy of Castroism.

We have also verified that Gutiérrez never has recourse to strategies which would enable him to be granted greater legitimacy as an author. For example, he states that his

⁷ Iwasaki, Fernando, "El rey de La Habana. Pedro Juan Gutiérrez". In *El Cultural*, October 3, 1999. At http://www.elcultural.es/version_papel/LETRAS/14576/EL_rey_de_la_Habana (23/08/2014).

writing does not bear any relation with artistic models which enjoy sound prestige in Cuba. Furthermore, he prefers to vindicate narrators of his country who occupy a, eccentric position both in society and in the national literary field. This is the case of Carlos Montenegro and Guillermo Rosales, two *strange* persons who, through their works and lifestyles, challenged all the accepted conventions. As if this were not enough, he also rejects being described as a *Latin American writer*, alleging that he has never managed to feel close to the narrative traditions considered to be typical of the subcontinent.

In the light of all the circumstances described, he seems to be heading towards being left outside the literary canons. However, here we have endeavoured to demonstrate that his attitudes and his way of writing perfectly fit into the environment of recent Latin American narrative. In order to comply with this objective, in the sixth chapter we have approached several narrators of the subcontinent who have carried out their activity in recent decades; then in the seventh chapter we have noted that Gutiérrez and these writers share essential features. In this way, we have discovered that all of them adopt the identity of the *outsider*, always situating themselves on the edges of any artistic or sociocultural pattern which has become institutionalised. In addition, we have confirmed that they never assume closed or unilateral affiliations as they affirm that their literature and personalities are based on the mixture of very diverse elements.

The analysis of the questions summed up has led us to conclude that these authors grant a new meaning to the adjective *canonical*. Thus, we have observed that they become emblematic figures owing to their eagerness not to represent any specific model. Taking this reality into account, we have understood that, in order to define their values, we must create broad frameworks of study, within which diverse facts and concepts are placed in relation. In accordance with this principle, we have addressed several complementary tasks.

Above all, we have attempted to prove that Gutiérrez and the narrators studied in the sixth chapter can be seen as paradigmatic representatives of their epoch. When corroborating this idea, we have taken into account that they chose not to be identified with any cultural or ideological movement which shows that it has limited characteristics. For this reason, we have decided to situate them in the context of postmodernity, understood as a polyhedric phenomenon which gives rise to diverse forms of life and thought. In order to carry out this operation, we have the theoretical bases which were established in the first four chapters of this work.

There we endeavour to demonstrate that the term *postmodernity* has broad and diverse meanings as it refers to a historical time marked by decisive changes which especially influenced the environments of western civilisation. In order to confirm this postulate, we analyse a series of very diverse artistic and ideological facts and movements which can be described as postmodern: the countercultural tendencies which developed in the 60s of the XX century, whose manifestations include from *pop* art to mass musical genres such as *rock* and social phenomena such as the student riots of 68; the architectonic currents which appear in the 70s as a reaction to the principles instituted by the Bauhaus; the theories propounded by philosophers such as Foucault, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Deleuze, Guattari, Barthes and Derrida, which led to a rethinking of concepts involving identity, reason, language and history; and the crisis originating in the appearance of mass produced symbolic goods which force a questioning of the traditional conception of the aesthetic value.

Simultaneously, we wished to propose a specific way to interpret the bonds forged by postmodernity with modern thought. Thus, we have argued that these bonds must not be explained through the concept of acritical mimesis nor by invoking the idea of an absolute break as its nature is based on the notions of rereading, fold and transvestism. These three categories of analysis have served to show how the postmodern *episteme* extends, criticises and redefines the fundamental principles of modernity.

The objectives which we have just summed up have obliged us to address a large number of themes and to use an extensive bibliography for support. Nevertheless, we consider that, in this way, we have managed to prove that the Latin American authors studied here fit into the context of postmodernity. On showing that this movement has a polyhedric lack, we have confirmed that it is ideal for embracing writers who insist on rejecting univocal affiliations within its framework. Therefore, in the first four chapters of this work we have established theoretical keys which have subsequently helped us to understand how these narrators create and think.

We have also carried out an in-depth examination of the relationship which Gutiérrez has with postmodern values. In this way, we have discovered that he shares two significant features with the promoters of countercultural tendencies who were studied in the second chapter. Like them, he believes that art can be transformed into a revolutionary tool, capable of improving society and ennobling the individual. However, he also thinks that his moral responsibility as a writer consists of taking an interest in facts which

directly affect him. For this reason, he creates a literature which, above all, aspires to being constituted in a testimony of the daily difficulties and concerns which his neighbours face. On this point, he again aligns himself with the young emissaries of counterculture, who already advocated the defence of *petty causes*. Thus, Gutiérrez and these young rebellious people coincide in their eagerness to achieve the grand objective which was imposed by the avant-garde schools: to forge artistic works focused on dealing with the problems suffered by normal people. To do this, both carry out rereading of the avant-garde techniques and ideas in order to achieve that these become more *democratic*.

We have also confirmed that Gutiérrez carries out an exercise which is typical of the postmodernity which was analysed in the third chapter: the criticism of the grand stories. In this regard, we have confirmed that the Cuban seems to agree with the approaches sustained by thinkers such as Foucault, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Deleuze, Guattari, Barthes and Derrida, as his works question the modern notions of reason, identity, language and history. Nonetheless, we have also observed that the author prefers to aim his negative evaluation of the unilateral ideological principles against on target in particular. Thus, his texts are concentrated on revealing the errors committed by Castroism. Consequently, he shows the sombre folds or corners of a grand story which, owing to its authoritarian and inflexible character, has led to serious material and symbolic damage in Cuba.

To finish, we have spoken of the posture adopted by Gutiérrez faced with *kitsch*, a category which was examined in the fourth chapter. On this point, we have seen how he appreciates a quality of *bad art* which has been explained here through the concept of transvestism. The transvestite assumes features of a sexual type which does not correspond to him in biological terms, with which he challenges strongly rooted social patterns and invents new forms of being a man or a woman. Likewise, *kitsch* uses procedures considered to be exclusive of *genuine art* but, it is often not limited to copying these formulas, but puts forward a creative reinterpretation of these. For this reason, the mass produced cultural goods forge unpublished ways to produce aesthetic effects and content. Gutiérrez values the capacity of these objects to subvert the most traditional artistic canons; thus, like many creators of his epoch, he decides to use in his works themes and resources linked to mass culture. These circumstances enable us to define him as a representative of *camp* sensibility, studied in the fourth chapter.

We have also taken into account that his literature has two features inherent to *kitsch* products: he has notable commercial success and, in the first instance, he is accessible and easy to understand by the large majority of readers. Due to this situation, the most *purist* of the literary critics have declared that their texts do not have true artistic quality. This fact shows that, in order to recognise the merits of the Cuban author, we must have resort to the unprejudiced views of the aesthetic value which are consecrated during the period in which he writes.

Through the approach to the themes summed up, we have proved that two characteristic principles of postmodernity can be found: rejection of the ideological and sociocultural precepts which are based on dogmatic beliefs and interest in the categories and entities which, due to their rarity, have a marginal condition. Moreover, the confirmation of this reality has served to discover that the narrator fits into his national context. Thus we have observed that his way of thinking is related to essential processes which have taken place in the Cuban literary field during recent decades. Precisely these dynamics have been fostered by postmodern ideas, whose influence has determined that Gutiérrez and several cotemporary narrators coincide in dealing with the same themes and in using similar aesthetic resources.

We have also tried to show how some of the most significant attitudes and conducts assumed by Gutiérrez and the narrators studied in the sixth chapter have a clear Latin American affiliation. In order to verify this hypothesis, we have used the theoretical bases highlighted in the fifth chapter. There we focus on explaining how, from the colonial epoch until the present time, the *New World* has been distinguished for its capacity to renew the pillars of European thought. The cultures of the subcontinent have not been constituted as acritical receivers of western schemes; on the contrary, they have chosen to amend or redefine these patterns, adding new, transgressor facets to them. Through these exercises they have achieved that the frequently unilateral metropolitan patterns and notions become flexible or polysemic. This is why, in Latin America the heterodox versions of what is considered to be standard end up acquiring a canonical sense.

In order to exemplify the ideas summed up, we speak of a human type who finds his natural habitat in Latin America: the peripheral intellectual. This figure, who belongs to subordinate spaces, must bear in mind the paradigms imposed on him from the outside. However, he never adopts these models in a passive way as he submits them to several operations. In the first place, he proposes original interpretations and creative rereading

of the templates which forge the ethnocentric subjects in order to achieve that these adapt to their historical circumstances. He also criticises the European way of understanding and organising the world taking what he sees around him as a reference. With this he questions the validity of a world view insisting on endeavouring that the empirical phenomena adjust to a pre-established, immovable order. Starting from here, he focusses his efforts on proving that reality is seen to be chaotic, fragmentary and full of folds or hidden corners. Finally, the peripheral intellectual can assume the fictitious and stereotyped features attributed to him by the dominant culture with a subversive intention, achieving that these characteristics acquire new implications. Through this resource, he achieves that a spurious image defines his true identity. Therefore, it can be stated that his actions are equivalent to an exercise of transvestism.

In the fifth chapter we saw how the recently described tactics were adopted by Latin American writers who belonged to very different epochs and places, from the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega to Macedonio Fernández, and including Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Rubén Darío and Delmira Agustini. Taking this circumstance into account, we conclude that we are dealing with forms of being and acting which are especially appreciated by the authors of the subcontinent. We also argue that the important role played by these formulas in Latin America justifies that postmodernity fits in there. This thought questions western discourse which is based on dogmatic and inflexible beliefs; thus, it can naturally fit into a territory which has always challenged Eurocentric values.

All these ideas have been applied to the narrators studied in the sixth and seventh chapters of this work. So, we have confirmed that these authors use the strategies presented in the fifth chapter as distinctive of the peripheral intellectual. In this way, it has been verified that the rereading, fold and transvestism terms not only make it possible to explain his links with postmodernity, but they are also ideal for demonstrating that they make some principles which have marked the personality of many Latin American artists their own.

The theoretical bases established in the first five chapters of this thesis have served as a basis for proposing a specific way to explain and define some of the routes followed by recent Latin American narratives. We have addressed this objective in the sixth chapter, where we have studied ten narrators of different nationalities who write their works in different stages of an extensive chronological period, between the 60s of the XX century and the first years of the new millennium: Gonzalo Celorio, Roberto Bolaño,

Óscar Malca, Fernando Vallejo, Severo Sarduy, Reinaldo Arenas, Luis Rafael Sánchez, Néstor Perlongher, Pedro Lemebel and Manuel Puig.

All these authors share a fundamental characteristic as none of them wishes to be ascribed to limited artistic and ideological currents. However, this does not prevent them from designing similar writing proposals which, together, shape some of the fundamental routes along which recent Latin American narrative travels. Taking this situation into account, we have attempted to demonstrate that the authors studied form three literary galaxies, each one of which spins round a specific category: realism, baroque and *kitsch*.

The idea of literary galaxy refers to a group of authors who have in common the fact that they avail themselves of an aesthetic formula provided with the flexibility required to become an object with multiple uses and interpretations. Therefore, in the sixth chapter we need to prove that realism, the baroque and *kitsch* possess this multi-purpose condition. This is why we use the three grand notions which have been constituted in the cohesive axes of this thesis: rereading, fold and transvestism. The first of these terms is associated to realism, an artistic pattern which, throughout time, has been changing unceasingly in order to adapt to the human way of life and thought which prevails in each historical epoch.

However, we also see that this model has timeless variants, capable of functioning in different places and epochs. These trans-historical versions can be adapted to a particular context, but always conserving their essential purpose, which consists of dealing with realities and problems which are always operative. In the sixth chapter we analyse one of these modalities, what Alfonso Sastre called *sunken or deep realism*, which pays attention to marginal facts and types, condemned by the prevailing socio-political order to lack a visible or legitimate status. In addition, we carefully examine one of the most emblematic expressions which this system has known: the grotesque.

We have also endeavoured to demonstrate that, throughout its history, the Latin American narratives have granted much importance to realism. The writers of the subcontinent have used this model frequently in their works in order to address the characteristic realities of the *New World*, understood as enigmas to be resolved. In this sense, the realist techniques have enabled them to discover and interpret facts representative of their geographical and cultural environments. Many of them have also resorted to these formulas in order to solve a typical problem of Latin America, where there are numerous entities which have been silenced owing to their anti-conventional

features. The realist vocation of these authors has become an eagerness to achieve that these strange, different beings acquire visibility in their literature. Considering what has been said, we have argued that, in the field of Latin American narrative, realism is not presented as a specific literary current, but as a method for appropriation used by the writers in order to transfer their reality to the text and, in this framework, to propose different views of the same.

After confirming that realism offers a wide variety of possibilities, we have shown how four Latin American narrators –Gonzalo Celorio, Roberto Bolaño, Óscar Malca and Fernando Vallejo– form a galaxy whose centre is occupied by this category. Thus, we have verified that these authors provide form to a realist aesthetic centred on analysing and describing phenomena which, in accordance with the theories put forward by Julia Kristeva, present an abject character. In order to corroborate this idea, we have explained how they address four motifs which play fundamental roles in their texts: urban spaces, the figure of the young person, the figure of the *intellectual lumpen* and the theme of violence.

This analysis has served to demonstrate that, when writing their works, Celorio, Bolaño, Malca and Vallejo take into consideration the two most fruitful qualities possessed by realism. Above all, they take advantage of the flexibility of this model, which can support the adaptations and rereading required to be converted into the vehicle expressive of precise historical realities. Furthermore, they take advantage of their trans-historical values as they assume the principles and objectives which distinguish *deep realism*.

In order to enter the Baroque, we have had recourse to the concept of fold which, according to Gilles Deleuze, defines better than any other the mentality of the XVII century. This notion refers to a new method of knowledge which implies going in-depth into something already given in order to discover its interstices and hidden facets. In this regard, the baroque individual is characterised by bringing to light numerous facets of western thought which had remained in silence. This action made it possible to refute the beliefs which were considered to be immovable and to confer prominence to strange beings and phenomena, which had not achieved sufficient visibility. Owing to these two facts, the historical Baroque could fit naturally into the Latin American colonies. Considering this circumstance, in the sixth chapter we analyse the Baroque of the Indies, paying special attention to the manifestations of this movement which were stressed due

to their capacity to transgress the Eurocentric norms and express the strange and the marginal.

We have also confirmed that, due also to his capacity to challenge the conventions instituted, some rhetorical ideas and strategies linked to the Baroque have taken on a trans-historical meaning. In particular, we see that many artists have recuperated these formulas so as to show their dissident and rebellious vocation through them. We also confirm that the view of the baroque as a timeless model has become a key point in Latin America thanks to Alejo Carpentier and José Lezama Lima, who postulated that the imagination and expressive resources of the XVII century were ideal for describing the identity of the subcontinent.

Once these theoretical bases were established, we studied three Caribbean narrators –Severo Sarduy, Reinaldo Arenas and Luis Rafael Sánchez– and two from the Southern Cone –Néstor Perlongher and Pedro Lemebel– who, in the field of recent Latin American narrative, form a literary galaxy whose centre is occupied by the baroque. With this analysis, we have attempted to prove that the authors mentioned emphasise certain questions which Lezama and Carpentier omitted when formulating their theories on Latin American neo-baroque.

According to these last two writers, the baroque nature of the *New World* was due to its aptitude for engendering extraordinary and marvellous realities, which que dazzled Europeans. Influenced by postmodern ideas, Sarduy, Arenas, Sánchez, Perlongher and Lemebel put forward an alternative view to this one. They postulate that the *baroque style* of Latin America also resides in phenomena which, owing to their strangeness, have a sombre, marginal condition. In accordance with this idea, they recover those techniques and images proper to the XVII century, which are characterised by placing what is considered to be abject, deformed and abnormal in a central position. This recourse serves to address three fundamental themes, which we will speak of in the sixth chapter: the city, the national stories and the body.

Finally, we have attempted to determine which functions are assumed by *kitsch* in the works of some of the Latin American writers who have become known in recent decades. Here we were confronted by a category whose use in the area of cultural and literary studies goes back to recent times; therefore, it does not have the weight nor the tradition of realism or baroque. Notwithstanding this, we have confirmed that, throughout the last two centuries, mass culture has acquired more and more importance in Latin

America, where social, political and economic factors of much relevance have been involved. The confirmation of these facts has enabled us to trace the historical context in which the writing proposals designed by the authors of the subcontinent who incorporate *kitsch* to their narratives take on meaning.

Once this objective was fulfilled, we have studied four authors who are outstanding owing to their use of motifs and rhetorical strategies from *cheap art*: Severo Sarduy, Pedro Lemebel, Luis Rafael Sánchez and Manuel Puig. These narrators are distinguished for rejecting the conventional ideas on aesthetic value as they do not wish to create written works where only the prestigious codes and models fit. In this way, all these show that they can create meritorious work using themes and resources linked to mass culture, which has played an important role in their *symbolic education*. This is why we have stated that they become *arbiters of taste*; that is to say, authors able to establish their own concepts of artistic quality. We have also observed that, on taking advantage of mass produced art, these narrators keep a feature which Latin American literatures have shown since their origins alive: the tendency to create heterodox, non-hierarchized mixtures aesthetic formulas which, according to the most traditional canons, have different levels of prestige.

Moreover, we have verified that these authors appreciate the links which *kitsch* establishes with transvestism. The transvestite can overcome the idea of simulation in order to offer a new view of sexual identities when he transforms the disguise in which he defines his authentic ego. Likewise, there is a *kitsch* which knows its capacity to carry out subversive and innovative actions. This modality, which we have termed *metakitsch*, is no longer presented as a coarse copy of *true art* as there is an awareness that it has two intrinsic qualities and always endeavours to get the most out of these. It knows that it has the option to show significant aspects of the social environment in which it is forged and to contravene some of the ideological principles which prevail in this area. It also recognises that it is in an ideal position to challenge the conventional artistic norms; it does not have to comply with these. Therefore, it takes advantage of this circumstance in order to forge unpublished or heterodox ways to produce aesthetic effects and content. Precisely in the sixth chapter, we see how Puig, Sarduy, Sánchez and Lemebel have recourse to this *kitsch* aware of its transgressor facets for renovating the mechanisms of two currents which have played a fundamental role in the history of literature: realism and avant-garde.

In the seventh chapter all the ideas which we have gone over have served as support for the study of the narrative of Gutiérrez, and special attention has been given to three of his works: *Trilogía sucia de La Habana*, *El Rey de La Habana* and *Animal Tropical*. This analysis has led us to conclude that his writing is based on a combination of ingredients which are both diverse and different from each other. So that this mixture might function, the author uses multi-purpose aesthetic models, which admit multiple uses and do not impose strict patterns. In this way, a literature is forged in which elements from realism, baroque and *kitsch* converge. As a result, we have tried to explain how advantage is taken of the numerous possibilities offered by these categories, examined in depth in the sixth chapter.

In the first place, we have shown that Gutiérrez avails himself of the two essential facets which distinguish realism. On the one hand, he knows that this artistic current has been changing throughout time in order to express the beliefs about the real world which prevailed in each historical period. To do so, his works contain the three main variants which have generated this process: natural realism, ascribed to philosophical postulates whose origins are in classical Greece; critical realism, linked to modern thought and, in particular, to the grand novelistic tradition of the XIX century; and integral realism, characteristic of the postmodern period and based on the findings carried out by post-Newton physics. On the other hand, the narrator takes into account that there are trans-historical versions of realism, capable of addressing problems which have always disturbed the human being. Considering this circumstance, he adopts strategies proper to a timeless expression of the realist code which is analysed in the sixth chapter: the grotesque.

As regards the Baroque, we have found that Gutiérrez also appreciates the trans-historical value which a number of techniques and fundamental ideas for this XVII century movement possess. So, he uses these formulas in order to describe the Havana of the *special period* and to deal with matters which are of special interest to him. When deciding for this *modus operandi*, he is aware of a fact which we insistently refer to in the sixth chapter: the Baroque is present, above all, as a way to see reality and not as a closed catalogue of stylistic patterns. Consequently, the writer takes advantage of the flexibility of a model whose ideological bases can be verbalised through very varied expressive registers. In this way, he achieves that the baroque notions and images take on a form through plain, accessible language.

Finally, we have shown that the Cuban uses *kitsch* in order to carry out two complementary actions. Above all, he observes how certain values and principles disseminated by the cultural industry sponsor important factors which arise in his country during the 90s. That is why he decides to portray this situation in his literature in order to offer more exact and realist analyses of a determined historical context. Gutiérrez also discovers that some typical strategies of *cheap culture* have revolutionary potential as they are not obliged to obey the precepts which prevail in the terrain of *grand art*. This is why in his works he uses resources and motifs from *kitsch* in order to carry out avant-garde and innovative exercises which challenge the traditional literary conventions. With this, he transforms *mass art* into *metakitsch*; that is to say, into a mechanism aware of its capacity to generate aesthetic products which are heterodox and transgressor.

The study of the themes summed up has led us to the conclusion that Gutiérrez forges a *torrent style*, where very diverse elements converge. In accordance with this premise, we have determined that his writing proposal acquires a canonical sense in the area of Latin American literature. Within this field, the authors who have managed to amalgamate, in their work, artistic and intellectual patterns which are diverse and different from each other, have always stood out. Therefore, in the subcontinent the risky mixtures have become an authentic tradition; so, Gutiérrez must be considered to be a purely Latin American writer.

In order to reinforce this argument, we have also proved that the Cuban passes through some of the main routes taken by recent Latin American narratives. Thus, we have shown how, through his use of realism, baroque and *kitsch*, he establishes fundamental links with the three galaxies of authors which were analysed in the sixth chapter. This has enabled us to insist on the paradigmatic revealed in his literature.

In short, I believe I have fulfilled the three basic objectives of this work: to establish the fundamental features which distinguish postmodernity; to study narrators who have appeared in the Latin American literary panorama throughout a period from the 60s of the XX century and the first years of the new millennium; and to make an in-depth examination of the case of the Cuban writer Pedro Juan Gutiérrez. Undoubtedly these are ambitious intentions and, in this sense, I have not wished to take them lightly. This is why I have tried to analyse strictly the questions I have dealt with, to my understanding they deserve an attentive, exhaustive study. So, I have viewed these themes from the greatest number of angles possible and I have endeavoured to have an extensive bibliography at

my disposal which would serve as support when inquiring into these themes. This has meant that I used all the time and the resources at my disposal in order to draft this thesis, which has taken eight years.

I wish to conclude by pointing out that, in my opinion, the fundamental connection between the points addressed in this work is the fact that all of them invite us to rethink the traditional ideas on the canon. For centuries, the cultural and socio-political institutions of the West understood that this functioned as a hierarchized and immovable structure. However, here we have seen how, throughout history, it has been demonstrated that it often adopts the conduct of a spiral. This geometrical figure carries out advancing movements while it turns back on itself. Moreover, it continually moves up and down. Likewise, in the terrain of the artistic and cultural canons, it is not strange that certain formulas considered to be eccentric or anti-norm acquire full legitimacy; and, inversely, it may occur that, with the passage of time, a model pattern may lose its prestige completely. Furthermore, numerous artists and philosophers have made crucial changes and innovations in their respective areas of work based on recuperating techniques or concepts which, supposedly, belonged to the past. Therefore, their *regression* has given rise to incontestable progress.

The postulates explained have constituted the backbone of this thesis; this is why the title refers to these. Therefore, it should be said that, through our successive approximations to several themes, we have tried to determine the true nature of what is canonical. In this regard, it has been verified that grand artistic works and traditions are often not presented as closed, immovable realities ascribed to rigid principles, but as open, multifaceted, which admit multiple uses and interpretations. In addition, we have verified that many aesthetic styles and products branded as unsubstantial can contain valuable facets, so it is worthwhile vindicating these. All these ideas are summed up in the following words of Federico García Lorca, with which I close my presentation:

I understand all poetics; I could speak about them if I did not change my opinion every five minutes. I don't know. Maybe someday I might like bad poetry very much, just as I am crazy about (we are crazy about) bad music today. I will burn the Parthenon during the night and begin to build it again in the morning and never finish it.⁸

⁸ García Lorca, Federico, "Poética". In Diego, Gerardo, *Antología*, Madrid, Signo, 1934, p.423.