

**WORDS INTO IMAGES:
H. SOLÁS' FILM RE-CREATION
OF C. VILLAVERDE'S *CECILIA VALDÉS*
AND THE DEBATE OVER CUBAN
IDENTITY.**

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of The
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To my parents

A ti, mamá, por estar sempre aí e axudarme en todo

A ti, papá, polo mesmo. Aínda que xa non estás, segues connigo

Y a ti, Ivo, que agora también te me has ido. Sin tu ayuda
nunca hubiera terminado esto.

La historia de la nación cubana es en extremo dramática. Cuántos delirios, sacrificios, fracasos ha costado su existencia. Yo digo que somos la Polonia de América. Un pueblo siempre en peligro, consagrado a luchar por una independencia que se le escapa y retorna, en ciclos impuestos por cierto fatalismo geográfico y por los avatares y caprichos de la historia. Y ella, la independencia, se torna justamente en pasión obsesiva. Quizás somos, exactamente, un país tragicómico, porque el componente africano alivia muchos sufrimientos con su legado musical, con su regalo de una religión tan flexible, humana y apropiada para esta tribu de desposeídos que somos. Nuestro sincretismo nos salva de la melancolía, ese sendero hacia el suicidio, y nos torna sonrientes e ineludiblemente esperanzados. Somos además una dicotomía, un árbol de dos ramas: una de ellas está en nuestro Oriente, con su arrebatado de gladiadores y caudillos, anhelantes de desafíos y proezas; la otra, en Occidente, utópicamente a la espera mientras de cobijar una república donde reine la razón y el sereno juicio.

Humberto Solás in Caballero (1999:11)

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the film re-creation that the Cuban filmmaker Humberto Solás made in 1982 of Cuba's nineteenth-century literary classic *Cecilia Valdés* (1882) by Cirilo Villaverde. When analysing a film re-creation, I sustain that not only the differences and similarities between the literary original and its screen transposition must be considered, as most adaptation analyses do, but also the many other texts and elements that influence the creation of both works. Hence, a study of the context of production, reception and distribution of both texts must be carried out. This type of investigation provides a more comprehensive and illuminating understanding of both the novel and the film, in particular, and literature and cinema, in general. Likewise, the role that the two arts play in society and their contribution to the construction of reality is also explored.

I follow this approach in my investigation of Humberto Solás' *Cecilia*. Hence, I first concentrate on the source novel, *Cecilia Valdés*, studying the historical and literary context in which it emerged and then the narrative features of the text. The novel's reception and how it has progressively become a canonised text in Cuban literature is then reviewed, particularly how its main female protagonists, *la mulata* Cecilia Valdés, has come to represent the Cuban nation in the island's social imagery. Among the numerous re-creations that Villaverde's original has generated, in very different artistic mediums, I propose that the *zarzuela* *Cecilia Valdés*, composed by Gonzalo Roig in 1932, has become a key text in the perception of the novel by the general public and the consolidation of Cecilia's myth.

The last part of my analysis focuses on an investigation of the context of production and a textual analysis of Humberto Solás' film in order to elucidate the controversy that *Cecilia* provoked and the oblivion that it has been subjected to by both Cuban audiences and scholarly research.

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List of Frequently Used Abbreviations

CNC	<i>Consejo Nacional de Cultura</i> National Council of Culture
ECIFAR-TV	<i>Sección Filmica de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias</i> Film Unit of the Revolutionary Armed Forces
ICAIC	<i>Instituto Cubano del Arte y la Industria Cinematográficos</i> Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry
ICRT	<i>Instituto Cubano de Radio y Televisión</i> Cuban Institute of Radio and Television
MINCULT	<i>Ministerio de Cultura</i> Ministry of Culture
PCC	<i>Partido Comunista de Cuba</i> Cuban Communist Party
PSP	<i>Partido Socialista Popular</i> Popular Socialist Party
UNEAC	<i>Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba</i> Cuban Union of Writers and Artists
OPP	<i>Órganos del Poder Popular</i> Organs of People's Power

I

Introduction

In 1982, the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (*Instituto Cubano del Arte y la Industria Cinematográficos*, ICAIC) released the motion picture *Cecilia*, directed by Humberto Solás. The film is a free re-creation of a canonised nineteenth-century Cuban text, Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* (1882). A few days after the premiere, an intense and heated attack on Solás' work ensued in the Cuban press. The film was accused of being "un atentado contra el Patrimonio Nacional", due to numerous radical changes that had been introduced with regard to its literary source. In this debate, the policies followed by ICAIC, although often indirectly, were also harshly condemned.

The case of *Cecilia* exemplifies the complex and controversial relationship between cinema and literature that has been going on ever since the birth of the motion picture in 1895. Although making a film based on an existing literary text is a process that has been widely and repeatedly employed in the history of cinema, a film re-creation of a novel usually generates disagreement, particularly if the latter is considered a good piece of literary work. Many viewers and critics feel disappointed by the film, which, they say, does not do justice to its source. Their judgement, however, is frequently based on impressionistic and highly subjective criteria that

mainly centre around the issue of whether or not the film is a faithful rendering of the literary text.

The attack on and vilification of *Cecilia*, however, was not only due to the film's deliberate changes with regard to its literary source. Although it is undeniable that common prejudices against film re-creations played a significant part in the controversy that followed the film's release, the altercation also marked an important new episode in the on-going fight over the control of Cuba's national film industry and over the role that art and the artist should play in a revolutionary society.

The immediate result of the diatribe was the dismissal of ICAIC's head, since its establishment in 1959, Alfredo Guevara. The long-term effects are still being felt today in the silencing that both the film and the whole sequence of events that culminated in Guevara's dismissal have been subjected to and in the scarce scholarly literature that has been published on Cuban cinema.

Hence, although Humberto Solás was soon rehabilitated and produced a new film in 1983 (*Amada*), *Cecilia* has since been either ignored, hastily dismissed or even reviled in film history and criticism both on the island and abroad. The only book-length analysis of Cuban cinema in English, Chanan's seminal *The Cuban Image*, albeit published in 1985, finishes its account in the late 1970s, so that *Cecilia* is obviously not covered. Paranagua (1988, 1990) explains some of the changes that took place after Guevara's dismissal and García Espinosa's inception as new head of ICAIC, but he does not relate them to the affair surrounding *Cecilia*. Likewise, in the debate that ensued in the British journal *Screen* in the late 1990s, after the publication of Oscar Quirós' essay (1996) about the changes that had taken place in 1980s Cuban

films, neither he nor Davies (1999) nor Hess (1999) ever mentioned *Cecilia*, despite the fact that many of the issues under consideration can first be perceived in Solás' film. D'Lugo (1993) and Álvarez (1998/9) discuss the metaphorical use of women as symbols of national identity in Cuban cinema, but neither of them discusses Solás' work, despite the fact that Cecilia Valdés is *the* epitome of *Cubanness* in the different artistic forms on the island. Similarly, although the interpretation of a key historical moment in the development of Cuban consciousness, namely the first half of the nineteenth century, is a main concern both in Villaverde's anti-slavery novel and Solás' re-creation, neither Mraz (1997), who discusses the depiction of slavery in Cuban cinema, nor Barnard (1993), who explores how history has been portrayed in the island's film industry, manages to refer to *Cecilia*. Finally, in their discussion of the representation of blacks and of Afro-Cuban religion in cinema, López (1988) and Martínez Echazábal (1994) also ignore Solás' work, despite the recurrent use of myths of African origin throughout the whole film.

My investigation addresses directly the neglect that Humberto Solás' film has suffered and, in doing so, looks closely at the relationship between Solás' filmic text and Villaverde's literary source. However, as I conceive of literature and cinema as semiotic systems of communication that are integrated into broader systems, i.e. culture and society, I propose a new approach to the study of the filmic re-creation. I believe that an analysis of both works only in terms of their textual differences and similarities, which most adaptation criticism favours, would diminish the richness and complexity of both art forms. Hence, I carry out an investigation into the contexts of production and reception of the novel and the film and discuss the relations that are

established between these contexts and the works. A comparison between the narrative elements of both texts becomes relevant here too. A study of this issue will allow us a better understanding of the functioning of the arts in society, in general, and Cuban society, in particular. Art's contribution to the configuration and construction of reality, including important issues such as national identity, will also be explored. However, before proceeding with my main project, I will first discuss some of the different approaches adopted in adaptation studies and examine some of the key questions that have been debated in order to better understand the numerous issues at stake in the analysis of a filmic re-creation of literary texts, particularly canonised texts such as *Cecilia Valdés*. Hence, my methodological approach will be elaborated and fully explained here.

On Cinema and Literature

In 1923, a collection of essays entitled *Literature and Cinema* was published by the Russian Formalist theoretician Viktor Shklovsky. Since then, the relationship between cinema and literature has been widely studied and discussed, not only by theoreticians but also by film and literary critics and by writers and filmmakers, usually producing divergent, if not opposite conclusions.¹ Some have argued for the absolute separation of the two arts, refuting the validity of any analogy, cross-influence or convergence between them. Thus, when speaking of the silent adaptation

¹ See Ross (1987) for an extensive bibliography on the subject.

of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Virginia Woolf was one of the first writers who discussed what she believed to be an insuperable limitation of cinema:

[T]he alliance is unnatural. Eye and brain are torn asunder ruthlessly as they try vainly to work in couples ... For the brain knows Anna almost entirely by the inside of her mind –her charm, her passion, her despair ... All this, which is accessible to words, and to words alone, the cinema must avoid.²

Despite the advent of the talkies in the 1920s and cinema's ability to then use the spoken word, the idea that some novels at least are un-cinematic has become a truism in film and literary criticism. Woolf's assertion was soon consolidated by the works of film critics such as Arnheim (1957) and Krakauer (1965), who, in their attempt to establish cinema as an Art (with a capital A) and differentiate it from other artistic forms, especially theatre, supported the notion that good films convey their stories primarily through images whereas bad films make extensive use of techniques borrowed from the theatre (i.e. dialogue). The supremacy of the visual over the sound component of the cinematic image has thus become a given in most film criticism.

However, not all studies of cinema and literature have advocated a radical separation of the two arts. Some have focused on the influence that literature has exercised on film. Thus, many critics have looked for literary analogues to the formal sources of cinema, the most famous example being the essay by Sergei Eisenstein (1949) which established Dickens' rendering of simultaneous action as the inspiration for D. W. Griffith's development of cinematic cross-cutting and camera movements.

²As quoted in Griffith (1997:16), who cites Harry M. Geduld (1972): *Authors on film*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 88-90.

Late nineteenth-century writers such as Henry James and Joseph Conrad and their preference for conveying the story by showing how the events unfold rather than telling them, are also a pervasive reference in the quest for literary influences on cinema. This search has gone so far in literary history as suggesting pre-cinematic techniques in Homer and Virgil.³

Other critics, however, reacted almost immediately to this trend by arguing the influence of cinema on literature. Cohen (1979) discusses how the cinematic way of seeing and telling was a determining influence on the development of modernist fiction. In the Latin American context, the influence of cinema on writers such as Manuel Puig, Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Mario Vargas Llosa, not only in content but also in the formal structure of their novels, is well documented.⁴

The approach to the relationship between cinema and literature has therefore been undertaken from different angles and with diverse results. Most analyses underscore the notion that the relationship between the two arts is manifold: there often exist cross-influences, convergences and a dynamic enriching process of exchange between the two.

As regards the different literary genres, cinema was first associated with theatre due to the visual nature of both mediums. With the advent of sound, the association was strengthened and numerous plays were thus adapted. The disastrous results of such practice, however, soon challenged the assumed closeness between film and theatre. The discerning analysis of the differences between the two genres

³ Paul Léglise: *Une oeuvre de pré-cinéma: 'L'Énéide'*, Paris, n.d.

⁴ See Thickstun (1992) for a bibliography on the topic. Thickstun centres her work on the influence of cinema on writers such as Carlos Fuentes, Borges and García Márquez.

carried out by the Hungarian theoretician Béla Balázs showed the analogy to be inappropriate. Oversimplifying Balázs's conclusions, whilst theatre is watched from a fixed, unchanging vantage point and the story unfolds without the necessary mediation of any narrating agent, film on the contrary presupposes an enunciation controlled through editing techniques which constantly vary the angle of vision of the spectator (presentation in theatre vs. enunciation, narration in cinema).

It was precisely the narrative character of film and fiction that soon led to the widespread view that cinema is essentially closer to the novel than to drama: both are forms of storytelling, despite the differences in medium. Strictly speaking, however, as the filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock pointed out,

the nearest art form to the motion picture is, I think, the short story. It's the only form where you ask the audience to sit down and read it in one sitting. (as quoted in Kittrege & Krauzer 1979:1)

Despite the apparent naivety of the comment, the question of the unlimited extension of the novel versus the two to three hour length of the film, has inspired quite a few of the issues debated in adaptation studies. Nonetheless, the important argument here is the shared narrative nature of prose fiction and film, which undoubtedly brings cinema more closely to the novel than to theatre.

A Brief History of Adaptations: Biases and Misconceptions

The most obvious relationship between fiction and cinema is the adaptation of a literary text to film.⁵ The process has been widely employed throughout the history of cinema. Dudley Andrew (1992) estimates that half of the world's commercial films derive from literary originals, all of which, however, are not necessarily respected and revered. If we look at Hollywood, as many as four out of five Academy Award nominations are adaptations (Beja 1979, Brady 1994).

As Ross (1987) observes, drama and fiction were being used as models by early filmmakers struggling to make the flickers tell stories. Thus, as early as 1896 Edison produced the first "adaptation" in American cinema when he excerpted *The Widow Jones*. The other two countries that controlled cinema world markets in the silent era, Italy and France, also turned to literature in their search for material for the screen. In France in 1902 a nouvelle by Émile Zola was adapted in Ferdinans Zecca's film *Les victimes de l'alcoolisme* (Peña-Ardid 1996). In 1908 the company *Société Film d'Art* was set up with the purpose of transposing prestigious literary works to the screen, most of which were dramas, though some were also novels by Hugo, Balzac and Dickens. Italian cinema mainly resorted to historical novels. Thus, Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompei* was adapted in 1908 and Sienkiewicz's *Quo Vadis* in 1912 (Boyum 1985:3-4). For obvious reasons all these adaptations were very limited in their aesthetic merit; cinema was still a very young art which was in

⁵ The opposite process, the novelisation of a film, is becoming increasingly popular nowadays. Many novelists are also writing their novels with the idea of the astronomic figures that Hollywood pays for the screen rights. If the writer has already produced various novels which have become blockbusters, s/he is granted a large sum of money before s/he even starts to shape his/her novel, a practice which, according to Izod (1992), dates back to the 1950s.

the early stages of developing its expressive techniques and building an audience. A reel, the average length of a film at the time, could only run for ten to fifteen minutes and many films were only shown once in the movie-theatres so that the patrons came back for more, which meant that not much time could be devoted to their production. However, as Boyum (1985:4) observes, these adaptations “were greeted with praise, if not for their aesthetic value, at least for their educational potential. (...) [S]uch films were aimed primarily at the lower classes and so were perceived as a promising means of providing these viewers with a share in the *great tradition*”.

If the lower classes massively attended the films shown in the nickelodeons, whether or not originals or adapted from classics or popular literature (the so-called dime novel provided the material for such screen versions), the middle classes were also soon attracted to the movie-theatres, partly due to the respectability that the adaptation of literary classics was conferring to the new medium.⁶ As Izod notes, the filming of classics had a double role:

Firstly it was used as a weapon to resist pressures exerted on the film business by those middle class reformers who held the cinema to be an evil influence on society. In 1908 they had succeeded for a time in closing the cinema of New York, and had generated a fairly successful campaign in favour of censorship. Secondly, as an extension of the strategy directed at reformers, it was hoped that adaptations of “good” literature would do more than reassure the middle classes that cinema was not a dangerous new social disease, and would actually entice them through the turnstiles. Thus, adapting literary classics was part of the industry’s strategy to gain for itself both a clean reputation and new business. (Izod 1992: 96)

⁶ The improvement of the quality of the music accompanying films was another method to attract the middle classes to the cinema. An astounding example is the hire of the Viennese conductor Hugo Riesenfeldt and his one-hundred piece orchestra in the 1910s by the Ritz theatre in New York.

Once the middle classes attended cinema frequently, more and more nineteenth-century novels, which reflected their tastes and values, were brought to the screen. The association between Dickens and early cinema is probably more closely related to the suitability of the appropriation of the content of his novels to film, than to his formal narrative techniques, as Eisenstein claims.

If the issue of respectability is no longer at stake in the adaptation of a novel to film, the commercial factor is still as relevant today as it was in the silent era.⁷ In such an unpredictable industry as cinema, the possibility of reducing the odds and risks when making a film is generously welcomed by producers. Not only has the film-to-be already received an official approval by another “producer” (i.e. the publisher), it also enjoys an audience who has read the novel or heard of it and will flock to the cinema to see the celluloid version.

Although the economic issue is obviously a powerful reason for an adaptation, it is not the only one at play, and it does not have to be the determining one either, as is often suggested. The most apparent motivation might simply be the search for new material for film. The above-mentioned question of “popularising” the classics, making them available to a wider sector of the population, is also mentioned by the German filmmaker Volker Schlöndorff as one of the motives that have drawn him to produce so many adaptations. Schlöndorff, who scripted and directed, among others, the successful versions of Heinrich Böll’s novel *The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum* and Günter Grass’ *The Tin Drum* (1959, film 1979), states that “moving literature out

⁷ At present cinema generally enjoys the same status as literature. Since the appearance of television in the 1950s, which became the new popular culture form of mass entertainment, cinema is even considered elitist.

in the market place is a most worthwhile project, since it reduces the possibility of literature acquiring the aura of a remote, high-culture object” (as quoted in Kilborn 1992:29).

This “democratising” function, however, has been widely criticised by the detractors of adaptations, who frequently discredit the film for not being a faithful rendering of the novel, grossly simplified for the sake of the illiterate and sentimental demands of the cinema audience. Although this has frequently been the case in Hollywood cinema due to its propensity to reduce the narrative to a single line of cause-effect events, an adaptation does not necessarily have to be simpler than its original source. It is likely to be shorter, since the unlimited extension of the novel has to be condensed into a two to three hour film: however, shorter is not equivalent to simpler. Anyway, the fact that the cinematic version might not be as complex as the novel does not have to mean that the film is not as “good”. And we should always remember that an adaptation is normally conceived of first and foremost as a film and it is only afterwards that the question of whether it is based on a pre-existing text comes into play, an issue which, for a wide proportion of the audience and critics, may go unnoticed or is not relevant at all.

Furthermore, even if the adaptation simplifies the novel greatly and might not turn out to be a good film, the latter will never hurt or destroy the former, as much criticism repeatedly states. On the contrary, the film usually provokes the opposite effect, encouraging people to read the original, rather than discouraging them from doing so, in the same way as having read the novel generally leads people to go to see the screen version. Publishing companies’ sales records prove this, as when in 1939

William Wyler's *Wuthering Heights* was released and more copies of the novel were sold that year in the United States than in the entire previous near-century of its existence (Boyum 1985:16). An adaptation may even confer status of best-seller to its source, as in the case of Francis Ford Coppola's version of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1992) or, in the Latin American context, Laura Esquivel's novel, *Como agua para chocolate*, directed by Alfonso Arau (1991). The impact of the adaptation on the sales of the original novel is verified by the now common practice of re-editing the novel at the time of the cinematic release with a still from the film on the front cover and sometimes with the label of "now a major film by ...".

Criticism of adaptations has not solely come from the literary milieu. Many filmmakers and film critics reject them on the grounds of their being a "literary film" ("literary" here used with opprobrium) and not exploiting the specific expressive capabilities of the cinematic medium. The prejudice comes from the conception of cinema as a primarily visual art as opposed to literature as a verbal medium (see the above-mentioned distinction by Arnheim 1957 and Kracauer 1965).

Most of the literature on adaptation theory is permeated to a lesser or greater extent by the prejudices that these issues which I have discussed entail. The first book-length analysis that deals with the adaptation process is George Bluestone's often quoted *Novels Into Film*. Although this study was published in 1957 and the evolution of cinema has been dramatic since then, several of his assertions are still taken as given by many of the critics concerned with adaptations. I will now explain his work in some detail and then go on to comment on it in view of the development in cinema and film theory since the 1960s.

George Bluestone's *Novels Into Film (1957) and Beyond*

Bluestone seeks to study some of the specific characteristics of cinema in relation to the novel "to raise the questions which confront any filmist who attempts the adaptation of a novel to his own medium" (viii). His investigation is based on a close examination of six adaptations, all made in Hollywood in 1935-49.

The issues that the filmmaker must consider when adapting a novel to film, Bluestone says, refer both to formal and thematic requirements, and to mediums and audiences alike. Hence he proceeds to analyse the audience, mode of production and censorship issues concerning both mediums: the novel enjoys a small literate audience, is produced by a single writer and, therefore, is free of rigid censorship; the film is viewed by a mass audience, produced co-operatively under industrial conditions and restricted by a self-imposed Production Code.

He then focuses on the differences between the two art forms and asserts that "between the percept of the visual image and the concept of the mental image lies the root difference between the two media" (1). Cinema, he states, works with images, *photographs of reality*, the novel with words. He treats the novel as a conceptual and discursive form, versus the film, which he considers to be a perceptual and presentational form. This premise leads him to claim that films are unable to portray the interior life of characters, that is, their thoughts, memories, dreams, feelings and conceptual consciousness: "[Cinema] can show us characters thinking, feeling, and speaking, but it cannot show us their thoughts and feelings" (48). He goes on to state that "the novel has three tenses; the film has only one. From this follows almost everything else one can say about time in both media" (48).

Throughout his book, Bluestone repeatedly emphasises that “what the filmmaker adapts is a kind of paraphrase of the novel, —the novel viewed as raw material” (62), and that he treats both works as autonomous. However, he concludes:

What is peculiarly filmic and what is peculiarly novelistic cannot be converted *without destroying an integral part of each*. (...) and that is why the great innovators of the twentieth century, in film and novel both, have had so little to do with each other, have gone their ways alone, always keeping a firm but respectful distance. (63, my emphasis)

Bluestone’s formalism and his concept of the novel as an organic whole in which content and form are inseparable, leads him to infer that an adaptation of a novel is doomed to failure, at least in the case of a good novel. This assumption, first posed by another formalist, Balázs, has since become a truism in film and literary criticism: good literature does not adapt well to cinema and produces bad films; pulp fiction, however, may render a good film.

His analysis is also considerably affected by the mass culture theories prevailing in the 1950s. Mass culture critics saw popular culture as a harmful influence on society: it not only lacked intellectual challenge and stimulation, but by creating its own emotional and sentimental responses, instead of demanding that its audience use their minds, began to define social reality for the mass public (Strinati 1995). Bluestone expresses himself in those terms when criticising the Hollywood *modus operandi*:

What is pernicious is not that the audience accepts, and even believes, the movie myths, but that the industry tries to institutionalise those beliefs to the exclusion of others. (...) Not only does it [the film] influence fashions and

mores, but it threatens to replace reality with illusion outside the movie theatre. (Bluestone 1957:43)

There is no doubt that the ideology with which Hollywood cinema is imbued promotes values that endorse the establishment and existing power relations. But cinema itself as an art or medium is not to blame for that. Despite cinema being an industry and being produced co-operatively, there has always been room for those artists who have challenged the social status quo, even within Hollywood itself. The role of the audience is also misunderstood by Bluestone. The “mass audience” is not a passive flock of consumers easily lured by cinema, who without any critical thought believe anything shown to them on the screen.⁸ Audiences are more active and discriminating than Bluestone gives them credit for, and they often re-interpret and creatively re-work the material of popular culture. Furthermore, as Strinati (1995) indicates, it is perfectly possible to appreciate some forms of popular or mass culture without accepting all of it. Parts of it can be chosen selectively as a result of precise social and cultural factors. Cultural taste is constructed and hence, we need to see audiences as socially and culturally differentiated.

Bluestone would probably have reached very different conclusions in his investigation if he had taken into consideration other cinemas apart from Hollywood. In 1950, in France, Robert Bresson had produced a magnificent adaptation of G. Bernanos' novel *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne*, a diary-novel which in

⁸ The type of audience Bluestone suggests as cinema goes is exemplified by an anecdote of the Gary Cooper Fan Club of San Antonio. He relates that the Fan Club “made a serious and determined effort to nominate their hero vice-president of the United States. Their platform was his perfect adaptation for the job: ‘he doesn’t talk much, said they; he knows what it is all about; and gets things done’. They could cite any number of instances, on the prairies or in the Himalayas” (Bluestone 1957:43).

Bluestone's view would have been impossible to render on the screen due to its being a first-person narration of the interior world of the protagonist. Thus André Bazin's essay, 'In defence of mixed cinema', also from the 1950s, defended the rightfulness and desirability of the practice of adaptations (Bazin 1967). He argued that, although filmmakers should aim at producing good, faithful adaptations, even those films which betray their originals should not be condemned. Spectators who are not acquainted with the literary work, will either be satisfied with the film, which is as good as most, or will want to know the original, with a subsequent gain for literature. As for those who know the novel, the film will not harm in their eyes the literary work's value, however little the filmic version approximates to its source. Cinema itself, as still a young art, will also improve its narrative structures, says Bazin, when confronted with those of the literary work, generally far more complex due to literature's longer existence.

Bluestone's views on the process of adaptation were deeply influenced by the understanding of cinema prevalent at his time: cinema was seen as a medium which reproduced reality transparently, immediately, directly. This belief in cinema as copying the world we perceive is arguably the defining feature of classic film theory. The assumption was further reinforced by Peirce's classification of signs into three

categories: iconic, indexical and symbolic.⁹ It was believed that whilst literature operates with symbols, cinema communicates mainly through iconic and indexical signs. Therefore, the relation between a sign and the object it represents is closer in cinema than in literature, so that one immediately recognises cinematic signs, but needs to decode linguistic. Hence, cinema works by reproducing the real.

Although the formalist and realist schools of classical theory differed on to what extent cinema was a reproduction of reality, both considered that

[C]inema, based as it is in photography, must be judged as in part a mechanical reproduction, whether feeble or convincing. For both approaches the iconic and indexical relation between the film image and the objects it represents entails that a major effect of cinema stands apart from human intervention and resists signification, expression, value. (Easthope 1993:5)

This so-called naturalist fallacy permeated all discussions in film theory until the 1960s, when it was finally surpassed with the rise of semiology and narratology.

⁹ Peirce (1839-1914), considered to be the father of Semiology, when analysing thought and the processes of knowledge and interpretation defined signs as "anything which determines something else (its *interpretant*) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its *object*) in the same way, the interpretant becoming in turn a sign, and so on *ad infinitum*" (Peirce 1901-1905, 2:527). As Hoopes (1991:7) explains, Peirce is here contesting the Lockean idea that meaning is immediately, intuitively known or experienced. Peirce sustains that a sign receives its meaning by being interpreted by a subsequent thought or action: "A stop sign in a street corner, for example, is first perceived as an octagonal shape bearing the letters S-T-O-P. It is only in relation to a subsequent thought – what Peirce called an interpretant- that the sign attains meaning. The meaning lies not in the perception but in the interpretation of the perception as a signal to stop or, better still, in the act of stopping" (Hoopes 1991:7). Peirce distinguished three types of signs: icons, "a sign which would possess the character which renders it significant, even though its object had no existence; such as a lead-pencil streak as representing a geometrical line"; an index, "a sign which would, at once, lose the character which makes it a sign if its object were removed, but would not lose that character if there were no interpretant. Such, for instance, is a piece of mould with a bullet-hole in it as a sign of a shot; for without the shot there would have been no hole; but there is a hole there, whether anybody has the sense to attribute it to a shot or not"; and a symbol, "a sign which would lose the character which renders it a sign if there were no interpretant. Such is any utterance of speech which signifies what it does only by virtue of its being understood to have that signification" (Peirce 1901-1905, 2:527; reprinted in Hoopes 1991:237-8).

Semiology

Semiology was first applied in cinema studies by the Frenchman Christian Metz. His early work was oriented towards answering whether cinema was *langue* (language system) or *langage* (language), reaching the conclusion that it was a *langage* and not a language system for a series of reasons. One of them was cinema's lack of arbitrary linguistic signs. Again, cinema seemed to be reduced to some extent to a mechanical reproduction of reality. Despite the initial failure of his enterprise, Metz managed to change the focus of the discussion on film theory: although there were other factors at work (the old "resemblance to reality"), cinema was now also a coded activity governed by a series of set conventions, some specific to cinema (camera, lighting), others shared with other art forms (characterisation, costumes). Later semiologists went further and completely rejected the notion of cinema as partly reproducing reality. Umberto Eco convincingly argued that images were not a duplicate of reality but owed their existence to the working of cultural codes. Where the others saw reality, Eco saw ideology; cinema was culture, not nature. Anthropological work carried out at the time seemed to support his argument, since some "primitive" tribes were not able to recognise what was shown to them on a screen in their first encounter with cinema. Perception is therefore coded, one needs to be trained to recognise images (Andrew 1984; Stam et al. 1992). Cinema is then a fully coded system of signification, just another type of "writing" which works in similar ways to other systems such as verbal language. As MacCabe (1974) proved in his analysis of Hollywood cinema and the classic nineteenth-century novel, their realist effect is simply an artificial, though conscious, technique sought by their creators. The

experiments of the French New Wave in the 1960s were a good proof of this assertion.

Narratology

Parallel to semiotics, narratology developed and narrative began to be studied as a discourse in its own right, regardless of its manifestation in any particular medium.

As Chatman notes, narrative itself is a deep structure independent of its medium:

[N]arrative is basically a kind of text organisation, and that organisation, that schema, needs to be actualised: in written words, as in stories and novels; in spoken words combined with the movements of actors imitating characters against sets which imitate places, as in plays and films; in drawings; in comic strips; in dance movements, as in narrative ballet and in mime; and even in music, at least in program music of the order of *Till Eulenspiegel* and *Peter and the Wolf*. (Chatman 1992:403)

In other words, narrative is a type of text organisation, if we understand text as “any communication that temporally controls its reception by the audience (...) [the text] requires us to begin at a beginning it chooses (the first page, the opening shots of a film, the overture, the rising curtains) and to follow its temporal unfolding to the end it prescribes” (Chatman 1990:7). What distinguishes narrative from other text-types is its doubly temporal logic. In a piece of narrative there are two times: one external, that is, the time required to read, watch or listen to the narrative; and one internal, namely the time or duration of the sequence of events narrated. Non-narrative text-types such as description and argument lack the internal time progression: “their underlying structures are static or atemporal –synchronic not

diachronic” (Chatman 1990:9). Nonetheless, most novels and films use all text-types at some point in their rendering. That is, although a film or novel might be a narrative text due to their doubly temporal sequence, the narrator is likely to resort to descriptions and arguments throughout the presentation of the text. Vice versa, descriptive and argumentative texts make use of each other and of narrative as well. The text-types thus function at each other’s service.

The development of narratology and semiotics calls for urgent revision of Bluestone’s assertions. The criticism of his views has centred on the issues of time and the portrayal of thought and, hence, the possibility of first-person narration in cinema.

Time

The assumption that film can only speak in the present, whilst fictional narrative has all the tenses at its disposal is convincingly challenged and discarded by Dagle (1980). She asserts that this present-tense doctrine rests on the argument that any visual image isolated from its context necessarily expresses only a present reality. Thus film critics talk about the “timelessness” of the film image. However, the whole argument is untenable when considered in the context of film as a narrative, because:

1. The concept is clearly rooted in the confusion of the two time structures inherent in every narrative: obviously the spectator views the film in the present, in his/her present, but the act of reading a novel also occurs in the present tense of the reader. A totally different matter, however, is what happens

at the level of story-time, the time of the events and characters, which has every tense at its disposal.

2. The notion that the context can be eliminated and the visual image thus becomes timeless is highly problematic. Cinematic narrative unfolds sequentially and thus involves contextual and syntactic relations between its units:

Tense signifiers are recognised as such because they are conventional; they have been established by the intertextual grammar of film and fictional narrative, and yet they can be contradicted as well as reinforced by the syntagmatic relations, the specific grammar, of an individual text. (...) But in other cases the syntagmatic relation between narrative units may constitute the signifier of tense (as in the case of an unsignalled flashback...). (Dagle 1980:50)

3. The definition of film image by those who defend its present-tense quality is faulty for two reasons. Firstly, they do not regard the blurred transition in a flashback or in the rendering of thoughts as film images. The same applies to superimposition or to the other cinematic signifiers used to express temporal changes.

It is not, as Robbe-Grillet claims, a case of two present-tense images interrupted by some sort of non-image which signals the past tense, but rather a case of an image which itself speaks of the past tense. (...) We view the image of the superimposition that introduces the flashback in the present tense, but the image itself signifies both present and past events. (Dagle 1980:49)

The difference with written narrative is that in the latter the signifiers are normally present in the past-tense sequence, the verb marking the past is also in the sequence, whereas in cinema the signifiers which mark the shift of time just introduce the sequence and then they are not present in the film image; the flashback does not contain the signifier but is just bracketed in between the signifiers.

Moreover, Bluestone and a wide sector of film critics equate *film image* with *visual image*, neglecting the importance of sound in film narrative, thus considering sound as a mere reinforcement of the realistic power of the photographic image (as mentioned earlier, the misconception has its grounds in Arnheim and Kracauer's definition of cinema as a visual medium vis-à-vis the verbal nature of theatre). Both Dagle (1980) and Ross (1987), however, indicate several narrative situations which challenge this supremacy of the visual image: sometimes the visual image and the sound do not correspond, as in Welles' *Touch of Evil* (1958), Truffaut's *Two English Girls* (1971) and many other modernist films. A more radical technique is used by Godard in his film *Le gai savoir* (1968). Here, image and sound are not only frequently disjunctive but the visual image is also eliminated for several minutes.

If we consider cinema as a narrative consisting of moving images *and* sound (dialogue, music, etc.), film can obviously use its double register in a number of different ways to indicate temporal shifts. Some will depend on the context, as in non-marked flashbacks (e.g., Sanjinés' *Nación Clandestina*, [1989]). Others include more conventional strategies such as music, dialogue, voice-over technique and the

already mentioned optical devices such as dissolves and blurred transitions from one image to another. As Branigan argues, film and prose are comparable with respect to time rather than tense. Both film and literature acquire temporal reference through “a series of marks none of which is in itself time but to which we apply temporal labels” (Branigan 1984:168).

The disregard for the aural component of cinematic images leads us to consider three issues so often debated not only in adaptation studies but also in film theory in general: the portrayal of the character’s inner world, the point of view and the narration.

Thought, Point of View and Narration

The alleged deficiencies of cinema to deal with thought and conceptual subtleties is still an issue in adaptation analysis. However, several objections can be put forward to such an assumption:

1. The use of dialogue, voice-over, commentary by a narrator and so on, allow cinema to portray thought, memory, dreams and feelings, which are expressible through verbal language. A good example is Louis Malle’s film *My Dinner with André* (1981), in which two New York intellectuals talk about their experiences, their dialogue constituting the whole film. Moreover, both cinematic and written narratives reveal thought in a conventional manner. We are told what is felt or thought, but we are not presented with a direct experience of thought or feelings, which is impossible in any language. Once thoughts are externalised, they are no longer thoughts, but their conventional

expression. The struggle of modern fiction to find a more accurate manner to reproduce the pattern of thought, as in the case of the stream of consciousness, proves this.

2. Another objection is the confusion of narrator and focaliser. The distinction, first put forward by Genette (1972), asserts the necessity of distinguishing between the narrating agent and the agent who perceives as two different entities. They might conflate in some narratives, as in first-person narrations, but even in such cases, the narration is usually retrospective. This means that, for example, although Pip in Dickens' *Great Expectations* is both the narrator and the focaliser, it is the old Pip who narrates but the young Pip who experienced and perceived the events (he is the focaliser), with the subsequent implications for the final meaning of the narrative.

In cinema, the distinction is probably harder to make due to the tendency to identify camera with narrator. Not only Bluestone, but many other later film critics (Monaco 1977, Gianneti 1982, Boyum 1985) define the cinematic narrator in terms of perception, substituting a thinking narrator by a mechanical one, the camera. However, the camera is only the instrument of the narrator. Although cinema does usually present covert narration, i.e. a narrator who does not make himself noticeable and only shows the narrative instead of telling and intruding on it, this does not mean that there is not an agent in the film who is providing us with the information he wants to reveal, at the moment he decides to disclose it and in the manner he wants to show it to us (in a close shot, a close-up, a panoramic view, and so on).

3. The confusion of camera-narrator with the focaliser also leads many film critics to the conclusion that first-person narration in film is impossible. Here the question of film as a perceptual form and literature as a conceptual one, re-emerges. In a first-person narration the focaliser and narrator converge in the same entity, the protagonist. If we equate the camera with the narrator-focaliser, then everything shown on the screen should be viewed from the eyes of the protagonist (or camera), who would never appear physically in the narrative. Robert Montgomery attempted to produce this type of narrative in his film *The Lady in the Lake* (1946), an adaptation of one of Chandler's novels. Montgomery acted as "protagonist" and attached the camera to his body. He is thus never seen in the film apart from some of his reflections in a mirror. The problem is that spectators identify with the other characters who are shown on the screen, not with the "first-person narrator", totally inverting the effect characteristic of this kind of narrative, namely empathy with the protagonist. Griffith (1997:52) correctly argues that Montgomery creates a second-person narrative, not first-person one, by shooting the film so as to put us in the hero's shoes. The camera is thus constantly addressing us, the spectators.

Narrator and focaliser should then be distinguished in every narrative, including the cinematic one. And they should never be equated with the camera either. Within this context, any type of point of view and narration is possible in cinema, as in any other narrative. If we always start the reading of a novel by suspending our disbelief, why do we not believe in an explicit narrator in a film who tells us that he is going to recount his story? Obviously, what we see on the screen, if

we accept the suspension of disbelief that fictional narrative demands, will be his recollections and his version of the story. And the voice-over technique, although the most frequently used, is not the only strategy that the filmmaker has to creatively render a first-person narration. As Chatman, whose comment is applicable to all the questions discussed about cinematic narrative, indicates:

What a medium can do narratively depends very much on what its creator wants it to do, on the genre that he works in, on the kind of conventions she can persuade her audience to accept, and so on. (...) Critics generally fail to distinguish between inadequacies deriving from the medium as such and those deriving from the artistic infelicities of specific filmmakers. (Chatman 1990:163)

The alleged expressive deficiencies of cinema therefore should no longer be an issue in adaptation studies. Each adapted film has to be considered independently and analysed according to the decisions that the filmmaker has taken about the treatment of the subject and how these serve his/her final purpose. This is a key issue in the appreciation of any adaptation.

The Question of Fidelity

The fidelity approach is still a dominant discourse in adaptation theory. Films are often evaluated by the criterion of their faithful rendering of their literary source on the screen. However, as Beja (1979:80) asks: "Should [a film] be *faithful*? Can it be? To what?" Critics usually talk about fidelity to the "letter" and fidelity to the "spirit", the latter considered to be more important and also more difficult to achieve. But, what is the "spirit" of a novel? Tone, rhythm, imagery, the values imbued in the text,

are usually described as contributing to the “spirit” of a literary work. The problem is that they are all intangible text features that also involve the interpretative and perceptive capabilities of the reader. And each reader has a different version, however slight, of any particular novel.

The difficulty in achieving the equivalence of the “spirit” of the novel in its cinematic version has led some critics (Mitry 1971; Barrett, as quoted in Boyum 1985) to deny the possibility of a faithful adaptation due to the differences in cinematic and literary languages. Others, such as Orr (1984), also doubt the capacity of a film to render faithfully the novel. He advocates the inadequacy of the discourse of fidelity not on the grounds of the deficiencies of the cinematic language but because of the different kind of experiences that a reader of a novel and a viewer of a film enjoy:

Thus the basic premise behind the discourse of fidelity is that while a film adaptation and its source are separate texts, one’s experience of the adapted film should be the cinematic equivalent of one’s experience of the literary original. (Orr 1984:72)

Following Scholes (1985, originally published 1982), Orr claims that this equivalence is impossible. Scholes attempts to analyse the issue of narrativity in film, narrativity being understood as “the process by which a perceiver actively constructs a story from the fictional data provided by any narrative medium” (393). He concludes that while the reader’s narrative processes in dealing with written fiction are mainly oriented towards visualisation, in cinematic narrative however, the viewer must supply a more categorial and abstract narrative.

Boyum (1985), however, rightly challenges this view. Although we frequently talk about visually re-creating what we read, the metaphor is somewhat misleading: “[I]t is probably true that most of us in reading don’t really see very much at all. (...) what we get instead is the illusion of seeing, and one that becomes all the stronger when faced with a film adaptation” (51). She notes that what we remember most vividly from our reading experience is the emotions and sensations provoked by the text, rather than the plot or subjects. So, we come to an adaptation with the hope of reliving that past experience, those same feelings, but this wouldn’t even happen were we ourselves to re-read the novel –or see the film again.

Boyum, along with Orr (1984), Sinyard (1986), MacFarlane (1996), and Griffith (1997), stresses that an adaptation is always an interpretation, the interpretation that the filmmaker extracts from the original novel. She then concludes that if the re-symbolisation of the novel on the screen meshes with the re-symbolisation of the viewer, then s/he will be satisfied:

In assessing an adaptation, we are never really comparing book with film, but an interpretation with an interpretation. (...) An adaptation always includes not only a reference to the literary work on which it is based, but also a reading of it –and a reading which will either strike us as persuasive and apt or seems to us reductive, even false. (Boyum 1985:61, 70-1)

Boyum then goes on to assert that despite the fact that all coherent interpretations based on textual analysis are valid, some are more accurate than others. And here, she says, is where we can talk about fidelity to the novel. A faithful adaptation would be the one which interprets the novel in the most “correct” way,

that is, an interpretation “put forward by the interpretative community”, i.e., the academics (77). Her views on this matter seem very much influenced by her literary background, which she herself draws attention to in the preface to her book.

The problem is that many adaptations do not intend to be faithful either to the letter or to the spirit or to the established interpretation of the novel; many deviate intentionally from their source. The question of the fidelity of the film to its original should therefore not be an issue per se in adaptation studies, and less a criterion to evaluate adaptations. What is important is what kind of adaptation is intended. Several typologies have been suggested, depending on the kind of adaptation a film aims to be. Most critics distinguish three modes of adapting a novel, although they refer to them using different terminologies. The division derives from a seventeenth-century literary treatise by John Dryden, in which he proposes that all translations fall into one of three categories: (a) metaphrase, (b) paraphrase and (c) imitation (Boyum 1985: 70).

A) A metaphrase is equivalent to those adaptations that intend to be faithful to their original, so that the novel is reproduced visually with minimal intervention. Wagner (1975) refers to them as *transposition*, Andrew (1992) as *fidelity of transformation*.

B) A paraphrase is those adaptations that, in Klein & Parker’s words, “retain the core of the structure of the narrative while significantly reinterpreting or, in some cases, deconstructing the source text” (Klein & Parker 1981:10). Wagner labels these *commentary* and Andrew *intersection*.

C) An imitation would be free translations of the original text. Thus, the film takes the novel as its raw material, as the point of departure for another work of art. Wagner calls this *analogy*, Andrew *borrowing*.

This classification produces the problem that the boundaries between the different categories proposed are sometimes blurred, especially in those films which are not a faithful adaptation (B and C). However, the important point to make is that not all films based on literary texts aim to reproduce faithfully their source, and sometimes this is explicitly indicated by the film. Thus Fellini's *Fellini Satyricon* (1969) and his *Fellini's Casanova* (1976) state in a very obvious way that the films are the director's work, rather than Petronius' poem or Casanova's memoirs. On the contrary, if a film opens with a shot of the novel's front cover followed by another of its first lines, the expectation that this creates in the audience are obviously different. In a similar way Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* asserts its reliance on the original novel by presenting itself as a version of it, as opposed to the other Dracula films which were based not on Stoker's novel but on a theatre play from the 1920s, itself an adaptation of Stoker's work.

Beyond Fidelity and the "Sacrosanct" Literary Text

The literature reviewed shows that, on a theoretical level, the relationship between cinema and literature has been filled with controversy. In practice, however, it seems that the two art forms have profited extremely well from each other, both on an artistic and commercial level. Most controversies arise because of the different considerations and values that literature and cinema have enjoyed throughout this

century. Prejudices against cinema, due to its popularity and obvious commercial motivation, have led many critics to disregard it as an art and, therefore, to deem it not comparable to literature. Paradoxically, others, in their attempt to establish cinema as an Art, have also negated its relationship with literature

If cinema, considered as a narrative, is capable of expressing whatever its creator wants it to express, then the issue of the different expressive possibilities of cinema and literature should no longer be a quality issue in adaptation analysis. A different question, however, is how successful a director has been in achieving his/her aims and whether they have been achieved in a manner that is artistically satisfying. It is here that a narrative analysis of novel and film becomes relevant; it also allows a better understanding of the narrative strategies of cinema and novel as developed in the works analysed.

Likewise, the importance of the literary original has often been overemphasised, even considered in many pieces of criticism as the sacrosanct text whose "violation" in the film acquires the status of betrayal. But, if cinema, like literature, is worthy of being called art, a film has to be considered as an independent artistic work which should be judged on its own merits, not just in relation to its source. Fidelity should not be a criterion per se in the investigation and evaluation of an adaptation.

Furthermore, from the 1970s, the so-called systemic theories have challenged the privileged position of texts in the analysis of literature that the Deconstruction and the New Criticism schools have advocated. Under the label "systemic theories", different theoretical models and approaches are included such as Iouri Lotman's

Semiotic of Culture, Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture, Siegfried J. Schmidt's Empiric Theory of Literature and Itamar Even-Zohar's (Poly)system Theory. Their common denominator is their understanding of literature as a socio-cultural dynamic semiotic system and a means of communication that is defined functionally, that is, through the relations established between the different interdependent components of the literary system and of these with other socio-cultural systems that literature is in contact with. Cinema is another of the semiotic systems that literature relates to.

Literature and cinema, therefore, are no longer conceived of as just a corpus of texts that have been canonised, but one of the many semiotic systems that are integrated into a broader system, namely culture. The fact that the systems are dynamic means that the relations between their elements are not static but changeable through time and space, which leads to a necessary diachronic perspective when analysing any work of art. Within this framework, not only the text but also the conditions of production, distribution, reception and institutionalisation of the literary and cinematic activity are important when studying literature and cinema both as separate and interrelated systems. In fact, these elements of the system are as important as the text, since it is the interdependence between them all and their relations that makes the system function in a certain way at a particular time.

If we apply this approach to the study of the relations of cinema and literature and, particularly, to adaptations, the privileged position that the literary source text has enjoyed in all criticism has to be questioned. The analysis of a film adaptation or re-creation does not have to focus only on the comparative narrative analysis between both texts. This approach, in fact, ignores the numerous other factors at play in the

literary and cinematic work which, following Jakobson's model of linguistic communication, Even-Zohar (1990) has described as the producer (the author of the text), the consumer (the receptor of the text), the product (the text and the different models of reality that it constructs), the institution (the context that makes of literature and cinema a socio-cultural activity: institutions, scholars, media, critics and so on), the market (all the components, many of them belonging to the institution, involved in the buying and selling of the text) and the repertoire (the laws and elements that govern the production and reception of the text).¹⁰

Hence, the issue that needs to be addressed when dealing with adaptations is neither whether the film is faithful to the novel or not, nor an isolated narrative comparison between the two texts, but rather why a filmmaker consciously uses a literary original and makes a point of doing so in order to create his/her own work of art. The question we need to ask is why a director chose to transpose a particular literary work to film. Within this context, not only the original but also other texts, codes and factors at work both in the film and the novel and their relations are considered. Not doing so would lead to an impoverishment of both art works and of cinema and literature as socio-cultural systems. Therefore, in order to probe into this investigation, I propose that the following issues must be considered:

1. Why an adaptation is produced at a particular time in history.
2. The type of adaptation a film aims to be: a faithful rendering, an interpretation, a transformation, just an inspiration. We must then consider what motivates the

¹⁰ Although Even-Zohar is referring exclusively to the literary system, the description is also, or even more pertinent to cinema, due to its industrial nature and mass appeal.

director to transfer or adapt some elements of the novel and not others, and we must look at those elements that, although already present in the novel, have their function displaced in the cinematic narrative.

3. What prompts the director to add elements not present in the original and how do they interact with the rest. In this context an analysis of the narrative strategies of both novel and film and how they affect the positioning of reader and viewer in the text becomes all important.
4. The situation of the cinema industry and what it implies for the adaptation ("Third World" cinema, questions which arise in a co-production).
5. The audience at whom the film is targeted, an issue that has been widely neglected in adaptation analysis. A study of the audience in terms of its size and its constitution (class, gender, race and other variables) is relevant. This can be partly inferred by a close examination of questions such as the advertisement of a film, the reviews it had in the national press and the social meaning attached to movie-going (reception theory).
6. The adaptation in the context of the director's filmography: what relationship the adaptation has to his/her other films and within his/her career.

The same questions should be explored with regard to the novel and its position in the literary system in order to understand the relations between its different elements and how they affect the cinematic work.

An investigation of this nature and scope not only allows a more complete analysis of the film and of the role the novel plays in its genesis but also a deeper

understanding of the cultural system to which both texts belong. The study of the literary and cinematic systems through an analysis of their different and shared elements and how they interact (author, text, reception, institutions, etc.), as exemplified in the particular case of an adaptation, also contributes to a better understanding of the role that cinema, literature and art in general play in a particular society and how the different artistic forms participate in the construction and re-figuring of reality within that community.

I will follow this approach in my investigation of Cirilo Villaverde's nineteenth-century Cuban classic, *Cecilia Valdés* (1882) and the film re-creation that the filmmaker Humberto Solás carried out in 1980, *Cecilia*. Hence, in Chapter 2 I will briefly explain the historical context in which the so-called anti-slavery narratives arose, among them *Cecilia Valdés*, and the reality that they portray. In Chapter 3 I will concisely review the main questions pertaining to the scholarly discussions about this literature, such as the portrayal of the slave, its intention and the formulation of *Cubanness* that the narratives propose. Chapter 4 will be devoted to a thorough analysis of Villaverde's novel. I will first review those episodes of the writer's life, such as his political involvement and exile in the United States, which conditioned his literary career, and then provide a brief explanation of the different versions that he wrote of *Cecilia Valdés*. My textual analysis will focus on its last version, published in New York in 1882. In Chapter 5 I will look at the reception that the novel has had since its publication in order to understand how it has become a canonised text on the island and how its female protagonist has come to embody *Cubanness*. Different re-creations of the novel

will be briefly explored, with particular attention to Gonzalo Roig's *zarzuela*, a significant text in the consolidation of the protagonist as a symbol of *lo cubano*. Chapter 6 will probe into the complex context of production of *Cecilia*, with particular emphasis on the changes that were taking place within the state film industry and that partly explain the controversy that the film generated after its release in June 1982. Finally, Chapter 7 will concentrate on the whole process of production of *Cecilia*, the attack that the film ensued and its textual analysis, focusing mainly on the major differences with its literary source. This will allow us to understand first the controversy and then the silencing that the film has generated.

The main aim of my investigation will be to provide us with an understanding of why and in what manner Humberto Solás' *Cecilia* is different to Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés*. I will explore the reasons why Humberto Solás consciously departed from Villaverde's original, which refer mainly to, first, the fact that the filmmaker had no intention of faithfully transposing to film a nineteenth-century historical novel imbued with an ideology that he as both an artist and a twentieth-century man did not share; and, second, his intention of providing in his film an analysis and commentary not only on Cuban history but also on contemporary Cuba. Importantly, however, the analysis will show that, in spite of the many differences between Solás' *Cecilia* and Villaverde's literary original, both works share a common goal, namely their contribution to the debate over Cuban identity, on-going since the beginning of the ideological formation of the Cuban nation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Finally, and

in relation to Solás's purpose when making *Cecilia*, I will also examine the reception that his film had in order to reveal what it tells us about contemporary Cuba in general, and the role of arts in a revolutionary society in particular.

II

COLONIAL CUBA: SUGAR, *CRIOLLOS* AND SLAVES

This Chapter provides a brief introduction of the historical reality which gave rise to the anti-slavery narratives, which it is necessary to have in order to fully understand the context of production and intentions of these literary texts, as well as the world they portray. First, the profound structural changes that occurred in Cuban society in the second half of the eighteenth century are succinctly explained, so that the consolidation of the plantation mode of production throughout the nineteenth century on the island can be properly comprehended. Then the consequences of this plantation economy, based on the production of sugar and a black and mulatto enslaved work force, are dealt with. Finally, the emergence of a Cuban consciousness amidst the troublesome colonial situation lived on the island is explained.

The Pre-Plantation Era: Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries

Cuba, discovered by the Spaniards on 28 October 1492, soon became a strategic enclave in the Spanish conquest and colonisation of the Americas due to the island's privileged geographic location. By the 1560s, when colonial rule had

established the fleet system as the shipping method to carry and safeguard American riches and tributes, Havana became the final gathering port for the fleets on their return to Europe. As a consequence, Havana, rather than Cuba, developed as a service-based settlement colony whose interests were harmonious with those of the metropolis, due to a mutual interest in economic profit and social welfare.¹¹

The first settlers, including the small bureaucracy of officials appointed by the colonial administration, came to Cuba, and to the Americas generally, in expectation of becoming rich and gaining a higher social status, even sometimes an entrance to nobility. However, most *peninsulares* (Spanish-born Spaniards), who intended to stay temporarily overseas and return rich to their homelands, never made their way back and their descendants soon became part of the new class of *criollos* (American-born Spaniards), who controlled the local government and administration, cultivated the land and frequently became landowners and merchants. In Cuba, as elsewhere in the empire, a *criollo* oligarchy consisting of a handful of families evolved.

By 1750 Cuba was foremost a trading post. Agriculture was based on small cattle ranches and farms, tobacco being the most profitable crop. Sugar cane, which was widely grown in the non-Hispanic Caribbean colonies and which contributed with its high gain to the emergence of Great Britain as a world power,

¹¹ The other six towns or *villas* founded by the *conquistadores* in the 1520s in Cuba, namely Baracoa, Bayamo, Trinidad, Sancti Spiritus, Puerto Príncipe (today's Camagüey) and Santiago de Cuba, were forced to resort to contraband activities with the neighbouring islands as the only means of survival and development in view of the overwhelming dominance of Havana and their being poorly interconnected and intercommunicated. As Moreno Fraginals (1995:44) points out, "La Habana fue un fenómeno aparte cuya relación con el exterior fue mucho más importante que su conexión con el resto de Cuba. El distanciamiento físico creó además un distanciamiento psicológico entre La Habana y las demás poblaciones de la Isla. Desde el siglo XVI habanero será algo más que un gentilicio: denotará una peculiar manera de ser, un privativo sentido de superioridad social y política."

was not yet intensively produced in the Spanish overseas territories. According to Thomas (1993:2), in the whole island there were only about a hundred small sugar plantations, *ingenios*, mostly close to Havana, due to the prohibitive costs of transport to any other port. They probably produced about 5,000 tons of sugar per year, of which only a tenth was officially exported, partly because there was no large-scale home market in Spain for such a luxury as sugar.

These small-sized sugar plantations required few slaves.¹² According to the Cuban historian Moreno Fragnals (1995:93), in the seventeenth century the average number of slaves working in an *ingenio* was 20-25, with only a few estates exceeding 50. The sugar mills were small rural domestic industries: both agricultural labour and sugar processing were scarcely mechanised and the pace of work was consequently slow. Hence, the living conditions of slaves in Cuba at this time were much better than those of their counterparts in the non-Hispanic colonies, where intensive exploitation of blacks was already commonplace.¹³

It is likely that, whilst Cuba remained a settlement colony, the number of slaves working in urban activities (private houses, shipyards, civil and military construction works and so on) was as high or even higher than in rural areas. Urban slaves usually enjoyed better treatment than those in the countryside, due to a more personal relationship with their masters. Quite a few worked as *esclavos a jornal*, i.e. as "slaves" who hired out their services and whose only obligation

¹² The first blacks who arrived in the Americas were the *ladinos* or assimilated Africans who were living in peninsular Spain. They participated from the very beginning in the process of conquest and colonisation as auxiliaries to the white conquerors. See Santa Cruz Gamarra (1988).

¹³ The patriarchal nature of slavery in Cuba before the consolidation of the plantation economy led some scholars to distinguish between a "benign" and a "malignant" form of slavery, exemplified by the Hispanic and non-Hispanic colonies respectively. The thesis was first put forward by Frank Tannenbaum in the 1940s and provoked heated debates. See, for example, the collection of articles edited by Forner and Genovese (1969). Nowadays the two alleged forms of slavery are generally conceived as two phases in the development of the plantation as mode of production.

towards their masters was to give them periodically a fixed amount of money (Moreno Fraginals 1995:87-8). Many of these "paid slaves" were able to save money and finally buy their freedom. They were sometimes trained as artisans and often managed to set up their own businesses.

Hence, throughout the seventeen and eighteenth centuries Cuba developed a significant population of free blacks and mulattoes. According to Heuman (1997:145), in 1774 freedmen in Cuba accounted for 20 per cent of the total population and 41 per cent of non-whites.¹⁴ This high proportion of free blacks and mulattos within the wider slave society is partly attributed to more flexible laws of manumission in the Hispanic colonies, which made it easier for slaves to purchase their own liberty than, say, on the British sugar islands; and partly to the willingness of the ruling class, on their death beds, to emancipate slaves, especially their illegitimate offspring (Thomas 1993:4).

The free people of colour constituted an important economic sector within Cuban society. Throughout the years they had performed the tasks that whites spurned and thus carried out all manual and mechanical work. By the end of the eighteenth century, most artisan activities, including the most exclusive ones such as music, painting and gold/silversmithing, were realised by blacks, mostly free, but also skilled slaves. Some reached an important economic position, which also provided them with a higher social status. Frequently, they reproduced the codes of behaviour and morals of the white society, some of them even owning slaves.

¹⁴ Heuman (1997) bases his data on the figures given by David W. Cohen and Jack P. Greene in *Neither Slave nor Free: The Freedman of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1972), Appendix: Population Tables, pp 335-9. The total population of Cuba in 1774 was 171,620, of which 96,440 were white, 36,301 freedmen and 38,879 slaves.

Despite their relative integration into the dominating classes, the free coloured population were usually linked to and frequently joined the so-called *cabildos*, Afro-Cuban brotherhoods constituted in the sixteenth century to promote ethnic cohesion.¹⁵ In 1755 the Bishop of Cuba, Pedro Agustín Morell de Santa Cruz, had given the *cabildos* the official recognition of the Roman Catholic Church as a means of facilitating the religious conversion and assimilation of slaves into New World society. The *cabildos*, however, fulfilled an opposite role and became havens for African culture. Both free and slave blacks of similar ancestry enrolled in the *cabildos*, which helped to perpetuate old rivalries between the different ethnic groups, such as the Congo and the Carabalí. The *cabildos* were headed by *capataces*, elected among the most revered members of the Afro-Cuban community. The *capataz* acted as a plenipotentiary to white society, in case any of the *cabildo* members needed any form of assistance (Paquette 1988: 108-9).

Cuban society, therefore, was hierarchically stratified according to both race and class. The racial divisions within society became more rigid by the late eighteenth century, when the island turned into a typical Caribbean plantation society and the black and mulatto sectors of the population saw the limited well-being they had enjoyed being rapidly diminished.

¹⁵ These African brotherhoods were not exclusive to Cuba. They were already present in peninsular Spain in the fifteenth-century, the so-called Negro *cofradías*, and developed in other American societies such as Peru or Brazil (the *irmandades*). See Nicomedes Santa Cruz Gamarra (1988), Fernando Ortiz (1921) and Deschamps Chapeaux (1971)

The Consolidation of the Plantation: Late Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

In the 1760s intensive production of sugar and coffee began in Cuba and large plantations spread throughout the island. Several events and forces, all equally important and frequently interrelated, contributed to this phenomenon, namely the occupation of the city of Havana by the British in 1762-63; the Bourbon reforms, which brought about a trade liberalisation; the revolution in Haiti; and shifts in international market demands. I will briefly refer to these decisive factors in order to highlight the profound changes that were taking place in the Cuban social and economic systems at the end of the eighteenth century so that the context in which the anti-slavery novels developed and the social tensions that they portrayed can be better understood.

The occupation of Havana

The British ruled Havana from July 1762 to June 1763, when the *Treaty of Paris* put an end to the *Seven Years' War* and the city was returned to Spain in exchange for the territories of Florida. The initial suspicion and distrust with which the *habaneros* greeted their new colonial rulers soon dissipated when the latter sagaciously maintained the pre-existing local political and administrative structures and stimulated the locals' economic role. The British abolished old taxes and dismantled the monopolies created by the Spanish administration to regularise the production and commercialisation of Cuban products.¹⁶ Trade was

¹⁶ In 1711 the Spanish administration had established the *Real Factoría de Tabacos* to control the production of tobacco in the island. In 1739 the *Real Compañía de Comercio de La Habana* was created and first granted monopoly rights to commercialise tobacco and later the total production of sugar, woods and leather, as well as the commodities received in return (i.e. slaves). The British suppressed these institutions which by the 1760s had become obsolete and were just an obstacle to economic development (Moreno Friginals 1995:100-101).

liberalised, including the commerce of slaves that was at this moment the most pressing need of the burgeoning saccharocracy. According to Thomas (1993:5), during the year the British directed the government of Havana, about 4,000 slaves were sold there, a figure that was an eighth of the number of slaves at that time on the island. Earlier applications under Spain to expand the import of slaves had been rejected on the grounds that it would be politically risky to have so many *bozales* on the island.¹⁷

Although the changes introduced by the British during the eleven months they occupied Havana were important, it should be born in mind that the British added nothing to what was already simmering on the island before their arrival. The producers from Havana had already initiated the sugar boom by the 1760s, but their production was limited by the rigid trade restrictions imposed by the colonial administration and its inability to cope with and canalise vast amounts of sugar or any other export. Spain lacked both the internal market and the infrastructure needed for a commercialisation of such magnitude, in contrast to Britain, which was able to provide these kinds of export outlets. Therefore, a plantation-based economy and society was already under way in Havana before British domination. Their rule, however, accelerated the process. As Moreno Friginals succinctly explains:

En menos de un año los ingleses rompieron el estatismo productor habanero, introduciendo esclavos, liquidando trabas burocráticas, ampliando abruptamente el mercado comprador de azúcar, mejorando la red de comercialización y aumentando la capacidad de transformación. (Moreno Friginals 1995:136)

¹⁷ The word *bozal* was used to refer to slaves who had just arrived from Africa and therefore had not yet assimilated at all to the Hispanic culture. Once assimilated, they became *ladinos*.

The Bourbon reforms: the liberalisation of the slave trade

The British occupation of Havana was therefore the definitive warning to the Spanish king, Charles III, of the urgent necessity of implementing the administrative reforms that he and his ministers had been contemplating since his inception in 1759. The Bourbon dynasty, which was installed in the Spanish Crown in 1700 with Philip V, brought a new concept of empire: while the Habsburgs had a patriarchal notion of it as a conglomerate of independent realms united by their shared fidelity to the king, the Bourbons conceived of it as a unified realm in which the colonies were subordinated to the interests of the metropolis (Van Oss 1997). The Spanish Crown, ruined after several disastrous administrations and its continuous involvement in unfortunate wars against the British, needed to modernise and regain its position in the world's political arena. The overseas territories and their economic resources were essential to the success of this project. Thus, commerce with the Americas was liberalised, and cities such as Buenos Aires and Havana were soon greatly favoured by these new circumstances. In the case of Havana, Van Oss (1987:12-13) explains that in 1760 only six vessels dealt with all the commercial transactions between Spain and the island. Twenty years later more than two hundred were used, and in 1801 more than a thousand national and foreign ships docked at Havana's harbour. The liberalisation of commerce first within the Spanish empire and by the early 1800s with the involvement of foreign countries and their colonies, is best exemplified in the slave trade, which ascended rapidly in Cuba at the turn of the century.

Cuban property owners had traditionally bought their slaves from the English, French, Dutch and Portuguese companies that had been granted the right by the Spanish government to deliver for sale a fixed number of slaves to the

empire.¹⁸ However, the slaves allowed into the colonies did not satisfy the increasing demand for labour, so a lively and lucrative smuggling activity took place around the Caribbean islands. By the end of the eighteenth century the urge for human cargoes was such that Francisco de Arango y Parreño, a representative of the Cuban planters, petitioned the Spanish administration to free the importation of slaves to Cuba in his *Primer papel sobre el comercio de negros* (1789). The request, which convincingly argued the economic profitability of such a measure for both the Crown and the plantocracy, was granted and the royal decree of 28 February 1789 opened Cuba, Puerto Rico and the province of Caracas to free slave trafficking for a period of two years. The decree rescinded all previous contracts and authorised any resident of Spain or its colonies to participate in the trading of slaves.

The petition of the Cuban planters for freeing the slave trade was related to profound structural changes that were taking place in the agricultural system of the island. The increasing international demand for tropical staples, which emerging European capitalism had created, was the definitive move that led Cuba towards becoming a plantation society. The plantation system was further reinforced on the island by another international event, namely the extension of the French revolution to its Caribbean colony of St. Domingue, which resulted in the creation of the independent republic of Haiti in 1804.

¹⁸ See Santa Cruz Gamarra (1988) and Palmer (1997) for a brief history of the slave trade in the Americas since the sixteenth century.

The Haitian revolution and its impact on Cuba

By 1789 St. Domingue had become the world's principal producer of sugar and coffee to the detriment of British colonies such as Jamaica, which had exhausted their soil at a time when fertilisers were not yet used.¹⁹ However, the outbreak of the revolution, which immediately transformed into a slave war, completely destroyed the colony's economy. As a consequence, the available supply of sugar and coffee quickly plummeted and their price in international markets soared.

Cuban planters immediately realised the benefits they could obtain from the situation in Haiti and, on 24 January 1792, their representative before the Spanish government, again Francisco Arango y Parreño, presented to the government in Madrid his *Discurso sobre la Agricultura de La Habana y medios de fomentarla*. This time, Arango y Parreño not only asked for an extension of free slave trafficking, as he had already done in 1789, but also sought to legitimise the supremacy of sugar and of Havana on the island. As Benítez Rojo (1988:197) explains:

El rol de Arango consistió en manipular este discurso de plantación en términos exclusivos de azúcar; piénsese que podía haberlo hecho en términos de café o en términos de una diversificación agrícola. De esta manera su *Discurso* no es en rigor un discurso, sino un texto que se inserta en un discurso pre-existente de economía de plantación con la finalidad de limitarlo y regularlo. (...) al conocer y sancionar la Corona Española el enfoque restrictivo del texto de Arango, quedaban establecidos los principios para el desarrollo favorable de dos máquinas de poder: la de La Habana y la del azúcar. De esta manera el *Discurso sobre la Agricultura de La Habana y medios de fomentarla* puede leerse como un mito de

¹⁹ As Knight (1970:12) explains, St. Domingue was at this moment the most highly developed plantation society in the world. Located on the western part of the island of Hispaniola, and comprising a total area of only 10,700 square miles, the colony's population of 40,000 white people and 480,000 slaves and free persons of colour had become the ideal of and comparison for every other colony in the area that hoped to become rich by growing sugar cane and coffee. The Cubans reasoned that with four times as much cultivable area as St. Domingue and undoubtedly greater soil fertility, they could easily surpass their neighbour's production. The only hindrance was the acute shortage of slaves, which was now finally being rectified.

fundación que se erige como panoplia o escudo de armas que legitima el ingenio habanero.

Cuba benefited further from the collapse of the Haitian economy, since not only would Cuban sugar fill the vacuum created in the inflated market but also a number of French landowners, fleeing from the revolution, took refuge on the island and brought with them their skills, modern technology, slaves and a large capital to be invested in the new homeland.

Sugar, Slavery and Racial Prejudice

All these circumstances facilitated the emergence of Cuba as the world's principal supplier of sugar: in 1840 it was already the world's biggest producer and by 1860 more than 450,000 tons, or a quarter of the world's sugar, were produced on the island.²⁰ This vertiginous and constant increase was based on an enslaved African workforce, which had to grow continuously in order to maintain the fast rhythm of production.

However, at the same time, slavery as a form of labour organisation was becoming a highly objectionable institution throughout the Western world. First, the Enlightenment and the spread of the egalitarian thought emanating from the French Revolution provided the rationale for ethical considerations in the debate about slavery. Second, the rise of capitalism and its ideal of freedom (i.e. free labour, free markets and free flows of capital) offered an economic framework that rendered slavery an obsolete labour system. The British were at the vanguard of the crusade against slavery, first at home and later abroad. Abolitionists such as

²⁰ See Moreno Fraginals (1978) for complete sugar output in Cuba. For comparative figures with other Caribbean colonies and their production of tropical staples throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Eltis (1997).

Wilberforce and Clarkson began their campaign by attacking the trans-Atlantic slave trade; once the importation of slaves to the Caribbean ceased, they reasoned, the scarcity of labour would first lead to an improvement of Africans' living standards in the plantations and then to a gradual abolition of slavery. In 1807, the slave trade to the British colonies ended after several intense parliamentary discussions and the Emancipation Bill, passed in 1833, put an end to enslaved labour in Great Britain and its colonies.

Throughout the eighteenth century, global abolition of slavery was to become a key issue in British foreign policy. In 1817, Spain gave in to Britain's pressure and signed the *Treaty of Madrid*, which stipulated the abolition of the slave trade within Spanish territories by 1820 in return for 400,000 pounds to be paid as compensation to slave merchants. The treaty also established the right of the Royal Navy to stop ships suspected of slave trafficking and take slavers for trial before a mixed commission (Thomas 1993:11).

However, the official abolition of the slave trade by the Spanish government did not end the importing of human cargoes to its colonies. The legalities were thwarted by corrupt officials and administrators who profited from slave-trafficking and, in the 1830s, slave trading in Cuba reached its peak, when around 125,000 Africans arrived on the island.²¹ Cuba's overt contravention of the treaty provoked long struggles with the British, whose diplomacy achieved the

²¹ According to yearly figures given by Moreno Friginals (1978:285), the number of slaves imported to Cuba from 1820 until the 1860s, when the last *bozales* arrived in the island, is as follows:

	Imported slaves
1820 - 1829	60,623
1830 - 1839	127,130
1840 - 1849	53,359
1850 - 1859	110,586
1860	24,000

signing of a new and stricter agreement in 1835. In 1836, a mixed Anglo-Spanish tribunal was instituted in Havana and Richard Madden, the newly-designated British consul to Cuba, became one of its judges. Madden, who also acted as Superintendent of Liberated Africans, played an important role in the development of the reformist movement in Cuba in the 1830s. His contribution to the emergence and international diffusion of the anti-slavery narrative was also significant.

However, despite all the vigilance and zeal of the Royal Navy, Africans continued to be sold on the island and continued to fuel the booming sugar industry until the 1860s: the last known importation of slaves took place in 1867 (Thomas 1993:18).²²

The massive introduction of Africans, as enslaved labour, brought about profound changes in Cuban society. The most obvious transformation took place in the demographic composition of the island. In 1750, before the sugar revolution started, the white population was double that of free coloureds and slaves: by 1830, however, the latter, in the main enslaved, had become a majority.²³

The spectacular increase of coloured people paralleled the worsening of their living standards. The patriarchal nature of Cuban slavery until the sugar boom was replaced by a more intensive exploitation of blacks, as practised elsewhere in the Caribbean. Subjected to a twenty-hour working day, increasing violence and crowded barracoons, slaves on plantations were mere commodities

²² In the novel *El negrero* (1933), Lino Novás Calvo gives a well-documented account of the slave trade to Cuba. *El negrero*, a novelised biography of the most famous Spanish slaver, Pedro Blanco, recounts how Blanco was still selling slaves to Cuban planters a few years before he died in 1854.

²³ In 1750 the total population of Cuba consisted of 116,947 whites and 53,053 blacks and mulattos (24,293 free coloureds and 28,760 slaves). In 1830, there were 332,352 whites and 423,343 coloureds (113,125 freedmen and 310,218 slaves). See Engerman and Higman (1997:47-52), where comparative population figures for other Caribbean colonies are also given.

that could be easily replaced with new hordes of imported Africans. By comparison, urban slaves enjoyed better conditions. The work they had to perform was not as urgent or as demanding as that on the plantations. A more equitable sex ratio in the urban enslaved force and the opportunities to keep in touch with the broader world made it easier for urban slaves to live a more "normal" life than for those on the plantations (Moreno Fraginals 1995:178). However, the threat of being relegated to their masters' *ingenio* was perpetual.

The free population of colour was also affected by massive slavery, which produced an increase in colour prejudice and racism. As Paquette (1988) explains, colour prejudice had a long history in Cuba. The Spaniards who conquered Spanish America came from an essentially seigneurial system in which Catholicism, military service and "pure blood" opened the way to prestige and power. When they settled in the New World, they also rooted their seigneurial values there, and Cuba was no exception. But if racial antagonism had been barely troublesome during the first three centuries of colonisation on the island, as Paquette (1988:112) explains,

[w]ith the maturation of the plantation economy the long-standing peninsular preoccupation with *limpieza de sangre* ("purity of the blood") - which originally had nothing to do with color but with the contamination of Islam, Judaism and other heresies - gradually evolved into an unwritten law of purity of the skin to reinforce white supremacy in a society based on African slavery.

The traditional Western Christian colour symbolism helped to legitimise the social division along the lines of skin colour since white had long been associated with purity, virtue, beauty and the dove of the Holy Spirit and black with malignance, corruption, sin and the devil (Taylor 1988:20). The development

of scientific racism throughout the nineteenth century further strengthened the belief in a superior white European race destined to control and “civilise” inferior races such as blacks and mulattoes.²⁴

Therefore, in a society such as nineteenth-century Cuba, with an economic system based on Africans being enslaved and exploited by European whites and their descendants, the latter had to ensure their privileges and superiority within the social order by keeping the former “in their place”, so that the stability of the system was not threatened. What ultimately counted was an individual’s status with respect to slavery; skin colour became a means of evaluating how far removed an individual was from slavery. The principle that structured nineteenth-century Cuban society, therefore, was the whiter the colour, the higher the rank and vice versa (Martínez Alier 1974).

The Cuban Landowning Class

As the misery of the enslaved Africans escalated and as racism spread, deteriorating the social position of the free population of colour, the wealth and opulence of the white landowners grew in parallel and their resistance to the advancements of blacks and mulattoes heightened.

From the beginning of the sugar revolution, the Cuban plantocracy enjoyed not only prosperity and opulence but also a share in the administration of the island, in blatant opposition to what was happening elsewhere in the Spanish empire, where the Bourbon reforms were in the process of dismantling the *criollo*-empowering structures. The alliance of the Cuban planters with the Spanish rulers, as exemplified by the Crown’s granting of all requests made by the

²⁴ See Malik (1996) for an analysis of the development of the concept of race and racism.

aforementioned Cuban saccharocracy representative, Arango y Parreño, greatly benefited both. The revenues provided by Cuban sugar had become the greatest source of income for the Spanish government, which was thus frequently forced to comply with the Cuban landowners' demands in view of their ever-so-necessary economic contribution. This alliance, albeit riddled with tensions, partly explains why revolts for independence did not succeed on the island at a time when the other Spanish colonies were fighting for theirs. Even more importantly, the *siempre fiel Cuba* (ever faithful Cuba), as the contemporary propaganda read, became the strategic Spanish spot in the attempt to re-conquer the viceroyalties of Nueva Granada and Mexico.

In 1833, however, the death of the absolutist king, Ferdinand VII, brought the liberals to power in Madrid and that meant an end to the honeymoon between Cuban planters and the Spanish government. As Moreno Fraginals (1995:159) explains, the liberals, whose interests were with those of the burgeoning Spanish trade and industrial sectors, saw it as absurd that the *criollo* oligarchy had established an economic regime that was favourable to *criollos* and marginalised *peninsulares* and took the majority of the profit of colonial trade: colonies, a liberal pamphlet read, are created to serve the metropolis' interests, not the other way round.

In 1836, after heated discussions between the two parties, the new Spanish government decided not to apply to Cuba the constitutional rights that were the prerogative of the peninsula but instead to maintain the island's status as a colony rather than a province. The reason given by the Spanish government was that the new Constitution advocated the rights to equality and freedom for all Spanish citizens; since in Cuba half the population was enslaved, there would be an

insurmountable contradiction if the constitutional regime was to be extended to the island and therefore all its citizens were to be considered Spanish (Rivas 1990:41). Thus, Cuba continued to be a Spanish colony where the new Liberal constitution did not apply rather than a province of Spain. Slavery, which had provided the planters with wealth and privileges, was now turning out to be their yoke. In view of the increasing number of slaves imported into the island, the threat of a slave revolt, like the one that had occurred in Haiti in 1789, was also a powerful deterrent for any violent action on the side of the *criollo* planters. A scenario for increasing antagonism and conflict between the old rivals, *peninsulares* and *criollos*, was forming.

Already in 1820, when the deposition of Ferdinand VII occurred (the so-called glorious revolution, *la Gloriosa*) and the liberals ruled for three years, the "almighty" saccharocracy had experienced a curtailment of their power for the first time. Yet, in 1823, the restoration of the *Ancien Règime*, encapsulated in Ferdinand VII, gave them back the lost privileges. Therefore, what in peninsular Spain is known as the *década ominosa* (ominous decade, 1823-1833), in Cuba was the last period of autonomy and enrichment for planters (Moreno Fraginals 1995:166). In fact, during those years Cuba saw an increasing socio-political awareness among the elite *criollo* classes, parallel to the great cultural progress that had started by the late eighteenth century and would culminate in the late 1830s.

The Development of a Cuban Consciousness

Throughout these years Cuba had developed numerous cultural institutions and a prosperous ambience that had facilitated the emergence of a liberal middle class

around the most progressive sectors of the planter oligarchy. Print-capitalism, which Anderson (1983) in his seminal work on the origins and spread of nationalism identifies as a decisive factor in the building of the nationally imagined community, started on the island when the newspaper *El Papel Periódico* was first published on 24 October 1790. *El Papel*, which included a great variety of articles on different matters, such as political, historical, social, scientific and literary issues, became a significant means of spreading Cuban consciousness as it was crystallising in the *criollo* middle and upper classes.

Among the numerous newly-established institutions, the *Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País* played a major role as a forum for discussion and progress amidst the elite sectors. Founded in 1793 under the auspices of the Captain-General Luís de las Casas, the *Sociedad* was modelled on the peninsular economic societies that had emerged with the Enlightenment. Among its functions was the establishment of other subsidiary institutions such as the *Academia de San Alejandro* for arts, the *Academia de Santa Cecilia* for the study of music, and various chairs for the learning and discussion of civil, political and constitutional laws. It also organised different competitions to promote the economic and social analysis of Cuban reality (Lazo 1965:48).

By the 1830s there was a great variety of newspapers, magazines and journals circulating in Cuba, although some had a very short life-span. One of the most salient of these was the *Revista y Repertorio Bimestre de la Isla de Cuba*, published by the *Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País* and initially directed by the Catalan Mariá Cubí i Soler. This journal, however, was soon taken over by José Antonio Sacó, the leading Cuban intellectual of the early nineteenth century, and changed its name to the *Revista Bimestre Cubana*. As Moreno Friginals

(1995:167) notes, the fact that the phrase “de la Isla de Cuba” was substituted by the origin-designating name “Cubana” was not an innocent change, and it was not overlooked by the *peninsulares*. The *peninsulares* responded with their own publication, a journal called the *Anales de Ciencias, Agricultura, Comercio y Artes* (1828-1831), whose editor was Ramón de la Sagra, the director of the Botanical Gardens at Havana who had been born in Spain. Both journals soon became the locus for the first confrontation, disguised as a literary debate, between the progressive sectors of the *criollo* elite and the intelligentsia, on one side, and the “liberal” *peninsulares*, on the other. The polemic centred on the literary quality and importance of the romantic Cuban poet José María Heredia. Heredia, who had participated in the so-called *Conspiración de los Soles y Rayos de Bolívar*, in 1823, had been forced to go into exile in Mexico and became a political model for young white Cuban intellectuals, and his poems a symbol of *Cubanness*.

The antagonism between *peninsulares* and *criollos* finally broke out more fiercely and publicly over the issue of the establishment of the *Academia de Literatura Cubana* in 1833. The intelligentsia around the *Revista Bimestre Cubana* and its director José Antonio Saco threatened the stability, not only of the *peninsulares* but also of the saccharocracy, by questioning the convenience of the illegal slave trade, controlled by the Spanish merchants. Numerous articles of all sorts (economic, historical, political, social, legal, scientific, literary) published in the *Revista Bimestre Cubana* argued against the slave trade and ultimately against the institution of slavery, now perceived as the chain that tied Cuba to Spain and prevented progress and democratisation (Benítez Rojo 1988:208). In fact, put forward mainly by José Antonio Saco, this became a reformist programme that

advocated the gradual abolition of slavery. White free migrants, it was argued, should substitute slave labour, and society thus would progressively be whitened through miscegenation. For this middle-class *criollo* elite, deprived of political power and unable to resort to social and economic action, literature became the only available means to democratise and advance Cuban reality, and to express an emerging national consciousness. It is what Benítez Rojo (1988) denominates “*la Conspiración del Texto*”.

As part of their campaign, these intellectuals wanted to set up a literary academic institution independent of the *Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País*, which, by the 1830s, was in hands of the most conservative planters. They wrote to the new regent, María Cristina, petitioning the establishment of the academy. Authorisation was granted and the *Academia de Literatura Cubana* started to function in March 1834. However, the director of the *Sociedad Patriótica*, Juan Bernardo O’Gaban, arguing that the literary academy had been founded without the knowledge and consent of the *Sociedad*, started a confrontation and asked for the dismantling of the institution. The animosity that Saco provoked among the conservative planters and *peninsulares* was decisive in the decision taken by the newly-appointed Captain-General Miguel Tacón to decree his exile and the closing of the Academy and the *Revista Bimestre Cubana* in the very same year it had been set up. Cuban intellectuals then resorted to narrative fiction in order to reflect on the emerging national culture and thus continue their endeavour to change Cuban society. Literary *tertulias* organised by Domingo del Monte became the new forum for the discussion.

III

THE CREATION OF A NATIONAL LITERATURE

There is an intrinsic relationship between the antislavery narrative and history: the antislavery works are based on a historical reality which allows them to challenge history and rewrite in narrative discourse a different version of the same history. (Luis 1990: 2)

This Chapter briefly explores the role played by literature, in general, and the anti-slavery narratives, in particular, (*Cecilia Valdés* among them) in the emergence and consolidation of a Cuban national identity and culture throughout the nineteenth century. First, we will look at the important figure of Domingo del Monte and examine his crucial influence on the development of the anti-slavery narratives in the 1830s. Then we carry out a short review of the issues discussed by the literary criticism on these texts in order to consider the anti-slavery novels' final purpose and their role in the formulation of *Cubanness*.

Del Monte and His Literary Circle

Domingo del Monte (1804 - 1853) was a leading Cuban intellectual of his time. Born in Venezuela in 1804, he moved with his family to Cuba in 1810, where they settled in the region of Cárdenas as owners of a one-hundred slave *ingenio*.

In 1834 he married Rosa Aldama y Alfonso, daughter of a wealthy slave trader called Domingo Aldama, and thereby joined one of the most powerful and influential *criollo* families in Cuba. His vast cultural knowledge soon made him a key ideologist in Saco's reformist programme and an active participant in the consolidation and diffusion of the incipient national culture. He engaged in the creation and publication of several magazines such as *La Moda o Recreo Semanal del Bello Sexo* (1829-1831) and *Revista Bimestre Cubana* (1831-1834). Responsible for the education department of the *Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País* from 1831 to 1834, Del Monte took an active part in the foundation and running of the short-lived *Academia de Literatura Cubana*.

Once the academy was closed down in 1834, the literary reunions or *tertulias* organised by Del Monte, first in his hometown of Matanzas and later, from 1835 onwards, in Havana, became a key meeting point, where Cuban intellectuals gathered and discussed social, economic, political and literary matters. The most prominent writers of the period, such as José Antonio Echeverría, Antonio Zambrana, José Victoriano Betancourt, Ramón de Palma, José Jacinto Milanés, Juan Francisco Manzano, Anselmo Suárez y Romero and Cirilo Villaverde, attended the *tertulias*. There, they consulted the vast library that Del Monte had built up, commented on the schools of thought and the literary movements in vogue abroad and set about to create a national literature that reflected on and interpreted the history of Cuba. In his prologue to Ramón de Palma's *Obras completas* (1861), Suárez y Romero recollects these meetings as follows:

Cada cual leía la obra que había escrito, leíase en presencia de unos cuantos amigos, introducíanse en ella las correcciones convenidas,

llevábase a la prensa y tornaba después a examinarlas muchas veces en la repetición de aquellas gratas conferencias. (as quoted in Bueno 1963:82)

Del Monte was a firm defender of social and didactic literature. Writers, he maintained, must be dutiful to the society in which they live: hence, their work must be directed towards reforming and improving their surrounding reality. Although the influence of Romanticism was crucial in the emergence of a national consciousness everywhere in Latin America, with its recognition and praise of native peoples and landscapes, Del Monte was a staunch enemy of romantic excesses, which he deemed extremely pernicious. In his view, a revolutionary and nationalistic outbreak would have been extremely destructive to the kind of Cuba he and his associates were aiming to create: i.e., an independent, democratic, progressive, illustrated and *white* Cuba. It should be borne in mind that in the 1830s the black and mulatto population had surpassed the whites for first time in the history of the colony: hence the concern about the Africanisation of the island and the fear of black and mulatto rebellions.

If Romanticism was judged harmful by Del Monte, Realism was in his opinion the type of literature for which writers should aim. He introduced Balzac's work in his literary sessions and, in the Frenchman's spirit, a scientific analysis of Cuba became a major goal in the fiction created by the delmontine circle. Del Monte had a major influence on the emergence of the first fictional narratives in Cuban literature, both on the type of writing that was produced and because he directly commissioned the work of many authors. Thus, short stories and novels in the style of the literature of manners or *costumbrismo* were written by Ramón de Palma and Cirilo Villaverde, among others. They criticised the corrupt mores and vices of the planter class and issues such as slavery became, for

obvious reasons, one of the most recurring matters discussed by Cuban writers of the time, giving rise to the so-called anti-slavery narratives.

Anti-Slavery Narratives

Slavery became a key concern in the social, political and economic debates in nineteenth-century Cuba, and literature contributed to the discussions by drawing on the life of the slave as its subject matter. The first works whose protagonists were subjected to the institution of slavery were commissioned by Del Monte and written by authors who regularly attended his literary *tertulias*. Del Monte's plan was to get together a portfolio of texts to hand in to Richard Madden, the British Consul to Cuba and Superintendent of Liberated Africans between 1836 and 1840. This collection of writings, known later as *el Album*, were to be presented to the Anti-Slavery convention held in London in 1840 and then published in Europe in order to gain support for the abolitionist cause and increase international pressure on the Spanish government to stop the human trade and put an end to slavery. With this intention were written works such as *Francisco: El ingenio o las delicias del campo* (1839) by Anselmo Suárez y Romero; *Autobiografía* or *Apuntes autobiográficos* (1835) by Juan Francisco Manzano, a manumitted slave; and *Escenas de la vida privada en la isla de Cuba* (1838) by Félix Tanco y Bosmeniel. All three were finally included in *el Album* which Del Monte gave to Madden in 1839, when the latter returned to England, although only Manzano's work was finally published abroad.²⁵ None of the three made its way to the

²⁵ See Lewis Galanes (1988) for a complete, detailed account of the material entrusted by Del Monte to Richard Madden.

printing press in Cuba in the nineteenth century, since their sympathetic portrayal of the slave and striking depiction of the reprehensible customs of the landowning class clearly represented a threat to the status quo desired by the ruling class.

Literary criticism on these works has increased considerably in the last few years, although the corpus is still not large. Issues such as the terminology used about the novels, which novels should be included in the so-called anti-slavery narrative, their final purpose and their treatment of black slaves are all discussed in scholarly debates. As regards the works that should be included, there is a wide acceptance that the aforementioned three novels, written and circulated in manuscript in the 1830s on the island, constitute the first examples of this type of narrative not only in Latin American literature but in world literature as a whole. Three other works written and published abroad, two of them at a later stage, are also generally mentioned as anti-slavery narratives: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab*, published in Madrid in 1841 in the liberal political climate allowed by Regent María Cristina; Antonio Zambrana's *El negro Francisco*, a reworking of Suárez y Romero's *Francisco*, written under the commission of the Chilean Doña Ascensión Rodríguez de Necochea and published in Santiago de Chile in 1873; and *Cecilia Valdés o la Loma del Ángel*, written by Cirilo Villaverde and published in New York in 1882; the last is considered to be the novel par excellence of this type of narrative and the master work of Cuban literature in the nineteenth century.²⁶

Generally, critics agree that these novels reflect in a highly conscious way the prevailing ideologies and aesthetics of the period, i.e. those of Del Monte, José

²⁶ Luis (1990) and Williams (1994) also deal with and discuss anti-slavery novels written after the abolition of slavery and up to the present in Cuba.

Antonio Saco and José de la Luz y Caballero, the pillars and catalysts of the educational and cultural developments of this generation (c.f. Schulman 1977:412). However, while there is wide acceptance regarding which novels should be included in this type of narrative, the differences emerge when critics consider the final purpose of the novels, their anti-slavery stance and their formulation of *Cubanness*. The discussions mainly emanate from the portrayal of the slave in the narratives.

All the novels present an obvious didactic Manicheian conception of reality: both the depravity and vices of the planter class and the goodness and docility of the slaves are exaggerated. Landowners, and especially the young masters or *señoritos*, are presented as evil, despicable characters that subject exceptionally noble and virtuous slaves to unjustifiable treatment and punishments. Both female and male slaves, on the other hand, become resigned, passive beings whose admirable moral integrity stands in stark contrast to the corruption of their supposedly superior owners.

The passivity shown by the enslaved protagonists has raised numerous objections by literary critics both in Cuba and abroad. The novels, they argue, obscure the numerous forms of slave resistance that posed a threat to the prevailing status quo. The slaves' readiness to assimilate white values and society is also questioned, and so are the Romantic excesses. Cuban scholars such as Portuondo (1965), Bueno (1988), Moreno Friginals (1995) and some foreign critics (Schulman 1977; Romeo 1989) use the writers' race and class to explain how they characterise blacks. These writers, they argue, all whites who belonged to the *criollo* elite, with the exception of the slave Manzano, ultimately produced their novels in order to protect their status as members of the bourgeoisie, since in

the long run the perpetuation of the system of slavery would have meant their own ruin. In alliance with the progressive sectors of the plantocracy and in the light of the special circumstances explained earlier in which Cuba was submerged, they aimed at an urgently needed reformism. The increasing numbers of blacks illegally imported into the island had produced changes in its demographic composition and by 1830 blacks had already outnumbered whites. As explained in more detail in the previous Chapter, the long-feared Africanisation of Cuba was already taking place and worries about black rebellions had spread throughout the colony. Furthermore, slavery was becoming the yoke that inexorably tied Cuba to Spain, since any attempt at independence was likely to lead to Cuba finally becoming the second black republic in the Caribbean, in the manner of neighbouring Haiti. The fact that the illegal slave trade was in the hands of *peninsulares*, the eternal rivals of the *criollos* in the struggle for the political and economic control of the colony, just further complicated the situation. In view of all these factors, the writers, guided by Del Monte and Saco's thought, advocated in their works for the end of the illegal slave traffic. This would result in a more humanitarian form of slavery, since owners would have to improve their treatment of slaves due to the impossibility of replacing them. Moreover, once the trade of human cargoes came to an end, a slow and gradual disappearance of the system of slavery, they argued, would also occur. Slaves would be slowly replaced, ideally mainly by free white labourers coming from Europe, although also by some workers from Asia. In addition, these white workers would facilitate the so-much-needed whitening of Cuban population through the process of miscegenation with coloured women.

This background was a determining factor in the characterisation of the slave as a sympathetic, submissive protagonist. As Schulman (1977:413) explains,

The aim of the antislavery writers, given their ties with the economic interests of the plantation owners, was a gradual, forward-looking and humanitarian policy of limiting the growth of slaves through the enforcement of the slave traffic treaties. Translated into artistic terms, this attitude suggested the advisability of encouraging a mild rather than a bold or rebellious antislavery narrative, one in which the slave might draw tears from the reader rather than cries of fear or horror. (...) The resultant pathetic being would, it was hoped, not only win converts to the *criollo*'s humanitarian cause, but also court the mercy and justice of foreign readers, especially the English, who, in turn, might bring pressure to bear on the Spanish crown to enforce the slave treaties.

Romeo (1989) agrees with such interpretation of these narratives and further asserts that the slaves are the focus of attention only in so far as slavery created a number of problems in and for white Cuban society: "The aim of these novelists would seem to have been to encourage reform in white Cuban society by white Cubans, for white Cubans whose material progress is what is truly at stake" (1989:6).²⁷

Schulman highlights a key element that must be taken into account if we are to understand these novels, namely the audience for whom they were intended. As mentioned earlier, most of these works were written in Cuba at a moment in which it was almost impossible to publish them on the island. Therefore, they

²⁷ Romeo, notwithstanding, differentiates between the writers of the delmontine circle and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and her novel *Sab*. Not only Romeo but also other critics such as Luisa Campuzano maintain that *Sab* is the only truly anti-slavery and abolitionist novel since it is the only one that challenges the basic premises of the racist ideology created to support and defend the institution itself, i.e. the differences between human races. Avellaneda criticises the myopia of a society which deprives human beings of their true potential, and equates slaves, women and the poor as the victims of this society in transition to capitalism. As mentioned before, however, there is no agreement among the critics on the abolitionist stance of the different writers and their works. For some, the fact that *Sab* does not depict the atrocities to which the slaves were subjected in the plantations and its sentimental tone minimises its antislavery denunciation. An analysis of the different narratives in these terms, however, would be beyond the scope of this work.

circulated in manuscript among those attending Del Monte's *tertulias* and presumably among a wider white audience.²⁸ They were also clearly intended for an international audience, as shown by the fact that some of them were included in the portfolio handed to Richard Madden, the British consul and Superintendent of Liberated Africans, to be published abroad and presented to the Anti-Slavery convention held in London in 1840. And, as Luis (1990) sagaciously points out:

The author strives to persuade the reader into understanding and accepting the life of the slave, someone antagonistic to his own interest and existence. In other words, the narrative strategy reduces the distance between the master's quarters and the slave's barracoon, between the oppressor and the oppressed, the white and the black. The space traditionally occupied by master and slave is also inverted and the interested reader is persuaded to view slavery no longer from the master's perspective but from the slave's (...) If blacks and slaves represented a threat to whites, as the Haitian example suggests, they are now portrayed as the victims of a society which exploits them without apparent justification. Likewise, if the familiar slave master and overseer are the protectors of slavery and the livelihood of whites, they are transformed into morally corrupt individuals whose interest is to satisfy their own libidinal needs. (Luis 1990:3)

Luis concludes that the anti-slavery debate became a problem for the West because it represented an unfamiliar situation with which mainstream cultural discourse had not been faced before. However, since this was a situation that could only be described from a bourgeois point of view, the language used by the writers in question was the only possible language at least during the period in which the first anti-slavery works were written. Moreover, the novels were produced to promote a specific understanding of slaves and slavery for a particular audience in nineteenth-century society and successfully engaged this

²⁸ See Ambrosio Fornet (1974) for a study of the literary market in Cuba in these decades.

audience in a dialogue on the issue, as certain letters written to both Del Monte and Suárez y Romero by some contemporaneous readers prove.

The importance of these novels, I sustain, is that for the first time in Cuban literature, blacks and mulattoes appear as a constituent part of Cuban reality. For the first time, they are portrayed as human beings akin to whites in a society that frequently considered and treated them like animals. It is true, however, that they are generally seen as second-class citizens who have uncritically assimilated white culture, but this does not invalidate the subversive nature of these texts at the time of their writing. As Luis (1990), Williams (1994) and Benítez Rojo (2000) also suggest, a narrative that records the hybrid nature of Cuban culture and acknowledges its non-Hispanic elements is, moreover, a demonstration of a clearly emerging feeling of *Cubanness* and, subsequently, represents an attack on Cuba's colonial status. In Williams's words:

In turning to slavery as the representative of Cuban experience, Del Monte and his colleagues were registering at once their similarity to, and difference from, both slaves in Cuba and peninsular Spaniards. As a result of the writers' recognition of their status as colonial subjects, the texts established a rhetorical equivalence between a literal and a figurative enslavement. Hence the dualistic portraits of slaves in which the narratives abound. Since slaves could so readily embody the competing claims for social equality and political autonomy, the literal recuperation of what was politically repressed became simultaneously an anticolonialist gesture and an affirmation of being. (Williams 1994:19)

The novels, therefore, were a criticism of the system of slavery. Although they might not actively campaign for the abolition of the institution itself, they definitely intended to record and prove the devastating harm that slavery was inflicting both on the enslaved blacks and mulattoes and on society as a whole, including the whites. Undoubtedly the narratives are all filtered through a white

more ideological than others, in their attempt to put an end to the institution of slavery.

The plots of the first “anti-slavery” novels, those written in the 1830s, focused on the family unit, frequently on the tensions originating from the conflict between the pure, deep love that a male slave feels for a female counterpart and the lust that their young master or *señorito* has for her. As Shulman (1977:417) explains: “In such an oppressive environment, it is reasonable to assume writers refrained from creating plots in which the slavery question might be viewed by the authorities as a broad social issue, and, by extension, an insurrectional tract.”

As shown by the events that happened in 1844, the “year of the lash” (*Año del Cuero*) as it is known in Cuban history, the authors’ dread and fears were not unfounded. The so-called *Conspiración de La Escalera* was fiercely crushed by the colonial authorities and some of these writers and intellectuals became victims of the witch hunt that followed, including Del Monte, De la Luz y Caballero and Tanco, who all had to flee into exile.³⁰ In the following decades, until the beginning of the Ten Years’ War (1868-1878), any anti-slavery stance was self-censored in view of the harsh repression.

It was not until near the abolition of slavery that a novel was written encompassing a wide, comprehensive perspective on nineteenth-century Cuban society. We are of course talking of Cirilo Villaverde’s final version of *Cecilia Valdés*, published in New York in 1882, which will be analysed in the following chapter.³¹

³⁰ See Paquette (1988) for a full account of the Conspiracy of *La Escalera*.

³¹ On 7 October 1886 slavery was finally abolished in Cuba. Previously, in 1870, there had been a law which emancipated slaves under certain requirements and conditions. See Scott (1985).

bourgeois slant, that of their writers, who were prey to numerous contradictions.²⁹ As Benítez Rojo (1988:207) points out, the early nineteenth-century Cuban intelligentsia experienced: “De un lado un profundo racismo y un turbio deseo de poseer al negro; de otro, razones económicas y morales dictadas por la época de consolidación de la sociedad industrial”. Nevertheless, while the works are permeated by the authors’ racism, this does not diminish the importance of these narratives when we bear in mind the historical, political and social context in which they were produced. In particular, their ideology should be analysed in relation to their time as a means of investigating the historical reality from which they emerged. It would be a great mistake simply to look at them in the context of our contemporary parameters and criteria.

With regard to the terms used to refer to them, we might not be able to consider them pro-abolitionist or even anti-slavery in a strict sense. Rather, it may be more appropriate to talk about them as the narratives that emerged in the mid-1830s in Cuba and that included for the first time in world literature the black as a protagonist. Hence, we could analyse the stance of each of these works, some

²⁹ Slaves did not make use of writing to demonstrate their utter repugnance and rejection of the system of slavery and the society they had been forced to live in, since writing, and even more specifically the novel, was a white bourgeois means of expression. They resorted to different forms of resistance, some to make their life more bearable and others to openly change their condition. Thus they frequently committed suicide, a practice approved of by West African theology for war prisoners who then would return to their African homeland; they organised rebellions and revolts in the plantations and escaped to the mountains, where they sometimes managed to set up communities known as *palenques* or *rancherías*. Although Manzano was a black and a slave, the writing of his *Autobiografía* (1835) shows some degree of acculturation. His life, as Luis (1990) states, is already mediated by writing: “Thus he appeals not to black but white readers by divorcing himself from others like him. Manzano was not typical, but privileged” (Luis 1990:66). However, see Sonia Labrador Rodríguez (1996) for a review of the different corrections and readings that Manzano’s work has been subjected to. She understands Manzano’s work not only as a denunciation of slavery, as most readers do, but also as a reflection on the repression of the coloured artist, whose knowledge and cosmology is independent and different to those of the white intelligentsia and therefore pose a threat to them.

IV

CIRILO VILLAVERDE'S *CECILIA VALDÉS*

Cecilia Valdés es nuestro más representativo mito literario. Equivale para la literatura cubana, a lo que el *Quijote* para la española, *Hamlet* para la inglesa o *Fausto* para la alemana. (Elías Entralgo 1946:6)

This chapter analyses in detail Cirilo Villaverde's novel *Cecilia Valdés*, widely considered the foundational work of Cuban literature. First, a broad overview of Villaverde's life is presented, particularly of the events that conditioned his literary career. We then look at the history of the different versions that he wrote of *Cecilia Valdés*. Finally, an in-depth analysis of the final version of the novel is carried out in order to sound out its ideology and its contribution to the formulation of *Cubanness* and the creation of the Cuban nation.

Cirilo Villaverde

Cirilo Villaverde, born in San Diego de Nuñez (Pinar del Río) in 1812, was the sixth of ten children of Lucas Villaverde y Morejón and Dolores de la Paz y Tagle. He spent his early years in the countryside, in the region of Vuelta Abajo, province of Pinar del Río, where his father worked as a doctor. At the age of

eleven he went to live in Havana with his grandfather and aunt. Born to a family of limited economic resources, his formal education was poor. However, he was accepted at the *Seminario de San Carlos*, at the time the country's most progressive cultural institution, where José Antonio Saco and other important Cuban intellectuals taught, and graduated in law in 1834. Nevertheless, he did not enjoy the practising of law and soon changed his career to teaching and journalism. He wrote numerous and varied articles and chronicles for different newspapers, journals and magazines, and his first fictional works, four short stories, appeared in 1837 in the newspaper *Miscelánea de Útil y Agradable Recreo*.³²

Villaverde was a regular contributor to Del Monte's *tertulias*, where he was able to cultivate not only his interest in literature but also his concerns about the political situation in Cuba. Through his writing, both fictional and non-fictional, he was partaking in the delmontine attempts to reform Cuban society. Following his mentor's advice, he wrote his early works in the realist and *costumbrista* manner, although a romantic influence and melodramatic excesses can also be seen in his work. As Luis (1990:104) states, during this early period, Villaverde "wavered between documenting history and customs, and writing about frustrated love, two literary interests which would be combined in *Cecilia Valdés*".

The repression that followed the Conspiracy of *La Escalera* in 1844 finally convinced Villaverde that the Spanish ruling of Cuba had to end so that

³² For an account of Villaverde's life, see De la Torriente (1950), Sánchez (1973), Álvarez García (1977) and Luis (1990). For references and analysis of these four short stories and Villaverde's other works, see Manuel de Ximeno (1953), Sánchez (1973) and the collections of articles gathered in Cairo Ballester (1987), Álvarez (1982) and in the journal *Cuba en la Unesco: Homenaje a Cirilo Villaverde* (Marzo 1964, III-V:5).

progress on the island could be made. In order to create the modern society that the reformist movement was aiming at, Villaverde favoured the annexation of Cuba to the United States. Although many became annexationist as a means to perpetuate slavery, Villaverde seems to have honestly admired the way of life in the neighbouring country, which he deemed as a valid model for the changes required in Cuba.³³ He thus became involved in a conspiratorial group in Havana, known as *Club de La Habana*, and participated in the failed uprising organised by General Narciso López in October 1848. Having been captured, jailed and sentenced to life imprisonment, Villaverde managed to flee from jail in 1849 and sought refuge in the United States, where he settled in New York. There, he acted as personal secretary to General López and helped him organise the expeditions that the General carried out in Cuba until the latter was arrested and executed in 1851.³⁴

During his long exile in the United States, Villaverde collaborated with and founded numerous revolutionary journals, magazines and newspapers that advocated changes in Cuba. Although, at first, he had backed the annexation to the United States, he soon became a firm defender of the total independence of the island. In conjunction with his wife, Emilia Casanova, who had also been forced into exile due to her political activities on the island, he dedicated his life to

³³ The annexation of Cuba to the United States gained its momentum after Florida, Louisiana Texas, California and New Mexico joined the Union in the late 1840s. The idea mainly attracted both Cuban and North American people who saw in this move the possibility of prolonging slavery. The outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861, the South's defeat and abolition of slavery in 1865 put an end to the courtship between the two parts. See Thomas (1993:12-13) for a brief explanation of the Spain-Cuba-US relations in this matter throughout the nineteenth century. For an explanation of the annexationist movement on the island, see Moreno Friginals (1995).

³⁴ Narciso López was the staunchest supporter of the annexationist movement in Cuba. Lieutenant General of the Spanish army, he believed that he could become Cuba's *libertador*.

recruiting supporters of the Cuban independent cause until his death in New York in 1894.

Villaverde only returned to Cuba twice. In 1858 he went back to live in Havana and started to organise the edition of his complete works in six volumes. He bought a publishing company, *La Antilla*, which published Anselmo Suárez y Romero's *Artículos de costumbres*, and founded the magazine *La Habana* with Francisco Calcagno. However, in 1860, afraid of developments in the political situation on the island and of Captain General Concha's powers, he decided to travel and settle again in New York. After that, he only returned to Cuba for a brief two-week visit in 1888.

Cecilia Valdés: History of the Text

In early 1839, Villaverde published a short story entitled *Cecilia Valdés* in the literary magazine *La Siempreviva*. It was divided into two parts introduced by an editor's note stating that the short story was a foretaste of a novel under the same title that would be published soon. The first part of the story narrates the life of Cecilia, a ten-year-old mulatto girl whose beauty is admired by the Gamboa family. She resembles members of the family, especially the father. The second part is a conversation between Cecilia and her grandmother Josefa in which the girl tells her about her visit to the Gamboas. Josefa relates to her the story of a girl who was kidnapped by a student, who closely resembles the young Leocadio Gamboa, and literally swallowed by the earth.

By mid-1839, the novel *Cecilia Valdés*, divided into eight chapters, was first edited by the publishing company *Lino Valdés* in Havana. The original short

story constitutes the first two chapters of the novel with some minor alterations, such as the names of some of the protagonists (Leocadio becomes Leonardo; Cecilia's mother, Susanita, is now Rosario Alarcón). The other chapters deal with the once popular *Ferías del Ángel*, which used to be held every year in honour of *San Rafael*, on 24 October, around the *Iglesia del Ángel* in Havana. Villaverde, encouraged by his friend Manuel del Portillo, to whom the novel is dedicated, criticises the corruption, laziness and relaxed morals masquerading as religious celebrations inherent in the *Ferías*, which, however, were no longer celebrated by the time Villaverde wrote the novel.

In 1882, a final version of the novel *Cecilia Valdés* was published at the *Imprenta El Espejo* in New York. The title of this definitive version was extended to *Cecilia Valdés o La Loma del Ángel*, together with the subtitle *Novela de costumbres cubanas*. The 1882 novel, a much longer work than the two previous *Cecílias*, includes nearly unchanged the 1839 short story, which has become chapter two and three of the definitive edition.

Albeit published in 1882, the novel was finished in 1879, as Cirilo Villaverde states in the prologue. There the writer also informs of the many disruptions to the composition of *Cecilia Valdés*: he explains that he started the writing of a second volume in 1839, contemporary to the publication of the eight-chapter version by the *Imprenta Lino Valdés*. However, his new teaching post at a school in Matanzas, together with other literary commitments, forced the postponement of the writing of the novel. Once exiled in the United States, in 1849, Villaverde states that his involvement in political activities further delayed his literary work. He says:

Fuera de Cuba, reformé mi género de vida: troqué mis gustos literarios por más altos pensamientos; pasé del mundo de las ilusiones, al mundo de las realidades; abandoné, en fin, las frívolas ocupaciones del esclavo en tierra esclava, para tomar parte en las empresas del hombre libre en tierra libre. (14)³⁵

When he went back to Havana in 1858, to prepare the publication of his complete works, a new version of *Cecilia Valdés* was going to occupy the sixth and final volume of the collection. However, his forced return to exile in New York cut short this project. In his own words:

En 1858 (...) acometí la empresa de revisar, mejor todavía, de refundir la otra novela, *Cecilia Valdés*, de la cual sólo existía impreso el primer tomo y manuscrita una pequeña parte del segundo. Había trazado el nuevo plan hasta sus más menudos detalles, escrito la advertencia y procedía al desarrollo de la acción, cuando tuve de nuevo que abandonar la patria. (15)

Back in exile, politics occupied most of Villaverde's life in the 1860s. The first Cuban war of independence, the so-called Ten Years' War (1868-1878), increased his involvement in the campaign for the liberation of the island, and, again, the novel

no progresó más allá de una media decena de capítulos, trazados a ratos perdidos (...) De suerte, que en ningún sentido puede decirse con verdad que he empleado cuarenta años (período cursado de 1839 a la fecha) en la composición de la novela. Cuando me resolví a concluirla, habrá dos o tres años, lo más que he podido hacer ha sido despachar un capítulo, con muchas interrupciones, cada quince días, a veces cada mes, trabajando algunas horas entre semana y todo el día los domingos. (15-6)

Villaverde acknowledges that this over-extended and frequently interrupted composition of the definitive version of *Cecilia Valdés* may have

³⁵ Cirilo Villaverde (1964). Quotes from the prologue are taken from this edition. For all other quotes from the novel, I refer to the critical edition (1992).

caused some problems in the structure and style of his novel. Hence, he apologises for any flaw or inconsistency in its unity, coherence and tone, and for his inability to maintain the readers' interest throughout the whole work.

Some critics have considered the first two versions of *Cecilia Valdés* as examples of the anti-slavery narratives written on the island in the 1830s (e.g., Sánchez 1971). However, it is now widely agreed that only the 1882 edition has an anti-slavery slant. The fact that both of the 1839 versions of *Cecilia Valdés* passed the censors and were published in Cuba proves this. They are *costumbrista* writings that lack the socio-historical and political dimension added to the final version of the novel. As Luis (1990) points out:

[T]he early versions of *Cecilia Valdés* were preparations in a writing process which would culminate in the final edition of the novel. Villaverde wrote his most important work in stages and only in its final form does it take on antislavery characteristics: the short story and the first volume of *Cecilia Valdés* describe aspects of nineteenth-century Cuban society, but the definitive version of *Cecilia Valdés* offers a complete picture of Cuban slave society. (...) The 1882 edition rewrites the two earlier versions and places the action of the novel within the historical context of the administration of Gen. Francisco Vives. (Luis 1990:100, 109)

Furthermore, important elements in the definitive version of *Cecilia Valdés*, such as the motifs of incest and rural slavery, only appear in the final version.

Numerous and varied factors impinged upon Villaverde's final rewriting of the novel. It must be borne in mind that the first texts of *Cecilia Valdés* in 1839 and its final version in 1882 embrace Villaverde's literary career and decisive years in his personal development. His political involvement and long exile surely had an impact on his perception and understanding of the slavery system. The abolition of slavery, the Civil War and the rapid growth and development of the

United States, all this must definitely have convinced him of the urgent need for similar changes in his homeland. The pressing changes, he understood, concerned not only the abolition of slavery but also the independence of the island from its colonial ruler, two issues that he perceived related. The numerous writings on slavery and its pernicious effects on society that were published in the U.S. throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, must also have influenced his rewriting of *Cecilia Valdés*, which shares many features with its North-American interracial counterpart novels.³⁶ His long stay in New York also facilitated him a wider access to and contact with foreign literature, generally.

However, despite all these evident influences, it is clear that in the final version of *Cecilia Valdés*, Villaverde also combined old preoccupations that had already been present in his early work, as well as Del Monte's ideas on literature and the anti-slavery narratives written by his compatriots in the 1830s, as we commented earlier. Thus, Friol (1980) identifies different themes, already deployed by Villaverde in the first four short stories that he published in 1837, which frequently and consistently thereafter reappear not only in Villaverde's works but in nineteenth-century Cuban literature in general.³⁷ Topics and motifs used in these early works, such as Cuban reality, religion, the relationship between women's beauty and ill fate, neurosis and incest, re-emerge in the last version of *Cecilia Valdés*. Other issues, such as the re-creation of the horrors of

³⁶ See Sollors (1997) for an analysis of the recurring features of interracial literature. He defines interracial literature as "works in all genres that represent love and family relations involving black-white couples, biracial individuals, their descendants, and their larger kin – to all of whom the phrasing may be applied, be it as couples, as individuals, or as larger family units" (3). Sollors' works concentrates mainly on U.S novels, although some other works from literatures in which the interracial genre has been cultivated, such as Cuba and Brazil, are also briefly dealt with.

³⁷ The four short-stories are *El ave muerta*, *La peña blanca*, *El perjurio* and *La cueva de Taganana*. As mentioned elsewhere, they were published in the newspaper *Miscelánea de Útil y Agradable Recreo* in 1837.

slavery, particularly rural slavery, and the continuous and unfair punishment of the slaves, the urban slaves' perpetual threat of being relegated to the plantations and their resort to suicide, were all stock of the early anti-slavery narratives also present in Villaverde's last novel.

For our analysis, therefore, we will concentrate only on the final version (1882), for it is the only one that clearly relates to the anti-slavery narratives of the 1830s and is the text re-created by Humberto Solás in his film *Cecilia*.³⁸

***Cecilia Valdés*: Textual Analysis**

Cecilia Valdés is formally divided into four parts, each of which consists of several chapters: twelve chapters in the first part, seventeen in the second, nine in the third and seven in the fourth.

The first part introduces the main characters of the narrative: the legitimate Gamboa family, headed by Cándido Gamboa and his wife Rosa Sandoval, their four children, Antonia, Leonardo, Carmen and Adela and their household slaves; the illegitimate Gamboa family, consisting of three generations of progressively whiter women, Josefa, or "Chepilla", her daughter Rosario, also called Charo or Charito, and the latter's daughter by Cándido, Cecilia Valdés; Isabel Ilincheta, Leonardo's to-be-fiancée; and Cecilia's mulatto suitor José Dolores Pimienta and his sister and Cecilia's friend Nemesia.

The second part has a symmetrical structure. It starts with a ball dance, that of the white elite at the *Filarmónica* on October 1830, and concludes with a

³⁸ For a comparative reading of the three versions, see Rodríguez Herrera (1953), Álvarez García (1977) and Luis (1984), (1988), (1990). For an analysis of the short story published in *La Siempreviva*, see Friol (1982) and M. Guicharnaud-Tollis (1994).

formal ball held by the free people of colour on 23 December 1830: both form part of the Christmas celebrations that year. The love triangle, between Leonardo - Cecilia - Isabel, which unifies the whole novel, is fully developed throughout this part of the novel.

The third part focuses exclusively on a journey by some of the protagonists to the countryside and on life on the coffee and sugar plantations. The fourth and final part partially overlaps in time with the third one, since here events that happened in Havana simultaneously to those in the countryside are narrated. Most of the chapters, however, deal with the events that followed the advent of the new year. The dramatic ending is uncharacteristically rushed when set against the detailed account of other events throughout the novel. A short epilogue explaining what became of the protagonists concludes the novel (see appendix A for a full break down of the sequences that make up the novel).

What links together the four parts of the novel is the relationship between the rich white heir, Leonardo Gamboa, and the poor orphan *mulata*, Cecilia Valdés. Through these two characters we are presented with the different worlds that they inhabit: the world of the white elite, as represented by the Gamboa family with their house in the capital Havana and their sugar plantation *La Tinaja* in the countryside; and that of the free black and mulatto population in Havana to which Cecilia belongs. Most of the action is located in Havana in the early 1830s, although the first few chapters refer to earlier years, namely to Cecilia's birth (1812) and adolescence (1824); and, as we will see, the third part of the novel focuses on a journey to the countryside, to the region of Pinar del Río.

The head of the Gamboa family is Don Cándido, a *peninsular* who went to Cuba in his youth to make his fortune. He is married to Rosa Sandoval, a well-to-

do *criollo* woman, with whom he has had four children, Antonia (22 years old), Leonardo (20), Carmen (19) and Adela (17). Their urban household is also inhabited by slaves, some of them important for the development of the action, especially Dionisio, their cook; Dolores, his daughter and the girls' maid; Aponte, Leonardo's *calesero*; and Tirso, Dolores's maternal half brother. Slaves from the Gamboa family's sugar plantation, *La Tinaja*, such as Taita Caimán, the fugitive Pedro and especially María de Regla, also play significant roles in the novel. María de Regla, married to Dionisio and mother of his daughter Dolores, used to live in Havana until, as a punishment, she was sent to the sugar plantation, where she still lives when the whole family visits during Christmas holidays in 1830. Different employees of the Gamboas, such as Melitón Reventós, the book-keeper (*mayordomo*) of the family at Havana and Liborio Sánchez, the overseer in *La Tinaja*, are likewise portrayed in the novel, so that a wide and comprehensive view of the life of the Gamboa family and, by inference, the white plantation owners generally, is achieved.

If Cándido's legitimate family plays a pivotal role in the novel, his illegitimate family does so too; Cecilia Valdés is Cándido's natural daughter by Rosario Alarcón ("Charito"), herself a fatherless mixed-race or *parda* in the skin-colour gradation prevailing in colonial Cuba. In order to give Cecilia a surname that would facilitate her social betterment, Cándido marked the recently born baby with a blue half moon on her shoulder and took her to the *Casa Cuna*, where she was baptised and given the surname Valdés.³⁹ Meanwhile, Charito became ill with

³⁹ The *Casa Cuna* of Havana, located on the junction between the streets Oficios and Muralla, was built by the bishop Gerónimo Valdés in order to take in abandoned children. The babies were baptised there and adopted their benefactor's surname, Valdés: thus they could pass as whites (*pasar por blancos*).

meningitis, which resulted in her insanity and subsequent seclusion in the Hospital of Paula. When Cecilia was returned to her home, she grew up being taken care of by her grandmother, Josefa or Chepilla, and believed herself to be an orphan.

Yet, Villaverde does not confine the action of the novel to the family unit, as his contemporary anti-slavery writers had been forced to in the 1830s. The temporal and spatial distance from the narrated events allowed him not only a broader perspective on history but also freedom from harsh censorship. We must not forget that he produced his final version of *Cecilia Valdés* in late 1870s New York, not in 1830s Cuba. His intention in this definitive version was to provide his readers with a comprehensive picture of Cuban reality under the colonial authority of Captain General Francisco Vives (1823-1832). Accordingly, all sectors of society are represented, not only Gamboa's legitimate and illegitimate family; hence, *Cecilia Valdés* becomes a truly choral work.

We are confronted with a whole array of characters from different social and racial backgrounds, who all, at some point or another, have some kind of a relationship with the Gamboas and/or with Cecilia and her grandmother. Thus, we are introduced to Leonardo's friends and fellow students at the *Seminario de San Carlos*, Eduardo Meneses and Pancho Solfa; we travel to the coffee plantation *La Luz*, the Ilincheta family's abode, where Leonardo had started a relationship with Isabel Ilincheta; we meet Doctor Montes de Oca and the Mayor (*Alcalde Mayor*) Fernando O'Reilly. We mingle with Cecilia among the free black and mulatto population of Havana: the tailor Uribe; the musician José Dolores Pimienta, who is deeply in love with Cecilia; his sister Nemesia, Cecilia's best friend; the petty criminal Malanga, the *curro* from *el Manglar*, a dangerous neighbourhood in

Havana; and many others who populate the novel and help to provide a complete picture of Cuban colonial society.

Furthermore, the novel provides a good insight into the hierarchies of Cuban society, from the top of the pyramid, Captain-General Francisco Vives, to its very base, the hordes of enslaved blacks in the sugar and coffee plantations, *La Tinaja* and *La Luz*, respectively. In the reconstruction of the different layers of society as typified in *Cecilia Valdés*, we are presented with the following groups organised in decreasing political, economic and social status:

- the colonial authorities, embodied by Captain General Francisco Vives and his group of Spain-born officials;
- the *criollo* aristocracy, represented by Fernando O'Reilly, Mayor (*Alcalde Mayor*) of Havana;
- the upper bourgeoisie, consisting of land-owners, merchants and slave-traffickers, both *criollos* and *peninsulares*. The Gamboas are situated here, although they aim at ascending the ladder by establishing the Earldom of *Casa Gamboa*;
- the middle classes, formed by a small *criollo* bourgeoisie of liberal workers and intellectuals, represented in the novel by Doctor Montes de Oca and the teachers at the *Seminario de San Carlos*, José Agustín Govantes and José Antonio Saco;
- the popular classes, comprising urban and rural small merchants and employees, both *criollos* and *peninsulares*, such as the watch-maker, the Catalan *bodeguero* (shop-tender) and the Gamboa's *mayordomo* (a kind of book-keeper), Melitón Reventós;

- the white working classes in the countryside and the city, coming from both peninsular Spain and Cuba, such as the *mayoral* (overseer) Liborio Sánchez, the *rancheador* (slave-hunter) Francisco Estévez and the *guajiros* (peasants) marginal to the plantations;
- the free coloured people, mainly in city dwellings. Cecilia and her grandmother Chepilla, as well as most manual workers, such as the tailor Uribe, the musician and tailor-apprentice Pimienta, the seamstress Nemesia and the black butcher Genoveva, all belong to this group, which was also internally graded according to the different shades in skin colour.
- the slaves, who were also divided in terms of their skin colour, mulattoes and blacks, and their working environment, the city or the plantation, the latter in much worse conditions than the former. Urban slaves, such as Dionisio, Dolores, Aponte and Tirso, enjoyed a better existence than those on the plantations, although the threat of being relegated to the countryside hung permanently over their heads, as exemplified in the novel by María de Regla's case. The nameless mass of enslaved blacks working in *La Tinaja* makes up the most wretched segment of the Cuban population.

A close look at the society represented in *Cecilia Valdés* reveals that characters from very different social backgrounds, who are historically documented, mingle in the novel with fictional ones. Some of the historical figures only appear briefly, mentioned in passing or "performing" as extras. The slave-hunter Francisco Estévez, whose party is alluded to as the one who captures the slave Pedro Briche from *La Tinaja* (part 3, chapter 5, p. 453), is an example of such a figure. Estévez was a government commissioned slave-hunter accused of cruelty and savagery. He was illiterate and therefore dictated his diary to his

daughter as a record of his activities between 1837 and 1842. The diary was presented to the *Junta de Fomento*, the organisation in charge of forming and inspecting slave-hunting groups, and was finally owned by Villaverde's father, who was an inspector of this *Junta*. In 1843, Villaverde copied it and later wrote an introduction to it when it was published.⁴⁰

In the same manner, many of those present at the formal ball, organised by the free coloured people to celebrate Christmas on 23 December 1830, are historically documented. Villaverde cites among those attending the cream of the free mulatto group, who, as explained in the historical introduction, constituted an important sector in Cuban colonial society until their destitution in the Conspiracy of *La Escalera*: among them, the musicians Claudio Brindis de Salas, Tomás Vuelta y Flores and Ulpiano Estrada, the barber Tomás Vargas, the carpenter Andrés Dodge, the poet Plácido, the writer Juan Francisco Manzano and so on.⁴¹

While these historical figures do not play an active role in the narrative, some others, however, become important characters who participate actively in the action and interact with the fictional ones. Thus, Captain-General Francisco Vives is portrayed in his *gallería*, the place where his fighting cocks are reared. There he receives Gamboa and other plantation owners who want him to help them secure a new cargo of enslaved Africans held captive by the British (Part 2, Chapter 8). In the *gallería*, readers are likewise introduced to Captain Tondá, Captain Vives' free mulatto protégé, who chased coloured criminals and hunted fugitive urban slaves. Similarly, Francisco de Paula Uribe, a tailor to the white

⁴⁰ See Luis (1990) for an analysis of Estévez's diary, which he classifies as a pro-slavery work in which the point of view of the slavers is given.

⁴¹ See Deschamps Chapeaux (1970) for an account of the black and mulatto historical figures who are represented in *Cecilia Valdés*.

elite, among them Leonardo Gamboa, for whom José Dolores Pimienta and his sister Nemesia work, is also a historically based character.

The interaction between historical and fictional characters in *Cecilia Valdés* has contributed to historical readings of the novel. On many occasions it has been valued more as a historical and social document than as a work of literature. Thus, epithets such as “lienzo colosal” (De la Cruz 1892), “el gran cuadro social del pueblo cubano” (Lazo 1965) and “la epopeya social cubana del siglo diecinueve” (Bueno 1989) are abundant in the literary criticism of *Cecilia Valdés*.⁴²

Furthermore, the historical reading of the novel has led many critics to search for the *real* people who might possibly have influenced Villaverde’s creation of the fictional characters. Thus, for example, it seems that the Gamboas were inspired by Villaverde’s friend and fellow student Cándido Rubio and his family. Cándido Rubio had a mulatto mistress and their relationship reportedly served Villaverde as an inspiration for the plot. Cecilia’s description fits that of a teenage girl in the neighbourhood Santa Catalina, whose beauty Villaverde used to admire, as he states in letters written to friends. The coincidence between the date of birth of the protagonist Cecilia Valdés and Cirilo Villaverde himself (October 1812), as well as the sharing of the same initials in their names, further suggests the possibility of an autobiographical reading: however, this lies outside the scope of the current analysis.

⁴² Although most of the literary criticism emphasises the historical reading of *Cecilia Valdés*, there is some divergence about whether it is a realist or a *costumbrista* novel. Most of the debate, however, stems from different definitions and conceptions of realist and *costumbrista* literature, issues which are far beyond the scope of this analysis.

In fact, Villaverde encouraged both an autobiographical and a historical reading of *Cecilia Valdés*, not only in numerous letters written to friends but also in the prologue to the final version of the novel. There he states:

Hace más de treinta años que no leo novela ninguna, siendo Walter Scott y Manzoni los únicos modelos que he podido seguir al trazar los variados cuadros de *Cecilia Valdés*. Reconozco que habría sido mejor para mi obra que yo hubiese escrito un idilio, un romance pastoril, siquiera un cuento por el estilo de *Pablo y Virginia* o de *Atala y Renato*; pero esto, aunque más entretenido y moral, no hubiera sido el retrato de ningún personaje viviente, ni la descripción de las costumbres y pasiones de un pueblo de carne y hueso, sometido a especiales leyes políticas y civiles, imbuido en cierto orden de ideas y rodado de influencias reales y positivas. Lejos de inventar o de fingir caracteres y escenas fantásticas e inverosímiles, he llevado el realismo, según entiendo, hasta el punto de presentar los principales personajes de la novela con todos sus pelos y señales, como vulgarmente se dice, vestidos con el traje que llevaron en vida, la mayor parte bajo su nombre y apellido verdaderos, hablando el mismo lenguaje que usaron en las escenas históricas en que figuraron, copiando en lo que cabía, *d'après nature*, su fisonomía física y moral, a fin de que aquellos que los conocieron de vista o por tradición, los reconozcan sin dificultad y digan cuando menos: el parecido es innegable.

As Ette (1994) has pointed out in his analysis of Villaverde's prologue, this statement and the prologue itself, which sets the novel in a particular frame, are literary devices that the writer has resorted to in order to blur the boundaries between fact and fiction, so that *Cecilia Valdés* could achieve a similar status to that of a historical document. The intermingling of historical and fictional characters, the latter with a varnish of historicity, also contributes to this effect. Other devices used by Villaverde, which Ette draws attention to, are the inclusion of much verifiable data that could be easily recognised by contemporary readers, while also historically documented in years to come; and the type of narrator deployed in the novel, which will be analysed later on.

Moreover, when Villaverde falsely states that he has not read any work of fiction in the last thirty years,⁴³ he is in fact attempting to negate any literary and fictional influences in order to make more credible and truthful his portrait *d'après nature*. The only influences he acknowledges, Scott and Manzoni, help him to locate *Cecilia Valdés* within the genre of the historical novel and make it partake in the construction of a *history* for an emerging nation.

Cecilia Valdés, therefore, is used by Villaverde to reflect on a decisive moment in the creation of the Cuban nation; he explores the major tensions present in the colonial slave society of Cuba, especially the confrontation between masters and slaves, the fight by the free people of colour to achieve a higher place in society and the rivalry between *peninsulares* and *criollos*. Each of these themes and the characters used to embody these tensions will be analysed below.

Masters versus Slaves: The Issue of Slavery

Slavery is one of the key themes in *Cecilia Valdés*. As a dedicated disciple of Del Monte, Villaverde tried to inject the reformist ideology that had imbued the 1830s anti-slavery novels into *Cecilia Valdés*. The fact that he wrote his work in New York around forty years later allowed him to convey a more overt and open criticism of the slave trade and slavery without having to circumscribe the plot to the family unit and resort to the Manichean conceptions prevailing in the novel's literary predecessors. He was able to portray a more truthful and complete picture

⁴³ Villaverde was the translator of some of Dickens' novels into Spanish such as *David Copperfield* published in 1857 in Havana. See Friol (1980).

of the effects of slavery throughout the whole of Cuban society, although his portrait is tainted by a white, middle-class *criollo* bias.

Hence, the novel presents a depiction and an analysis of the institution of slavery in its many forms and from various points of view. The reader is confronted with the slaves' voyage from Africa to the Caribbean, their sale, their work, both on the plantations and in the urban households; their ill-treatment and the extreme measures they sometimes had to resort to in order to escape from their miserable conditions. But Villaverde also shows how slavery adversely influenced both the free people of colour and white society, i.e., how moral values are being perverted and the disintegration this leads to. There is even a brief explanation of the history of slavery and the legal technicalities that support it, as discussed by Leonardo and his fellow students, Meneses and Solfa, on their way to the Law class at the *Seminario de San Carlos* (Chapters 8 and 9, Part 1). Villaverde, who had been a student himself at the *Seminario* in the early thirties, uses this episode to introduce some of the leading Cuban intellectuals of the time, such as José Antonio Saco, the ideologue of the reformist project, and José Agustín Govantes, who further elaborates on the legal and historical sides of slavery in his class to the law students.

Cándido Gamboa represents the *peninsular* merchant who has also become a member of the plantocracy due to his marriage to the *criolla* Rosa Sandoval. Besides owning the three-hundred slave sugar plantation, *La Tinaja*, which Rosa has inherited, he has also bought the slave ship *Veloz*, since, as his wife explains to their son Leonardo, the illegal slave trade is the business that renders most money:

- (...) Si la expedición se pierde, tu padre pierde un pico regular. Es la primera que él emprende en sociedad con sus amigos de aquí por ser muy costosa. Cuando menos trae quinientos negros.
- ¿Quién mete a papá en tales trotes, al cabo de sus años?
- ¡Ay, hijo! Echarías tú tanto lujo, ni gozarías de tantas comodidades si tu padre dejase de trabajar? Las tablas y las tejas no hacían rico a nadie ¿Qué negocio deja más negocio que el de la trata? Di tú que si los egoístas ingleses no dieran en perseguirla como la persiguen en el día, por pura maldad, se entiende, pues ellos tienen muy pocos esclavos y cada vez tendrán menos, no había negocio mejor ni más bonito que emprender.
- Convenido, mas son tantos los riesgos, que quitan las ganas de emprender.
- ¿Los riesgos? No son muchos comparados con las ganancias que se obtienen. (255-6)

Doña Rosa makes clear to her son that it is the illegal slave trade that provides them with the wealth they enjoy, not the construction materials that Cándido also deals in or the sugar plantation, which Rosa does not even mention. And, importantly, the slave trade is in the hands of *peninsulares*, such as Cándido, with the subsequent suspicions and envies of the *criollos*. Doña Rosa also mentions the vicissitudes of the slave trade after the *Treaty of Madrid* came into effect in 1820. As explained in Chapter 2, in 1817, Spain officially agreed with Britain to abolish the slave trade within Spanish territories by 1820 in exchange for 400,000-pounds compensation to the slave merchants. However, the agreement did not end the slave trafficking and in the 1830s, at the time in which *Cecilia Valdés* is set, importation of slaves to Cuba reached a record number of c.125,000. The trade, however, was not devoid of risks, as this episode shows. The *Treaty of Madrid* gave the British Royal Navy the power to stop and search ships suspected of slave trafficking and to take slavers for trial before a mixed commission; the human cargo should then be liberated. In the novel, the *Veloz* has been held captive by the British, who intercepted her full of newly arrived, enslaved Africans (*bozales*), as she approached Havana. However, Gamboa and

his associates, among them the *negrero* Pedro Blanco (see footnote 22), are looking into ways of saving their investment. They plot to dress the *bozales* with typical slave clothes (*esquifaciones*), so that they seem to have been transferred from Puerto Rico to Cuba, rather than illegally imported from Africa. In this way, the slavers would be able to keep the whole shipload and do their business. Thus, Gamboa dispatches his employee, Reventós, to carry out the necessary errands, including corrupting the officials in order to be able to get the slaves' clothes onto the captured vessel.

The strategy deployed is successful and Gamboa relates to his wife the "adventure", explaining in passing the treatment of the enslaved Africans throughout the voyage and revealing the horrendous conditions they have to suffer throughout the crossing of the Atlantic:

- Vio entonces Carricarte [the ship's captain] que no podía escapar sino a milagro, por lo que resolvió jugar el todo por el todo. Dio orden, pues, de despejar el puente, a fin de facilitar la maniobra y aligerar el buque lo que pudiese, y como lo dijo lo hizo. En un santiamén fueron al mar los cascos del agua de repuesto, no poca jarcia y los fardos que había sobre cubierta...⁴⁴

- ¿Los bozales quieres decir? ¡Qué horror! - exclamó doña Rosa, llevándose ambas manos a la cabeza.

- Pues es claro - continuó Gamboa imperturbable -. ¿Tú no ves que por salvar 80 a 100 fardos iba a exponer su libertad el Capitán, la de la marinería y la del resto del cargamento que era triple mayor en número. (...) Eso sí, dice Carricarte, y yo lo creo, porque él es mozo honrado y a carta cabal, que en la hora de mayor peligro sólo tenía sobre cubierta los muy enfermos, los enclenques, aquellos que de todos modos morirían, mucho más pronto si los volvían al sollado donde estaban como sardinas, porque fue preciso clavar las escotillas.

- ¡Las escotillas! - repitió doña Rosa -. Es decir, las tapas de la bodega del buque. De manera que los de abajo a estas horas han muerto sofocados. ¡Pobrecitos!

- ¡Ca! - dijo D. Cándido con el más exquisito desprecio -. Nada de eso, mujer. Sobre que voy creyendo que tú te has figurado que los sacos de

⁴⁴ Numerous derogative words were used to refer to the slaves, such as *fardos* and *sacos de carbón*, which is later used in the conversation by Cándido.

carbón sienten y padecen como nosotros. No hay tal. Vamos dime, ¿cómo viven allá en su tierra? En cuevas o pantanos. Y ¿qué aire respiran en esos lugares? Ninguno, o aire mefítico. ¿Y sabes cómo vienen? Barajados, quiere decir sentados unos delante de las piernas del otro, en dos hileras sucesivas, cosa de dejar calle en el medio y poder pasarles el alimento y el agua. Y no se mueren por eso. A casi todos hay que ponerles grillos, y a pocos es fuerza meterlos en barras. (272-3)

Through this conversation readers find out that in order to “save” the human cargo for the slavers, the Captain, an honest and decent man, as Cándido describes him, threw into the sea around a hundred slaves who were on the deck when the British intercepted the vessel. But, as Cándido explains, this was necessary in order to be able to prevent the British from immediately searching the ship and liberating the slaves. As a result, Gamboa and his associates were able to keep the human cargo that was locked below deck, more than three hundred, and make a profit. Gamboa’s words also point up a common racist belief of the time; he explains that the slaves are used to enduring the hardships throughout the voyage and on the plantations since the conditions are similar to those of their native countries, where, he says, they live in swamps and caves and only breathe pestilential air. Cándido is expressing the notion that some continents, such as Africa, had a degrading effect on the individual; this idea helped to justify the existence of superior and inferior races within humankind, in this case, with regard to blacks. The same rationale was applied to Latin America, which was believed to leave an indelible mark upon the individuals born there, regardless of their progenitors and/or skin colour. This provided the grounds for the different status of *peninsulares* and *criollos* not only in Cuba but also in the whole of Latin America.

Cándido's main reasons for defending the institution of slavery are purely economic. He considers blacks as "animales, no hombres" (273); during the after-dinner conversation at his sugar plantation (Chapter 4, Part 3), he explains to his guests the differences between the several ethnic and geographical black groups in terms of their performance and submissiveness, rating blacks, whose natural condition is slavery, as mere beasts or products on which to make profit. Doña Rosa adds the Eurocentric religious and civilising motivation to justify the enslavement. The conversion of those "savage" blacks to Catholicism and hence their "civilisation" is a moral duty for all Christians, she reasons.

Ironically, however, her plantation is continuously portrayed in the novel as an earthly hell. The Gamboas go to spend Christmas at their sugar estate, where a new steam machine brought from the United States is going to be installed, mechanising the sugar milling. The trip towards *La Tinaja* through the region of Vuelta Abajo, the valley where most sugar estates are located, is full of ominous signs amidst an adverse nature. Once on the plantation, the sight of the barefoot, ragged and malnourished slaves and their ghastly barracoons is in stark contrast to the description by the narrator of the riches and value of the estate. Although it is Christmas, the life of the slaves is hardly altered, so that they still "enjoy" a twenty-hour working day and are repeatedly and unfairly punished. The narrative portrays the enslaved blacks as people who try to interact and establish relationships among themselves in such an adverse environment. Their plight, though, is never understood by their masters, who always believe that a slave,

pensaba al menos en tres cosas: en el modo de sustraerse al trabajo, en quemarle la sangre a su detentor, y en obrar siempre en oposición a sus miras, deseos e intereses.

Para el amo en general, el negro es un compuesto monstruoso de estupidez, de cinismo, de hipocresía, de bajeza y de maldad; y el solo medio de hacerle llenar sin murmuración, reparo ni retraso la tarea que tiene a bien imponerle, es el de la fuerza, la violencia, el látigo. El negro quiere por mal, es dicho común entre los amos. (457)

The narrative, nonetheless, contradicts such a rationale; although it never penetrates the rural slaves' minds and their point of view is not given, it presents them as human beings subjected to the most abject circumstances, which leads them to extreme measures such as escaping and even committing suicide. Thus, as soon as the Gamboas arrive, they are informed that six slaves have run away. The following day, Francisco Estévez and his group capture the leader of the fugitives, Pedro Briche. Pedro, seriously injured by the bites of the slavers' dogs, is taken to the nursery, where Leonardo, his sisters and Isabel visit him to find out about his condition. Leonardo reports that "Pedro apenas le había reconocido a él como su amo" (464) and, when threatened to be punished, "contestó riendo que no había nacido el hombre capaz de sujetarle en ninguna parte contra su voluntad" (464). The girls, however, saw "el Hércules africano, (...), Jesucristo de ébano en la cruz, como alguna de ellas observó, era espectáculo digno de consideración y respeto" (464-5). Their perception is corroborated by the narrator, who defines Pedro as "otra víctima de la tiranía civil en su desventurada patria" (465). Pedro's identification with Jesus Christ is further reinforced by the epigraphs that introduce these chapters, all taken from the Bible.

The following day, the doctor informs the Gamboas that Pedro has committed suicide; he has swallowed his tongue, one of the most painful ways of killing oneself. As mentioned, slaves often resorted to suicide, a practice sanctioned by West African theology for prisoners of war, who thus would go

back to their African homeland. Already in Suárez y Romero's novel, *Francisco: el ingenio o las delicias del campo* (1839), the enslaved protagonist Francisco had killed himself because of the impossible relationship with his beloved Dorotea. Although a romantic literary device, Francisco's suicide signalled a reality that was commonplace in colonial Cuba. In *Cecilia Valdés* a more daring portrayal is possible due to the temporal and spatial distance from the narrated events, so that suicide is represented as the best alternative for a human being who cannot cope anymore with the abhorrent situation s/he is being forced to live in and therefore rebels against.

Pedro's suicide is not the only one in the novel. When Leonardo, Meneses and the girls go for a horse ride to the countryside, to escape from the suffocating atmosphere in the sugar plantation, they encounter an adverse nature that does not offer comfort to the girls' distress. They first arrive at a pool that seems to be a haven of tranquillity and that seems to invite them to take a swim: however, it turns out to be infested with caimans. Subsequently, in the forest, the trees are crowded with noisy ravens; a horrid sight soon blocks the narrow lane: vultures are picking at a corpse. The dead man is Pablo, another one of *La Tinaja's* fugitive slaves, who has hanged himself. Their journey back to the plantation takes them through the rundown slaves' graveyard where Pedro is being buried. The narrative suggests that nature is no longer a shelter for the human soul; it has been corrupted and tainted by the sugar plantation and its continuous abuse by humans of other human beings. As the narrator reflects when describing the region:

Quizá porque sus labranzas son ingenios azucareros, porque el clima es sin duda más húmedo y cálido, porque el suelo es negro y barroso, porque la

atmósfera es más pesada, porque el hombre y la bestia se hallan ahí más oprimidos y maltratados que en otras partes de la Isla, a su aspecto sólo la admiración se trueca luego en disgusto y la alegría en lástima. (423)

The quote refers to the region of Vuelta Abajo and its numerous sugar plantations. The area is described in detail on Leonardo and Isabel's journey to *La Tinaja* (Chapter 3, Part 2). Although the countryside is beautiful and provokes pleasurable sensations in the eyes of the beholder, in this case, those of the sensitive and receptive Isabel, the sights of the abuses on the plantations soon change those feelings. The ugliness and uneasiness, the narrative suggest, are not produced by the countryside, despite its humid climate, but by the sugar plantations and the ill treatment and abuses of both men and animals. The moral objections to this, however, are ignored and obliterated in the interest of economic success. As the epigraph to the chapter states:

¡Dulce Cuba! en tu seno se miran
en el grado más alto y profundo,
las bellezas del físico mundo,
los horrores del mundo moral. (420)

Significantly, the verses were written by Jose María Heredia, who became a model for young Cuban intellectuals in the 1820s and 1830s, after his exile in Mexico, due to his participation in the *Conspiración de los Soles y Rayos de Bolívar* and his support for the independence of the island. The use of this stanza from his poem 'El himno del desterrado', in which he expresses with strong patriotic fervour his longing for Cuba, to introduce the chapter of the novel in which the region of Vuelta Abajo is described, is highly meaningful. The chapter is clearly related to an earlier work by Villaverde, the article *Excursión a Vuelta*

Abajo, published in 1838. Benítez Rojo (1990) interprets this article as *the* foundational work of Cuban literature since, he reasons, it is the first work written in Cuba in which the author attempts to find and record the particularities of the Cuban countryside, that is, to establish what is truly Cuban: “Mi lectura de *Excursión a Vuelta Abajo* se acerca a la de un cuento maravilloso o mito, donde Villaverde asume el papel de caballero de una orden prestigiosa que le ha encomendado la búsqueda del tesoro difícil de obtener: lo cubano” (Benítez Rojo 1990:771). The search for a Cuban identity in *Cecilia Valdés* will be addressed in detail below.

If the region of Vuelta Abajo, with all its sugar plantations, and *La Tinaja*, as an archetypal one, is portrayed as an earthly hell, the novel depicts the highland area where the coffee plantations are located as its antithesis. The so-called “jardín de Cuba” is the earthly paradise where nature and humans live harmoniously, as exemplified by *La Luz*, a coffee plantation near the town Alquizar.

La Luz is owned by Don Tomás Ilicheta, a widower who lives there with his two daughters, Isabel and Rosa, and their aunt. Don Tomás, an elderly man who does not enjoy good health, has delegated the running of the plantation to his eldest daughter Isabel, who is also in charge of the household. Isabel is represented as both the good mistress of her slaves and the perfect hostess of her guests. The whip is hardly ever used in *La Luz*; the submissive slaves, who idolise Isabel, are controlled by the *contramayoral* Pedro, a slave himself, since the overseer has been fired because of his harsh and cruel methods. When the girls depart with Leonardo and Meneses to spend Christmas at *La Tinaja*, the coffee plantation is left in Pedro’s care. Isabel tells him: “- Bueno, confío en ti, Pedro. Es

un gran descanso para nosotros, cuando salimos, dejar el cuidado de la casa y de la finca a *un hombre tan racional y honrado como tū*" (399, my emphasis). The contrast between the two slaves named Pedro, in *La Tinaja* and in *La Luz*, could not be greater: whilst the Pedro of the sugar estate is forced to commit suicide as the only way out of his beast-like denigrated existence, his namesake at the coffee plantation is given the responsibility and trust that all human beings deserve. The name of both the estates further reinforces their identification as hell and paradise. A *tinaja* is a large earthenware jar that in this context recalls images and sensations of imprisonment, darkness and heat. Conversely, *luz*, light, denotes brightness, wisdom and happiness.

The representation of Isabel as the good mistress whose slaves look up to her because she takes good care of them can be related to the conception of slaveholding as a modern enactment of a patriarchal institution. The idea of a large family headed by a kind-heartedly patriarch who provides for and bonds with all the members of the family has been shared by many, especially among slaveholders. The Alquiza plantation complies with this understanding of slavery, although, significantly, it is commanded by a woman, Isabel. However, as I will explain later, Isabel is associated in the novel with a masculine role, which is corroborated by her masculine physical appearance.

Cecilia Valdés, therefore, depicts two very different types of slavery: the cruel denigrating slavery on the sugar estates and, on the other hand, the benign regime on the coffee plantations. Bearing in mind that the novel was published in 1882, when slavery was about to be abolished in Cuba and people of colour were fighting for their rightful place in society, the representation of this latter patriarchal form of slaveholding seems a regressive gesture because it does not

attack the principles that justify slavery, that is, the denial of equality among all humankind and every individual's right to freedom. However, there is a certain degree of historical veracity in the distinction, since it is true that slaves on coffee plantations enjoyed better treatment than their counterparts on the sugar estates. Yet, this was more the result of the different production methods of sugar and coffee, the former requiring more intensive exploitation of a larger enslaved labour force, rather than of philanthropic masters such as the *linchetas*. Villaverde's ideology, rooted in the reformist movement of the 1830s, resurfaces here, showing the full contradictions inherent in this project in the 1880s, at a time when the problem had already been surpassed. This obviously diminishes the novel's denunciation of the institution of slavery and racial prejudice, as pointed out by some critics of its time.⁴⁵

Furthermore, Villaverde's contradictory stance is clearly seen in his prologue to the novel, where, when explaining his exile in the United States in the 1840s, he states:

Fuera de Cuba, reformé mi género de vida: troqué mis gustos literarios por más altos pensamientos; pasé del mundo de las ilusiones, al mundo de las realidades; abandoné, en fin, *las frívolas ocupaciones del esclavo en tierra esclava, para tomar parte en las empresas del hombre libre en tierra libre*". (14, my emphasis)

This passage shows that Villaverde regarded the United States as a free country, despite the fact that slavery was not abolished there until 1865. His conception of slavery seems to have been more related to political freedom than to freedom for people of colour.

⁴⁵ See Martín Morúa Delgado (1891) for a contemporary negative critical review of *Cecilia Valdés*, which we will come to below.

Despite these contradictions, *Cecilia Valdés*, mainly through the character of Isabel Ilincheta, raises the moral objections pertinent to slavery. When Isabel observes the treatment of the slaves in *La Tinaja*, the narrator transmits her thoughts as follows:

En las pocas horas de su estadía en el ingenio, había podido observar cosas que, aunque oídas antes, no las creyó nunca reales ni verdaderas. Vio, con sus ojos, que allí reinaba un estado permanente de guerra, guerra sangrienta, cruel, implacable, del negro contra el blanco, del amo contra el esclavo. Vio que el látigo estaba siempre suspendido sobre la cabeza de éste como el solo argumento y el solo estímulo para hacerle trabajar y someterle a los horrores de la esclavitud. Vio que se aplicaban castigos injustos y atroces por toda cosa y a todas horas, que jamás la averiguación del tanto de la culpa precedía a la aplicación de la pena; y que a menudo se aplicaban dos y tres penas diferentes por una misma falta o delito; que el trato era inicuo, sin motivo que le aplacara ni freno que le moderase; que apelaba el esclavo a la fuga o al suicidio en horca como el único medio para librarse de un mal que no tenía cura ni intermitencia. He aquí la síntesis de la vida en el ingenio, según se ofreció a los ojos del alma de Isabel, en toda su desnudez.

Pero nada de esto era lo peor; lo peor, en opinión de Isabel, era la extraña apatía, la impasibilidad, la inhumana indiferencia con que amos o no miraban los sufrimientos, las enfermedades y aún la muerte de los esclavos. (...) Como si no fuera nunca el propósito de los amos corregir y reformar a los esclavos, sino meramente el deseo de satisfacer una venganza. Como si el negro fuese malvado por negro y no por esclavo. Como si tratado como bestia se extrañara que se portara a veces como fiera.

¿Cuál podía ser la causa original de un estado de cosas tan opuesto a todo sentimiento de justicia y moralidad? (...) La costumbre de presenciar actos crueles ¿sería capaz de encallecer la sensibilidad natural del hombre y de la mujer ilustrada y cristiana? ¿Tenía algo que ver en el asunto la antipatía instintiva de raza? ¿No estaba en el interés del amo la conservación o prolongación de la vida del esclavo, capital viviente? Sí lo estaba, a no quedar género de duda; pero eso tenía de perversa la esclavitud que poco a poco e insensiblemente infiltraba su veneno en el alma de los amos, trastornaba todas sus ideas de lo justo y de lo injusto, convertía al hombre en un ser todo iracundia y soberbia, destruyendo de rechazo la parte más bella de la segunda naturaleza de la mujer: la caridad. (479)

This long quote takes us back to the representation of the life on the plantations as hell on earth, as a constantly ongoing war between slaves and their

masters. It summarises the life of the slave on the plantation as a perpetual and atrocious punishment that, rather than stimulating them to work, often led to their escaping and committing suicide. The quote also highlights one of the main issues in all the Cuban anti-slavery narratives, namely the pernicious effects of slavery on the white sectors of society. Slavery is identified with a poison that corrupts and perverts the masters' moral values and sense of justice and fills them with arrogance and wrath. Furthermore, the narrative suggests, through Isabel's thoughts, that this is the worst effect of slavery in society, which links again with the novel's contradictory stance on the institution of slavery. Isabel is referring in this particular episode to Doña Rosa and deplores the latter's lack of fair judgement with her slaves, but the novel is rife with examples of the Gamboas' cruelty towards her slaves. Leonardo, particularly, is repeatedly portrayed as a haughty egotistical individual who, when confronted with setbacks and mishaps, vents his anger on his *calesero* Aponte (Chapter 5, Part 2).

Although the novel shows that urban slaves enjoyed better material conditions than those on the plantations, their situation, nonetheless, is depicted as very precarious. Not only are they targets for their masters' rage and frustrations but they are also perpetually threatened with being relegated to the sugar estate and separated from their families.

María de Regla is a case in point. She was the wet nurse of both Cecilia and Adela, the Gamboas' youngest daughter. When Cecilia was born and her mother became insane, Cándido ordered María de Regla, who had just lost her baby, to breastfeed the girl. Although Doña Rosa was told that the slave was being rented to them by one of Cándido's friends, she always harboured suspicions about a possible affair involving her husband, which led her to resent María de

Regla. When Adela was born, Doña Rosa was unable to nurse her, “por no sentirse en condiciones para desempeñar por entonces aquél, el más dulce de los deberes de madre” (300). María de Regla, who had just given birth to another girl by her husband Dionisio, was required to suckle Adela and feed her own daughter Dolores on cow’s milk. Her maternal instinct and care, the narrator explains, led her to nourish both girls, disobeying her masters’ orders:

Criábanse las dos hermanas de leche sanas y fuertes. María de Regla no hacía diferencia entre ellas, y así en la mayor armonía habría corrido su infancia si tan luego como empezó a disminuir el sustento no trataran de disputárselo y armar llanto, en especial la blanca, no acostumbrada a semejante división. (301)

Once Doña Rosa found out and when Adela’s nursing had finished, María de Regla was punished and sent to *La Tinaja*. Separated from her family and having to live in dreadful conditions, she is still working as a nurse on the plantation when the Gamboas spend Christmas there at the time of the narration, “purgando la culpa de ser madre amorosa, cometida trece años antes de esa fecha” (302). Doña Rosa, however, does not believe that this disproportionate punishment for a fault that never was, is unfair; her alleged Christian charity does not apply to her slaves. She completely disregards the fact that a family has been broken up and repeatedly refuses to allow María de Regla to go back to Havana and be reunited with her husband and children. Although she finally gives in to Adela’s pleading for forgiveness on her wet nurse’s behalf, María de Regla is only given permission to return to the city to find somewhere to rent herself, a practice considered degrading for a slave.

The Free Population of Colour and Racial Prejudice

If slavery and its devastating effects on both the slaves and their masters had already been the main issue in the anti-slavery narratives of the 1830s, members of the free population of colour appeared for the first time as protagonists in Cuban and Latin American literature in *Cecilia Valdés*.

As we have seen, in the early 1800s free people of colour had become an important sector both in number and as an economic force in Cuban colonial society. Unlike Dorotea in *Francisco* and Camila in *El negro Francisco*, in *Cecilia Valdés*, not only the mulatto protagonist who gives her name to the novel is free but also the whole society with which she mingles and which is also depicted in detail in the novel. A range of different professions, which came to be almost exclusively performed by free blacks and mulattoes, is portrayed: musicians, carpenters, barbers, tailors, shoe-makers, street-vendors and many other craftsmen and manual workers populate the narrative. In the same manner as the stratified white segment of the population, the free coloured group is also divided into different strata, in this case according to their different shades of skin colour and their material progress. The formal ball, organised on 23 December 1830, shows the different gradations within this group, which generally repeated the values and behaviour inherent in white society and took ostentation even further as a symbol of their achieved status. Cecilia's attitude at the ball is a case in point. As the narrator explains: "Cualquier mediano observador pudo advertir que, a vueltas de la amabilidad empleada por Cecilia con todos los que se le acercaban, hacía marcada diferencia entre los negros y los mulatos" (382).

The character of Cecilia Valdés exemplifies the dilemma faced by the whole mulatto group in search for an own identity: in order to socially advance,

they were forced to leave behind and negate their black origins, not only despising people darker than themselves but also having to accept being despised by whites and whiter mulattoes. Thus, Cecilia states: “No lo niego, mucho que sí me gustan más los blancos que los pardos. Se me caería la cara de vergüenza si me casara y tuviera un hijo saltoatrás” (375).⁴⁶

In the case of Cecilia, her being a woman in a patriarchal society makes matters even more difficult. She lacks a legitimate father and any other male relative who can properly support her and protect her honour, so she has to resort to her only asset, beauty, in order to ascend the social ladder and improve her situation and that of her offspring. Her outstanding beauty is continuously admired throughout the narrative both by the narrator and by different male characters, who cannot resist the captivating influence of this goddess, this Venus, as she is referred to on several occasions. In her grandmother’s words:

Aunque me esté mal decirlo, es lo más lindo en verbo de mujer que se ha visto en el mundo. Nadie diría que tiene de color ni un tantico. *Parece blanca*. Su lindura me tiene loca y fuera de mí. No vivo ni duermo por guardarla de los caballeritos blancos que la persiguen como moscas a la miel”. (339, my emphasis)

As the quote shows, beauty is associated with whiteness and Cecilia is constantly perceived as beautiful due to her passing as a white. She is even mistaken for her white half-sister Adela Gamboa by both Pimienta and Isabel; their resemblance is also pointed out by María de Regla, who breastfed both sisters. Leonardo’s friend Meneses also mentions the likeness between both girls to him, and even suggests Candido’s parenthood of Cecilia, but Leonardo firmly

⁴⁶ A *saltoatrás* was a child whose African features were more noticeable than those of his/her mixed father or mother.

rebuffs the idea and maintains that his father is also courting her: "A él le gusta la canela tanto como a mí. (...) Y casi, y sin casi, me causa doble inquietud que el músico Pimienta. Lo único que me tranquiliza por esta parte es que ella desdeña tanto a los viejos como desprecia a los mulatos" (413-4).

Cecilia's white complexion and beauty should provide her with a white husband, as her grandmother has maintained since she was a child:

- ¿Y tú te quieres comparar con la hija de *seño* Pimienta [Nemesia], que es una pardita andrajosa, callejera y mal criada? (...) *Tú eres mejor nacida que ella. Tu padre es un caballero blanco*, y algún día has de ser rica y andar en carruaje. ¿Quién sabe? Pero Nemesia no será nunca más de lo que es. Se casará, si se casa, con un mulato como ella, porque su padre tiene más de negro que otra cosa. Tú, al contrario, *eres casi blanca* y puedes aspirar a casarte con un blanco. ¿Por qué no? De menos nos hizo Dios. Y has de saber que *blanco, aunque pobre, sirve para marido; negro o mulato, ni el buey de oro*". (86, my emphasis)

Chepilla's words exemplify again the situation experienced by the black and mulatto population in a slave society such as Cuba, that is, their unconsciously forced compliance with the process of whitening in order to advance *both* socially and economically. As Chepilla states, the fact that Cecilia is the daughter of a white man and, hence, whiter in skin colour, situates her in a higher social position than her friend Nemesia, whose father was a mulatto. However, Cecilia's father, Cándido, silences and denies his paternity and does not recognise her as his daughter, mainly because she belongs to a "race" different to his and therefore does not form part of his family, according to the rationale of the time. In fact, as soon as Cecilia is born, her father orders her grandmother to mark the baby with a bluish half moon on her left shoulder (Chapter 1, Part 1), so that she can be easily recognised at the *Casa Cuna*. Importantly, one of the features

that were commonly accepted as denoting black origin in people who, otherwise, would pass as whites, was their nails' bluish half moons. Cándido, therefore, is marking his daughter as mulatto and jeopardising her welfare, both by not acknowledging his paternity and, symbolically, by tattooing a blue half moon on her, despite his efforts to make her pass as white by leaving her in the *Casa Cuna*.

Cecilia's personal tragedy resides here, in the fact that she looks white ("parece blanca") and is blinded by this illusion, while in the eyes of contemporary society, she is not white and therefore cannot aspire to the same "privileges" as a white woman. The narrator's description of Cecilia reflects the attitudes of wider society. Interestingly, she is only externally characterised: the reader is only presented with her physical description. However, her physical features are rapidly related to personality traits, which was a common practice throughout the nineteenth century. Her beauty is celebrated; yet, her overall appearance denotes something suspicious and disturbing:

Era su tipo el de las vírgenes de los más celebres pintores. Porque a una frente alta, coronada de cabellos negros y copiosos, naturalmente ondeados, unía facciones muy regulares, nariz recta que arrancaba desde el entrecejo, y por quedarse algo corta alzaba un si es no es el labio superior, como para dejar ver dos sartas de dientes menudos y blancos. Sus cejas describían un arco y daban mayor sombra a los ojos negros y rasgados, los cuales eran todo *movilidad y fuego*. La boca tenía chica y los labios llenos, indicando *más voluptuosidad que firmeza de carácter*. Las mejillas llenas y redondas y un hoyuelo en medio de la barba, formaban un conjunto bello, que para ser perfecto sólo faltaba que la expresión fuese menos *maliciosa*, si no *maligna*.

Del cuerpo era más bien delgada que gruesa, para su edad antes baja que crecida, y el torso, visto de espaldas, angosto en el cuello y ancho hacia los hombros, formaba armonía encantadora, aún bajo sus humildes ropas, con el estrecho y flexible talle, que no hay medio de compararle sino con la base de una copa. La complexión podía pasar por saludable, la encarnación viva, hablando en el sentido en que los pintores toman esa palabra, aunque a poco que se fijaba la atención, se advertía en el color del rostro, que sin dejar de ser sanguíneo había demasiado ocre en su composición, y *no resultaba diáfano ni libre*. ¿A qué raza, pues,

pertenecía esta muchacha? Difícil es decirlo. Sin embargo, *a un ojo conocedor* no podía esconderse que sus labios rojos tenían un borde o filete oscuro, y que la iluminación del rostro terminaba en una especie de penumbra hacia el nacimiento del cabello. Su sangre no era pura y bien podía asegurarse que allá en la tercera o cuarta generación estaba mezclada con la etíope.

Pero de cualquier manera, tales eran su belleza peregrina, su alegría y vivacidad, que la revestían de una especie de encanto, no dejando al ánimo vagar sino para admirarla y pasar de largo por las faltas o por las sobras de su progenie. (73-4, *my emphasis*)

Cecilia's description starts as that of an archetypical Western ideal of beauty ("virgen de los más celebres pintores, frente alta, facciones regulares, nariz recta"). However, soon the narrator describes some features that depart from this model: eyes full of passion ("movilidad, fuego"), full lips that suggest voluptuousness. We have to bear in mind that, on a formal level, in Latin American societies the construction of womanhood has been formulated following the model of the Virgin Mary, that is, a model that supposedly is both virgin and mother.⁴⁷ Female sexuality has, thus, been rejected and it has only been socially sanctioned when related to motherhood. Therefore, Cecilia's portrayal as a sensual, passionate woman makes her socially objectionable and morally dubious, hence the malignant expression that the narrator attributes to her.

The narrator goes on with the description to cast suspicions on her "race", which seems difficult to establish: however, an expert's eye ("un ojo conocedor"), such as the narrator's, is able to discern her black ancestors. The words used to explain her biracial origin are fraught with negative connotations: "el color del rostro (...) no resultaba ni diáfano ni libre, una especie de penumbra, sangre no pura." However, her beauty and charm is such that it is easy to ignore the flaws of her forebears ("pasar de largo por las faltas o por las sobras de su progenie"). This

⁴⁷ For a full elaboration and explanation of *marianismo*, see Stevens (1973).

last sentence gives the clue to understand the disturbing features of Cecilia's beauty and personality. Throughout the nineteenth century, in societies such as the Latin American ones where different races came into contact and produced mixed-race descendants, a debate about whether racial mixing destroyed civilisation or actually invigorated and stimulated society, ensued. As Sollors (1997) has proved in his study of biracial literature, in many nineteenth-century novels, mulattoes have been depicted as childless individuals with low life expectancy, a symbolic representation of the degenerative process that racial mixing brought about. This is not the case in *Cecilia Valdés*, however, where mulattoes are generally portrayed as sensible, healthy individuals who are the ones who survive in the corrupted colonial society of Cuba. Yet, in Cecilia's case, her black ascendancy is seen to have contaminated her and caused all the flaws that the narrator described. Thus, although Cecilia is outstandingly beautiful because of her white origin and is mistaken for her half-sister Adela, her other racial origin makes her morally blemished. In fact, her characterisation throughout the novel oscillates between the two traditional Christian paradigms of Eve and the Virgin Mary. She is temptation, since "no la había más hermosa ni más capaz de transtornar el juicio de un hombre enamorado" (100), but she is also the *Virgencita de bronce*, "pura y linda" (75). As Aedo (1995:12-3) states when explaining Cecilia's characterisation:

Psicológicamente y moralmente Cecilia se debate entre los modos de ser representados por la Virgen María y por Venus: entre espíritu y sensualidad, entre la casa y la calle, entre el pecado y la virtud. (...) Hay un solo momento en la historia que ella asume los valores morales cristianos, pero lo hace de un modo que ratifica su condición de pecadora, pues actúa identificándose con la prostituta bíblica María Magdalena.

However, while her explicit identification with María Magdalena when she washes her grandmother's feet signals her sinful condition, it also suggests that society is not exempt from blame regarding her behaviour, as in the biblical episode. Therefore, although there is no doubt that Cecilia's characterisation is filled with racial prejudice, the narrative also portrays the socio-historical conditions which lead her and other coloured women to use their beauty and body as their only possible means of social betterment in colonial slave society. Thus, the epigraph that introduces Chapter 2, Part 1, in which Cecilia is first introduced to the reader as an eleven-year-old girl, reads as follows,

Sola soy, sola nací
Sola me tuvo mi madre
Sola me tengo de andar
Como la pluma en el aire. (72)

Alone, *sola*, is the adjective that probably best describes Cecilia. Both fatherless and motherless, she is taken care of by her grandmother, Chepilla. The latter is also in charge of her insane daughter Charito, Cecilia's mother, secluded in a hospital. After a life of suffering and distress, Chepilla has taken refuge in religion as her only consolation in her life. Once there is no longer hope for Charito's recovery and her death is imminent, Chepilla no longer feels the strength to continue and dies (Chapter 2, Part 4).

The narrator points out that the lack of a parental figure, who could provide for the women in the family, has deprived Cecilia of receiving the good upbringing and education that girls should receive:

Entre tanto la chica crecía gallarda y lozana, sin cuidarse de las investigaciones y murmuraciones de que era objeto, y sin caer en la cuenta

de que su vida callejera, que a ella le parecía muy natural, inspiraba sospechas y temores, si no compasión a algunas viejas; que sus gracias nacientes y el descuido y libertad con que vivía alimentaban esperanzas de bastardo linaje en mancebos corazones, que latían al verla atravesar la plazuela del Cristo cuando a la carrerita y con la sutileza de la zorra hurtaba un bollo o un chicharrón a las negras que de parte de noche allí se ponen a freírlos; (...).

A pesar de aquella vida suya y de aquel traje, parecía tan pura y linda, que estaba uno tentado a creer que jamás dejaría de ser lo que era, cándida niña en cabello, que se preparaba a entrar en el mundo por una puerta al parecer de oro, y que vivía sin tener sospecha siquiera de su existencia. Sin embargo, las calles de la ciudad, las plazas, los establecimientos públicos, como se apuntó más arriba, fueron su escuela, y en tales sitios, según es de presumir, su tierno corazón, formado acaso para dar abrigo a las virtudes, que son el más bello encanto de las mujeres, bebió a torrentes de las aguas empozoñadas del vicio, se nutrió desde temprano con las escenas de impudicia que ofrece diariamente un pueblo soez y desmoralizado. (74-5)

As Martínez-Fernández (1995) explains, according to the prevailing etiquette in Havana in the nineteenth century, “ladies” were not allowed to walk on the streets. They had to stay at home behind the bars of their windows, out of reach of the much larger male population, although not out of sight. They could only move about freely throughout the streets of Havana when riding, accompanied by female friends, on *volantes*, *quitrines* and other horse-drawn carriages. This, however, did not apply to women of colour or others pretending to the title of “lady”. Thus, in Cecilia’s case, her continuous presence in the streets contributes to her being racially and morally suspicious, which distances her even further from her illusion of being a “lady”. But, as the narrative suggests, the problem lies more with the society she lives in (“un pueblo soez y desmoralizado”) than with herself. The guilt rests with a society that sanctions relationships between white men and coloured women and the silencing of their offspring’s paternity; furthermore, a society in which social and economic

position and betterment depend more on lineage and race than on personal effort, as portrayed in the novel through the characters of Pimienta and Leonardo.

Taking into account all of Cecilia's traits that I have just explained, we can conclude that she epitomises the social imagery of coloured women in colonial nineteenth-century Cuba and in Europe. In order to better understand this stereotyping, it is worth noting here an alleged scientific-academic essay on the idiosyncrasy of the Cuban mulatto woman written by the Puerto Rican Eduardo Ezponda and published in Madrid in 1878. In this essay, entitled *La mulata. Estudio fisiológico, social y jurídico*, Ezponda describes mulatto women as captivating beings who corrupt and drive men insane as the mermaids did with Ulysses in Homer's *Odyssey* :

De cualquier modo que se hable o se mueva [la mulata] derrama en torno suyo un raudal de liviandades, tan hechiceras como inefables, y que brotan de su índole con absoluta espontaneidad, inoculándonos el delirio y fascinándonos como las sirenas de la fábula. Mirarla es apetecerla. En mirándola nos cautiva irremisiblemente. Para que hoy canonizáramos un José, habríamos de someter a prueba de una mulata su castidad. (...) la respiración de la mulata es anhelante, sus ojos húmedos fulguran luminosos destellos, sus mejillas se encienden como grana, despide su piel un fuego calenturiento, y sus labios se entreabren cual si estuviera devorada por una sed insaciable, mostrando el marfil de su dentadura y bosquejando la imagen del éxtasis. (...) La mulata dice: "vivir es gozar, gozar es bailar" con todos los resortes del cuerpo, con todas sus fibras, con todos los impulsos del alma. (...) -Sin género alguno de espiritualismo; sin aspiraciones de ningún género; sin estímulos eficaces para ser honrada; sin el freno de la opinión, que la condena inexorable ántes de haber delinquido, su horóscopo la lleva forzosamente a la inmoralidad. Ingenua, libertina ó sierva, sucumbe á las primeras insinuaciones aduladoras que la dirigen, (...), y sucumbe sucesivamente á dos, á tres, y á más, interin no se marchitan sus atractivos. Su vida no fue para crear sentimientos, sino para devorar sensaciones momentáneas. (...) A la mulata se codicia, se compra, se posee, mas no se ama. (...) Es la flor que arrancamos del tallo, ansiosos de gustar su aroma, y que luego arrojamos al suelo deshojada. Segregadas en la sección ínfima, y no llegando hasta ellas nuestra civilización, nacen, viven y mueren sin conocer la dignidad humana. Sumidas en su materialismo y sojuzgadas, no comprenden la elevación de

los sentimientos, ni la honestidad de los goces, dan rienda libre a los instintos lúbricos, (...). (13, 16, 17-8, 24, 20-1)

Hence, the prevailing racial stereotyping made of mulatto women beautiful sexual animals that white men wished to subdue. They were considered passionate and voluptuous beings that could bewitch men. However, their beauty was flawed and they were just subdued and momentarily enjoyed. The proverb “No hay tamarindo dulce ni mulata señorita” typified the attitude towards coloured women in colonial Cuba. They were lovers, but not wives, as Ezponda suggests. The fact that most prostitutes were black slave women forced into the profession by their masters, due to the high profitability of such activity in a society where the majority of the population were males, reinforced their stigma.⁴⁸

Therefore, in the novel, Cándido Gamboa says about his daughter Cecilia: “la Valdés le sonsacaba a su hijo Leonardo, le seducía con sus artimañas, y no le dejaba seguir los estudios de derecho, y quería saber qué remedio podía poner la justicia a tamaño escándalo” (591). Although he contradictorily also acknowledges that Cecilia is an honest, decent girl who has been well-brought up by her grandmother and whose behaviour is, so far, irreproachable, he also observes that because she is of biracial origin, “como de raza híbrida, no hay que fiar mucho en su virtud. Es mulatilla y ya se sabe que hija de gata, ratones mata, y que por do salta la cabra, salta la que mama” (594). She is, therefore, guilty before “sinning” due to her biracial roots.

⁴⁸ The construction of the sexualised female black body was not unique to Cuba and to other societies where the white and black “races” were co-habiting, especially with the latter population subjected to slavery. As Gilman (1985) has proved, the representation of the African as a sexualised being/body was commonplace in European art, medicine and literature throughout the nineteenth century.

The above quote by Ezponda also highlights another characteristic traditionally associated with coloured women in nineteenth-century Cuba, their lack of a spiritual side as a legacy of their inferior black origin. They were considered atavistic beings dominated by passion rather than reason, by material interests rather than spiritual ones; hence, their inability to inspire true, decent feelings in the white male. Their lives concentrated on physical, bodily pleasures rather than on more elevated, spiritual enjoyment. This is the origin of their alleged insatiable sexual appetite and their love of dancing and material objects such as money, clothes and so on, which finally provoked their downfall. Their attitude towards life, according to the convention and as Ezponda explains, is encapsulated in the motto "vivir es gozar, gozar es bailar".

However, as already mentioned, the social reality that explains the situation of coloured women in nineteenth-century Cuba is also portrayed and explained in *Cecilia Valdés*, as well as in Ezponda's essay. With no money, education or male relative to support them and imbued with racial prejudices towards black and mulatto males, their only possibility for social and racial betterment is to conquer a white man, preferably as a husband but if not as lover, as it is suggested by the popular maxim "Rather mistress of a white than wife of a negro", or in Chepilla's works "blanco, aunque pobre, sirve para marido; negro o mulato, ni el buey de oro" (86). Cecilia's youth and beauty are, thus, her only weapons, although they turn out to be the reason for her destruction. She repeats the tragic path of her mother and her grandmother in becoming involved in a concubinage with a white man and in her pregnancy, for her illegitimate daughter is left fatherless as she had been earlier. Fernando O'Reilly, the Mayor of Havana,

sums up Cecilia's predicament as he explains to Cándido Gamboa late in the novel:

Confesemos también que nuestras mulatas, generalmente hablando, son frágiles por naturaleza y por el deseo, ingénito en las criaturas humanas, de ascender o mejorar la condición. Y he aquí la clave para descifrar el por qué de su afición a los blancos y de su esquivez para con los hombres de su propia raza.(...) En todo país de esclavos no es uno ni elevado el tipo de la moralidad; las costumbres tienden, al contrario, a la laxitud, y reinan, además, ideas raras, tergiversadas, monstruosas, por decirlo así, respecto al honor y a la virtud de las mujeres. Especialmente no se cree, ni se espera tampoco, que las de raza mezclada sean capaces de guardar recato, de ser honestas o esposas legítimas de nadie. En concepto del vulgo, nacen predestinadas para concubinas de los hombres de raza superior. Tal, en efecto, parece que es su destino. (594-5, 598)

As the quote underscores, it is the social and historical environment that determines the situation and attitude of coloured women, in particular, and people of colour, in general. Slavery has thwarted morals, not only, however, for the people of colour, who reject their own kin, but also for the whites, who are no longer able to sympathise with other human beings and prevent the harm and suffering that they inflict on them. It is important that the person who states these words in the novel is the Mayor of Havana, a *criollo*, who blames slavery for the moral corruption prevailing in colonial Cuba.

Cecilia is not, however, the only mulatto woman portrayed in *Cecilia Valdés*. Her friend Nemesia, who also secretly aspires to conquer Leonardo, finds herself in a similar situation. Her darker skin and lesser beauty, however, make her more aware of their difficult position in society:

- Mas no puedo olvidar el dicho de *seña Clara*, la mujer de Uribe: cada uno con su cada uno. (...) *¿Seña Clara* no tiene más experiencia que nosotras? Desde luego. Es mayor de edad y ha visto doble mundo que tú y que yo. Pues si a menudo repite este dicho, razón buena ha de tener. Aquí,

internos, *naiden* me lo ha contado, pero yo sé que a *seña* Clara siempre le gustaron más los blancos que los pardos, y bien durita ya se casó con *seño* Uribe. Por supuesto, llevó más pelos y desengaños que pelos tiene en la cabeza, y por eso ahora se consuela repitiendo a las muchachas como tú y como yo: cada uno con su cada uno. ¿Entiendes? (374)

The failure of coloured people, both free and slave, to develop a consciousness and an identity of their own helped to perpetuate the social order, based on racial difference, which prevented blacks and mulattoes from truly advancing in society. Furthermore, Villaverde's novel depicts how racial prejudices distorted values and morals, both amongst the whites and amongst the people of colour. For example, María de Regla has had two children, Dolores and Tirso. The girl is black, born to María de Regla's legitimate husband, Dionisio. The boy, however, is mulatto, born to a white man with whom the slave nurse had an affair on the sugar plantation. The narrator explains:

De aquí provenía el que ellos no se viesen como tales hermanos y que María de Regla quisiese más a Tirso, que mejoraba la condición, que a Dolores, la cual perpetuaba el odioso color, causa aparente y principal, creía ella, de su inacabable esclavitud. Pero aún en ese particular estaba María de Regla condenada a ver defraudadas sus más risueñas ilusiones de madre. Tirso, su preferido, no la quería, mas se avergonzaba de haber nacido de negra, enfermera del ingenio por añadidura. Al contrario Dolores adoraba a su madre. (303)

Furthermore, Chepilla, when explaining to Doctor Montes de Oca the reasons for Charito's insanity, claims that she "tomó la locura con la hija, diciendo que como había nacido tenía a menos el tener madre de color" (340). Although Charo's mental problems are explained elsewhere by the doctor as caused by meningitis, Chepilla's belief highlights a common attitude of the time, namely that whiter offspring despised and denied their darker progenitors. The

reverse process, the forced denial of motherhood by darker-skinned women, was also a common feature in slave societies, so that mothers did not jeopardise the possibilities of advancement for their children.

At the beginning of the novel there is a ball, *baile de cuna*, organised by the lavish Mercedes Ayala, "mulata rica y rumbosa" (Chapter 4-6, Part 1). The *bailes de cuna* were parties organised by mulatto women to which white men were invited so that they could become intimate, as in the case between Cecilia and Leonardo. Traditionally, the spatial disposition at the *baile de cuna* illustrated the different positions in society of the racial groups. The narrator describes the party as follows:

Acabada la danza, se inundó de nuevo la sala y comenzaron a formarse los grupos en torno de la mujer preferida por bella, por amable o por coqueta. Pero en medio de la aparente confusión que entonces reinaba en aquella casa, podía observar cualquiera que, *al menos entre los hombres de color y los blancos, se hallaba establecida una línea divisoria que, tácitamente y al parecer sin esfuerzo, respetaban de una y otra parte.* Verdad es que unos y otros se entregaban al goce del momento con tal ahínco, que no es mucho de extrañar olvidaran por entonces *sus mutuos celos y odio mutuo.* Además de eso, los blancos no abandonaron el comedor y aposento principal, a cuyas piezas acudían las mulatas que con ellos tenían amistad, o cualquier otro género de relación, o deseaban tenerla; lo cual no era ni nuevo ni extraño, atendida su marcada predilección. (109, my emphasis)

The paragraph denotes one of the main rivalries amongst the Cuban colonial population, that between free black and mulatto men and their white counterparts. Their different social status, based exclusively on their skin colour, is nowhere more apparent than in their relationship with black and mulatto women. The former were always in a disadvantageous situation, or had no chance at all, even if they clearly merited being in a different position. Thus, Leonardo, albeit good-looking, is characterised as a superficial, selfish, arrogant spoilt child

who wastes all his mother's money on betting and who is not able to make anything beneficial of his life. On the other hand, José Dolores Pimienta, Cecilia's mulatto suitor, is a brave, gallant, hard-working man who supports his sister with his music and his work and who helps Cecilia throughout her grandmother's illness and death purely out of generosity of spirit. Cecilia does not hesitate to praise Pimienta's bravery and behaviour, and to show her appreciation for all his assistance. However, as she states, "sólo le falta la cara blanca para ser un caballero en cualquier parte" (581).

This rivalry between the white and the coloured males is explicitly and daringly portrayed in *Cecilia Valdés*; the second part of the novel starts with a conversation between the tailor, Uribe, and José Dolores Pimienta, who is a trainee in his tailor's shop. Both are busily working because that night the *Sociedad Filarmónica* holds its Christmas ball and all the white young masters need their new clothes ready. Whilst working on Leonardo's jacket, their discussion shows the deep resentment they entertain for whites:

- (...) ¿Qué remedio, José Dolores? Disimula, aguanta. Haz como el perro con las avispas, enseñar los dientes para que crean que te ríes. ¿No ves que ellos son el martillo y nosotros el yunque? Los blancos vinieron primero y se comen las mejores tajadas; nosotros los de color vinimos después y gracias que roemos los huesos. Deja correr, chinito, que *alguna vez nos ha de tocar a nosotros. Esto no puede durar siempre*. Haz lo que yo. ¿Tú no me ves besar muchas manos que deseo ver cortadas? Te figurarás que me sale de adentro. Ni lo pienses, porque lo cierto y verídico es que, en verbo de blanco, no quiero ni el papel. (...)

- Lo que yo sostengo es, que ni a V., ni a mí, ni... a nuestros hijos, según van las cosas, nos tocará ser martillo. Y es muy duro, durísimo, insufrible, *señó Uribe* - agregó José Dolores, y se le nubló la vista y le temblaron los labios -, que ellos nos arrebatan las de color, y nosotros no podamos ni mirar para las mujeres blancas. (...) ¿No tienen los blancos suficientes con las suyas? ¿Por qué han de venir a quitarnos las nuestras? ¿Con qué derecho hacen ellos eso? ¿Con el derecho de blancos? ¿Quién les ha dado semejante derecho? Nadie. (Chapter 1, Part 2, pp 201-7, my emphasis)

Undoubtedly the conversation between the two characters voices the feelings and desires of many people of colour in nineteenth-century Cuba and shows their frustration due to the state of affairs that Pimienta rhetorically questions. However, it also verbalises the fear of many whites of black and mulatto rebellions on the island, which was one of the catalysts in the formulation of the reformist project advocated by Saco, Del Monte and Villaverde. The fact that it is the tailor Uribe who utters those words in the novel (“alguna vez nos ha de tocar a nosotros”) would immediately remind contemporary readers of the Conspiracy of *La Escalera*, of which Uribe was a victim. Furthermore, by introducing Uribe as a character in the novel, Villaverde actually breaks with the time of the narration (Luis 1990). Uribe was historically a tailor for whites, but he achieved his prominence between 1833 and 1844 when he was arrested for his alleged participation in the Conspiracy of *la Escalera* and subsequently committed suicide. As the narrator explicitly states, most of the mulattoes who attend the formal ball for the free people of colour at Christmas, in Chapter 17 (Part 3), were also victims of the events in 1844, which crushed the incipient middle class of free people of colour. Many of the white intellectual *criollos* who gathered around Domingo del Monte were also forced to leave the country as a consequence of the alleged conspiracy, which repressed any anti-slavery sentiment for the following decade.

The rivalry between the races was not only confined to the male group. In a patriarchal society where women's lives were always dependent on their male relatives, white and coloured women were also constantly competing for the attention of the white men. As Martínez-Fernández (1995:38) explains, the

marked emphasis on make-up, fine clothing, elaborate coiffures and other attention-catching aspects of the Habanera's material culture and behaviour, paralleled those of other slave-based societies, such as the southern belle in the United States. In both Cuba and the South of the United States, white women of the upper classes struggled to look their best as they faced the competition of women of colour for the attraction of white men. *Cecilia Valdés* explains in detail the elaborate dresses and hair styles that white elite women wore, the fashion magazines they were keen on and their need to find a husband, as in Isabel's case. But mulatto women did not lag behind: Cecilia's appearance when she attends the *baile de cuna* and the formal ball organised by the free people of colour bears comparison to those of the upper-class white women.

However, there is a common feature among all female protagonists in the novel, namely their jealousy. All are portrayed as exceptionally jealous women who are in a constant state of distrust towards their partners, whom they perceive as perpetually hunted by other women. Doctor Montes de Oca's wife, Agueda Valdés, described in the novel as a very beautiful woman, typifies the attitude of all the female characters of the novel:

Respecto de su fisonomía moral, el rasgo más prominente, a lo menos aquel de que nos es dado hablar en estas páginas, eran los celos. Su propia sombra se los inspiraba, no embargante que su marido carecía de aquellas prendas físicas que hacen atractivo al hombre a los ojos de las mujeres. Pero era médico, célebre y rico. Y ella tenía muy pobre opinión de las hembras, diciendo a menudo que no había hombre feo para las enamoradas y ambiciosas. (550)

The jealousy springs from their rivalry, since all of them, white and coloured, find themselves in the same predicament, i.e., their need to find and

hold on to a husband, so that they can be provided for in a patriarchal society that allows little or no space for independent women. Thus, Cecilia and Doña Rosa are constantly jealous of Leonardo and Cándido, respectively, and it is this jealousy that precipitates the tragic ending of the novel. The epigraph to the last chapter of the novel, “El mayor monstruo, los celos”, extracted from Calderón de la Barca’s play *El mayor monstruo del mundo*, foreshadows the imminent tragedy.

When Rosa finally has her suspicions confirmed about her husband’s affair with Charito through Doctor Montes de Oca’s words, her jealousy and thirst for revenge are such that her thoughts and feelings are explained by the narrator in the following manner:

La verificación de continuas sospechas, el aguijón de celos antiguos y siempre vivos. (...) Debía de ser una mulata, pues que su madre era casi negra. Se hallaba gravemente enferma, el médico la había desahuciado, estaría hecha un esqueleto, fea, asquerosa, moriría ciertamente en breve; pero había sido su rival, había gozado a la par con ella del amor y de las caricias de Gamboa (...) Ya era poco menos que inútil la venganza. La muerte se interpondría en breve entre la esposa y la manceba. ¡Qué desesperación! ¡Qué tumulto de pasiones! (345)

Although she is said to have married Gamboa out of love and against her family’s wishes, she is never able to forgive him and seeks revenge on him. Her failed marriage leads her to pin all her hopes on her son Leonardo. He becomes the centre of her life and she directs all her affection towards him, spoiling him in the process:

Vino el joven, y al punto Doña Rosa, rodeándole con sus brazos, le cubrió la frente de besos y lágrimas. Dábale entre tanto los epítetos más cariñosos y le decía: Hijo del alma, ¿dónde estabas? ¿Por qué huías de las caricias de tu madre? Mi amor, mi consuelo, no te apartes de mi lado. ¿No sabes que tu triste madre no tiene otro apoyo que el tuyo? Tú no mientes, tú dices siempre verdad, tú eres el único en esta casa que conoce la que vale una

madre y esposa leal. Mi vida, mi corazón, mi fiel amigo, mi toda ya en el mundo, ¿qué, ni quién tendrá bastante poder ahora para arrancarte de mis brazos? Sólo la muerte. (349)

As Aedo (1995) argues, drawing on Neuman's explanation of motherhood, Doña Rosa becomes the epitome of one of the facets of the Great Mother, namely the Terrible Mother who distorts motherhood with her obsessions and possessiveness and transforms it into a destructive relationship with overtones of incestuous desires. Her jealousy is used by Leonardo to help him regain Cecilia, who has been secluded by Cándido in an asylum in order to prevent the incestuous liaison between brother and sister. Leonardo tells his mother about how Cándido has been giving financial support to Cecilia and her grandmother, how he has fought against their relations and always kept an eye on the *mulata*. Doña Rosa's suspicion of a new infidelity of her husband with another coloured woman seems to be confirmed and she decides to aid her son in order to take revenge on her husband:

[I]rritada la madre contra el padre por la supuesta persistente violación de la fe conyugal, en venganza o represalia tramó en secreto con el hijo la mina que debía hacer saltar los parapetos levantados por D. Cándido en defensa del honor de Cecilia Valdés. A su ejecución comprometió doña Rosa su dinero y su influjo. (624)

It is she who gives Leonardo the money he needs to bribe the officials to release Cecilia from the *Convento de las Recogidas*; she also helps him to set up a house to take Cecilia and provide for her and their daughter. And it is she who finally convinces him of the need to immediately marry Isabel Ilincheta, once she has found out about Cándido's true relationship to Cecilia. It is Doña Rosa, thus, who arranges Leonardo's marriage, which will end up with his death. In her

obsessive revenge against Cándido, Rosa uses Leonardo and becomes the agent who motivates her son's behaviour, which again results in his murder.

Doña Rosa's lack of judgement leads her family to destruction and extinction, since the Gamboas are left without an heir to their title and fortune. But, as the narrator explains, her jealousy and thirst for revenge are exacerbated by underlying racial tensions:

... los celos de Doña Rosa, *excitados a lo sumo por el orgullo de raza y de señora casada*, por sus ideas sobre la virtud de la mujer y los deberes de la madre de familia, la ocupaban de manera y ofuscaban hasta tal punto su razón, que no la permitían notar que su marido estaba plenamente arrepentido de sus anteriores faltas, y que para enmendarlas ponía todos los medios que estaban a su alcance. Mientras dicha señora justamente ofendida, le echaba en cara sus extravíos de mozo, no veía que laceraba una a una todas las fibras de su corazón; no veía que ya no existían ni podían existir después los motivos de celos que tanto la habían desazonado; no veía, en fin, que deplorando el pasado desde el fondo de su alma D. Cándido de algún tiempo a esta parte sólo trataba de evitar un gran escándalo, una catástrofe en no lejano porvenir. (358-9, my emphasis)

The narrator, therefore, blames Doña Rosa for the destruction of her family. However, it should be borne in mind that the tragedy actually stems from Cándido's silencing of his paternity of Cecilia, both at the time of her birth and later on when he could still prevent the incestuous affair between brother and sister, and from society's compliance with his silence. However, the final episodes in the novel portray him as a distressed, repentant individual who is doing his best to avoid the disastrous outcome, whilst his wife, in her curtailment of her husband's authority, is the one who is to be held responsible. The novel, therefore, ultimately backs the *pater familias'* authority, which should not be challenged, especially by senseless, foolish women.

Cecilia is also portrayed as a proud and jealous woman who constantly distrusts Leonardo. However, when she finds out about his marriage to Isabel, her hate for his deceit and betrayal is not directed towards him. Instead, she wants revenge on Isabel, whom she sees as the obstacle that has prevented the fulfilment of her relationship with Leonardo and the achievement of a better and more stable social and economic position. The narrator explains that “la orgullosa y vengativa mulata”, who transformed from a sheep into a lion, asks Pimienta to prevent the marriage. When he is leaving, she, “con el pelo desmadejado y el traje suelto”, shouts at him the famous words “¡ A ella, a él no!” (637), which Pimienta does not seem to hear.

Although Cecilia is portrayed according to the racial stereotyping of *la mulata* as a revengeful and proud being, her mistrust of Leonardo is justified.⁴⁹ As Martínez Alier (1974) explains, in a patriarchal slave society such as nineteenth-century Cuba, whilst white women’s sexuality was strictly controlled by their male relatives in order to preserve the family’s honour, that is, racial purity and social status, coloured women, on the other hand, were constantly victims of sexual liaisons with white men, which hardly ever led to marriage, as in Cecilia’s case. Furthermore, due to the macho nature of Cuban society, the destruction of other families’ honour would enhance one’s own family, so that men’s affairs with coloured women were not only common but also socially sanctioned, even when extramarital. Indeed, a man’s virility was asserted through his numerous conquests and sexual affairs, whilst women with honour should resist their advances until marriage was secured. Thus, Leonardo Gamboa proudly states,

⁴⁹ In the aforementioned essay on the idiosyncrasy of the mulatto woman by Ezponda (1878:17), he states: “La mulata hereda la altivez castellana, y no es maravilla que tenga sus arranques orgullosos cuando se la ultraja, mereciendo la calificación de *cachorra*.”

“me peno por una muchacha mientras me dice que no; en cuanto me dice que sí, aunque sea más linda que María Santísima, se me caen a los pies las alas del corazón” (157).

The different status and conceptions about white and coloured women in Cuban society is depicted in *Cecilia Valdés* through the opposite characters of Cecilia and Isabel. When Leonardo explains to his friend Meneses what he feels for each of them, he is in fact articulating the prevailing social imagery concerning white and non-white females on the island:

La de allá [Cecilia] me trae siempre loco, me ha hecho cometer más de una locura y todavía me hará cometer muchas más. Con todo, no la amo, ni la amaré nunca como amo a la de acá [Isabel]... Aquella es todo pasión y fuego, es mi tentadora, un diablito en figura de mujer, la Venus de las mula... ¿Quién es bastante fuerte para resistírsele? ¿Quién puede acercársele sin quemarse? ¿Quién al verla no más no siente hervirle la sangre en las venas? ¿Quién la oye decir te quiero, y no se le trastorna el cerebro cual si bebiera vino? Ninguna de esas sensaciones es fácil experimentar al lado de Isabel. Bella, elegante, amable, instruida, severa, posee la virtud del erizo, que punza con sus espinas al que osa tocarla. Estatua en fin, de mármol por lo rígida por lo fría, inspira respeto, admiración, cariño tal vez, no amor loco, no una pasión volcánica.

(...) El que se casa con Isabel está seguro de que no padecerá de ... quebraderos de cabeza, aunque sea más celoso que un turco. Con las mujeres como C... el peligro es constante, es fuerza andar siempre cual vendedor de yesca. No me ha pasado jamás por la mente casarme con la de allá, ni con ninguna que se le parezca, y sin embargo, aquí me tienes que me entran sudores cada vez que pienso que ella puede estar coqueteando ahora mismo con un pisaverde o con el mulato músico.

(...) La de la Habana será mi Venus citérea, la de Alquizar mi ángel custodio, mi monjita Ursulina, mi hermana de la caridad. (...) Para gozar mucho en la vida el hombre no debe casarse con la mujer que adora, sino con la mujer que quiere. (414-5)

The *mulata* Cecilia, thus, is associated with frivolity, voluptuousness, temptation, passion, irrationality, fire and, ultimately, madness; she is a beautiful goddess of love who drives white men crazy, and who also brings about their

destruction and that of their society. She is a nineteenth-century *femme fatale* who destabilises the social and economic order by using her sexuality in order to blur racial boundaries and achieve social advancement for herself and her descendants. Although the novel sets this conception of mulatto women within the historical and socio-economic circumstances that determined it, Cecilia's portrait is still quite ambivalent and she is punished at the end of the novel for her transgression: she is sentenced to be secluded at the *Hospital de Paula* for a year as an accomplice to Leonardo's murder. However, the punishment also allows her to be reunited with her mother, whom she meets in the Hospital. Therefore, although Cecilia is penalised by the authorities and society, it seems that the narrative actually postulates a higher form of justice by which Cecilia is not guilty.

Cecilia's ambivalent characterisation is also linked to one of the long traditions of the Christian Western world, which conceives of women as weak but tempting beings who have caused mankind's sufferings and evil. She is the daughter of the biblical Eve who has disrupted the social order. Her rival Isabel, on the other hand, represents the other female in the Western tradition who has been able to reconcile humankind with their God, namely the Virgin Mary. She is portrayed as a pious and affectionate woman who, as we have seen, acts like a good, compassionate mother to her slaves on her coffee plantation, *La Luz*. Her slaves, accordingly, idolise and revere her. Her physical description is in stark contrast to Cecilia's:

Era alta, bien formada, esbelta, y vestía elegantemente, conque siendo muy discreta y amable está dicho que debía llamar la atención de la gente culta. Hasta la suave palidez de su rostro, la expresión lánguida de sus claros ojos y finos labios, contribuía a hacer atractiva a una joven que, por otra parte, no tenía nada de hermosa. Su encanto consistía en su palabra y en sus modos. (...)

No había nada de redondez femenil, y, por supuesto, ni de voluptuosidad, ya lo hemos indicado, en las formas de Isabel. (...) Para que nada faltase al aire varonil y resuelto de su persona, debe añadirse que sombreaba su boca expresiva un bozo oscuro y sedoso, al cual sólo faltaba una tonsura frecuente para convertirse en bigote negro y poblado. Tras ese bozo asomaban a veces unos dientes blancos, chicos y parejos, y he aquí lo que constituía la magia de la sonrisa de Isabel. (232-3)

In contrast to Cecilia, then, she is described as distant and asexual, like the Virgin Mary and, consequently, Leonardo refers to her as “mi ángel custodio, mi monjita Ursulina, mi hermana de la caridad”. She has been educated in a school run by nuns and her charm is her intelligence and manners, not her feminine attributes. She is rational and sensible, performing tasks and duties traditionally associated with men, such as the running of the plantation. She is physically very active, does a lot of sports and takes pleasure in nature, whose beauty and harmony she is able to appreciate and enjoy. All these qualities are indeed corroborated by her masculine physical appearance, since the narrative supports the idea that physical features denote moral values and attitudes, as already explained when dealing with the characterisation of people of colour.

Despite her being morally superior to Leonardo, Isabel agrees to marry him. She is painfully conscious of his shallowness and their differences, as these words clearly show: “¿Por qué quiero yo a Leonardo? ¿Qué hay de común entre mis ideas y las suyas? ¿Llegaremos alguna vez a ponernos de acuerdo sobre el trato que ha de darse a los negros?” (479-80). However, she consents to marry him due both to the pressures of a society that does not condone independent women and to the difficult economic straits her family is submerged in because of the ruin of the coffee plantations. After Leonardo’s murder, Isabel becomes a nun, since there does not seem to be a position for her in the world into which she was

born. As with the Virgin Mary, her destiny is to dedicate her life to God; her name, Isabel, which in Hebrew means consecrated by oath to God, symbolises her fate.

Importantly, if Cecilia and Isabel represent opposite female models, Adela Gamboa seems to be able to combine and harmonise both. As already explained, her physical resemblance to her half-sister Cecilia is such that many characters confuse them. Indeed, Leonardo's attraction to Cecilia can be understood as incestuous on more than one level, since, as the narrator explains, he dearly loves his sister Adela: "A no ser hermanos carnales se habrían amado, como se amaron los amantes más célebres que ha conocido el mundo" (171). María de Regla also points out Leonardo's incestuous desire towards Adela when she first meets Cecilia as a grown-up: "Jimaguas no se parecerían más. ¿Si será por esto porque el niño Leonardo está tan enamorado de su merced?" (631).

However, the narrative suggests that Adela, due to her education and "racial purity", is closer to Isabel than to Cecilia. She is best friends with the former, whom she admires greatly, as the text makes clear: "Las mujeres se estrecharon fuertemente entre los brazos. Adela lloró de alegría al apretar entre los suyos a Isabel, por la cual sentía afición extraordinaria. Para ella era la más modesta y amorosa de las mujeres" (440). Yet, while it seems that both female facets have been reconciled in Adela, the novel does not deal with her future, leaving unanswered the possibility of such a harmonisation.

***Criollos* versus *Peninsulares*: Colonial Authority and Resistance**

In nineteenth-century Cuba, besides the increasing tensions between the whites and the people of colour and within the latter group, the white sector of the population was not exempt from internal rivalries either. As explained in Chapter 2, the fight for political and economic power on the island provoked growing hostility between *criollos* and *peninsulares*. In *Cecilia Valdés*, these tensions are represented through the conflicts between Cándido Gamboa and his wife, Rosa Sandoval; and between Cándido and his son, Leonardo.

Cándido Gamboa epitomises the stereotype of the *peninsular* on the island. From a humble background in Spain, he came to Cuba to try his luck. Although nearly illiterate and ignorant ["Tampoco D. Cándido conocía más letras que las del Catón" (182)], his hard work and his higher social status, as a result of having been born in peninsular Spain, allowed him to set up a small timber business. However, he soon became involved in slave trafficking, mainly controlled by *peninsulares*, and reaped great benefits. His incipient fortune together with his unquestionable "purity of blood" opened for him the doors to high society in Havana. He joined this elite through his marriage to Rosa Sandoval, a *criolla* who had inherited an important sugar plantation in the country. At the time of the narration, after having amassed a great fortune, he is expecting to consolidate his own and his family's position in society by becoming part of the select aristocracy; he is waiting to be awarded the Earldom of *Casa Gamboa* from the Spanish crown. Gamboa's development is explained by the tailor Uribe as follows:

Y vea V. su padre D. Cándido, el otro día como quien dice, andaba con la pata en el suelo. Me parece que lo veo cuando llegó de su tierra: traía zapatos de empleita (quiso decir *pleita*, mejor, *alpargatas*), chaqueta y calzones de bayeta y gorro de paño. A poco más puso taller de maderas y tejas, después trajo negros de África a montones, después se casó con una niña que tenía ingenio, después le entró dinero por todos cuatro costados y hoy es un caballero de primero, sus hijas ruedan quitrín de pareja y su hijo bota las onzas de oro como quien bota agua. (203-4)

According to a conventional image of the time, *peninsulares* were coarse, hard-working men who lacked education and refinement, but, notwithstanding, considered themselves superior through having been born in Europe. America, they maintained, left an indelible mark on its children, who became bland and weak due to the influence of the degraded environment. The white *criollo* elite, who despised work, for it had traditionally been carried out by employees and slaves, were regarded as “jugadores y botarates” (355) by *peninsulares* such as Cándido.

Leonardo seems to definitely respond to this stereotype of the *criollos*. Doña Rosa, his mother, has always spoilt him and shown disproportionate affection for him. As mentioned elsewhere, Doña Rosa’s relationship with Leonardo can be understood as tainted with incestuous desire, and the attentions she pays to him seem to corroborate this. Thus, when she is angry with her husband, Cándido, after having found out about his affair with Charito, in order to make her husband jealous,

[H]acía con su hijo Leonardo dobles extremos de cariño y ternura. Cada vez que salía a la calle, le acompañaba hasta el zaguán y allí le despedía con besos y abrazos repetidos. Si volvía tarde de la noche, cosa frecuente, le esperaba ansiosa a la reja de la ventana cual se espera a un amante, y lejos de reñirle cuando llegaba, le besaba y abrazaba de nuevo, como si hubiese durado largo tiempo su ausencia, o corrido un grave peligro fuera de casa. Todo le parecía poco a dicha señora para el hijo mimado. Ocioso es añadir que se anticipaba a sus gustos, que le adivinaba los pensamientos

y que acudía a satisfacerse los, no como madre, sino como enamorada, con apresuramiento y afán de pródiga, sin pérdida de tiempo y costara lo que costase. (353-4)

She hides Leonardo's faults and misbehaviour from his father, who is painfully aware of the negative effects his wife's attitude has on their son's education. Thus, with Doña Rosa's connivance, Leonardo wastes his time and the money he is given everyday by his mother on parties and women. He hardly even attends his classes at the *Seminario de San Carlos*, and when he does so he has not prepared for his lessons. As the narrator explains, "la esperanza de ser algo por sus conocimientos, por sus estudios o por su industria, jamás calentó su corazón" (183). His parents reason that the Earldom of *Casa Gamboa* that they are waiting to be granted by the Spanish Crown, alongside the fortune Leonardo will inherit, will guarantee him a good position in society. Leonardo, however, sneers at Cándido for both his dedication to work and for his intention to join the nobility, addressing him sarcastically as *Conde del Barracón*, in reference to his slave-trading dealings.

The characterisation of Leonardo as the archetypal irresponsible *criollo*, who despises work and spends his time gambling, is due, however, to particular intentions in the novel, namely the deconstruction of this stereotype and the criticism of colonial rule. Leonardo's attitude is crucial in explaining the main factors behind the state of degradation, corruption and decadence in which nineteenth-century Cuba was submerged, according to the reformist ideologues of the 1820s and 1830s. Laziness among whites was identified as one of the main problems confronted by Cuban society in the first half of the nineteenth century, which, in the minds of the progressive elite, prevented the island from achieving

true progress. Hence, in 1829, the *Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País* announced a competition inviting essays on the reasons for laziness in colonial Cuba. After two years in which the prize was not awarded, José Antonio Saco won the competition in 1831 with his essay *Memoria sobre la vagancia*. He identified gambling as one of the main reasons that led to idleness, and gambling was not only authorised but also promoted by the colonial authorities. Saco maintained that, by fostering gambling, the colonial power corrupted and demoralised the population, distracting them from their necessary commitment to society. Many of the delmontine writers, influenced by this rationale, produced pieces of work criticising the pernicious effects that betting was having on society. In the case of Villaverde, the issue was actually one of the main concerns in the second version of *Cecilia Valdés* published in 1839, in which the *Ferías del Ángel* were depicted as degraded religious celebrations where gambling was the main activity. The topic is re-created again in the 1882 *Cecilia Valdés*, where the *Ferías* are described in the following manner:

No todos los tahúres, para vergüenza nuestra sea dicho, eran del sexo fuerte, hombres ya maduros, ni de clase lega, que en el grupo apiñado y afanoso de los que arriesgaban a la suerte de una carta, quizás el sustento de su familia el día siguiente, o el honor de la esposa, de la hija o de la hermana, podía echarse de ver una dama más ocupada del albur que de su propio decoro, o un mozo todavía imberbe, o un fraile mercenario en sus hábitos de estameña color de pajueta (...).

Que nada de lo que aquí se traza a grandes rasgos estaba prohibido o no más que tolerado por las autoridades constituidas, se desprende claramente del hecho de que los garitos en Cuba pagaban una contribución al gobierno para supuestos objetos de caridad. ¿Qué más? La publicidad con que se jugaba al monte en todas partes de la Isla principalmente durante la última época del mando del capitán general D. Francisco Dionisio Vives, anunciaba, a no dejar duda, que la política de éste o de su gobierno se basaba en el principio maquiavélico de corromper para dominar, copiando el otro célebre del estadista romano: divide et impera. Porque equivalía a dividir los ánimos el corromperlos, cosa que no viese el pueblo su propia miseria y su degradación. (92-3)

Furthermore, the disdain for work amidst the white sector of the population was related, according to the reformists, to slavery and its destructive consequences, since work had been traditionally associated with black slave labour. This reasoning supported further their claim for an immediate stop to the importation of slaves and a gradual abolition of slavery, in blatant opposition to what was happening on the island in the 1830s and was allowed and even encouraged by the colonial regime.

As Saco explained in his essay and Villaverde later portrayed in *Cecilia Valdés*, laziness was a social problem consciously not tackled by the colonial government rather than an inherent flaw of the *criollos* as a result of having been born in America, as the *peninsulares* maintained.

Despite all his egoism, superficiality and lack of consciousness, Leonardo, however, also typifies the *criollo* whose distrust of peninsular Spaniards and Spain, as a colonial power, is crystallising. Although the narrator reflects that Leonardo's generation has not yet still developed a full understanding of the precarious political and social situation of the island and of how to solve it, their contempt and hatred towards the *peninsulares* is growing:

El lector habanero, conocedor de la juventud de la época que procuramos describir, nos creará fácilmente si le decimos que Gamboa no se cuidaba de la política, y por más que se le ocurriese alguna vez que *Cuba gemía esclava*, no le pasaba por la mente siquiera entonces, *que él o algún otro cubano debía poner los medios para libertarla*. Como criollo que empezaba a entrar en el roce de las gentes mayores a estudiar jurisprudencia, sí se había formado idea de un estado mejor de sociedad y de un gobierno menos militar y opresivo para su patria. Sin embargo, aunque hijo de padre español que, siendo rico y del comercio visitaban con preferencia paisanos suyos, ya sentía odio hacia éstos, mucho más hacia los militares, en cuyos hombros, a todas luces, descansaba la complicada fábrica colonial de Cuba. (168, my emphasis)

Thus, Leonardo, despite having a *peninsular* father, is portrayed as a Cuban, no longer a Spaniard, who is starting to become aware of the necessity for change on the island, although he does not yet understand that change as independence. The hatred towards the military, who evidently were perceived as the representatives and enforcers of Spanish authoritarianism, however, is fierce. Thus, he reprimands his elder sister Antonia for accepting the courting of an officer of the Spanish Army, and he complains that the military:

se creen los amos del país, nos tratan con desprecio a nosotros los paisanos, y porque usan charreteras y sable se figuran que se merecen y que lo pueden todo. Para meterse en cualquier parte, no esperan a que los conviden, y una vez dentro se llevan las primeras muchachas y las más lindas. Esto es insufrible. Aunque si bien se mira, las muchachas son las que tienen la culpa. Parece que las deslumbra el brillo de las charreteras. (175)

Leonardo's words are very similar to those uttered by Pimienta in Chapter 1, Part 2, when he complains about the preference of women of colour for white men and the latter's higher status with regard to coloured males. The complaint is essentially the same: the economic, social and racial superiority of a sector of the population over the others as imposed by the establishment. In one case it is the subjugation of the blacks and mulattoes by the whites through slavery and racial prejudice; in the other, the preponderance of *peninsulares* over *criollos* reinforced by colonial rule and partially supported by racial prejudice as well.

The tensions between *criollos* and *peninsulares* are also depicted in the novel through Cándido and Doña Rosa. As already explained, Cándido Gamboa was a poor *peninsular* who migrated to Cuba in search of fortune. Rosa Sandoval,

on the other hand, belonged to an important *criollo* family who left her the sugar plantation *La Tinaja* as part of her inheritance. When the Gamboa family visit the plantation at Christmas, their different status is made clear. Thus, when they are inspecting the slave force with all their guests present, the eldest slave in the plantation, Taita Caimán, approaches his masters to beg forgiveness for the runaway slaves. He kneels down before Doña Rosa and addresses her exclusively, which annoys Cándido, since the slave has established the difference between the two masters, that is, between the legitimate master, Doña Rosa, and Cándido, who, as the narrator explains:

aunque señor de hecho, no lo era de derecho. (...) de esta manera fue como Don Cándido interpretó el discurso del esclavo, hiriéndole en lo vivo, de un lado, que prescindiera de él en su embajada; del otro, la odiosa diferencia que marcó entre ama y amo. Es que llovía sobre mojado, como suele decirse, y cogió la ocasión por los cabellos para vengarse del insulto y recobrar, ante las personas testigos de la escena, la que él creía rebajada dignidad del señor y amo. (461)

The narrative, therefore, supports the division between legitimate owners and those who, although in fact behaving as the owners, do not have the right to do so. The parallel with the general situation of *criollos* and *peninsulares* on the island and the struggle of the former to gain political power, that is, their legitimate right to decide the future of their land or *patria*, is obvious.

In fact, the institution of slavery is widely employed in *Cecilia Valdés* as a metaphor for the colonial status of Cuba. It is even introduced in the prologue, when Villaverde explains the reasons for the continuous interruptions in the process of writing *Cecilia Valdés*, and it is used both explicitly and implicitly in numerous fragments of the text when the narrator deals with the situation of Cuba.

For example, in the above quoted paragraph in which Leonardo's lack of consciousness is explained ("Cuba gemía esclava") and in the epigraph that precedes that chapter, again a stanza by the revolutionary José María Heredia, this time from his epistle *A Emilia*. The poem, written by Heredia from his exile in the United States after his participation in the Conspiracy of *Los Rayos y Soles de Bolívar*, in 1823, expresses his nostalgia and yearning for Cuba and explains the reasons for his resorting to the armed struggle:

De mi patria
bajo el desnublado cielo
no pude resolverme a ser esclavo
ni consentir que todo en la natura
fuese noble y feliz, menos el hombre

The similarity between slavery and colonial rule is also significantly put forward by the *peninsular* Cándido to explain how authority must be enforced. Following the episode commented above when the family is inspecting the slaves, the next morning Doña Rosa is awakened by the lashes that the overseer, Don Liborio, is inflicting on the slaves. Ashamed of the overseer's behaviour, which has probably also awoken her guests, she suggests to Cándido that he should be dismissed. Cándido, however, reasons that:

Sería mala política despedir a Don Liborio a raíz de haber castigado con mano fuerte las desvergüenzas de los esclavos. ¿A dónde iría a parar el prestigio de la autoridad? El mayoral representa aquí el mismo papel que el coronel delante de su regimiento, o que el capitán general delante de los vasallos de S.M. en esta colonia. ¿Cómo, si no, se conservarían el orden, la paz ni la disciplina en el ingenio, en el cuartel o en la Capitanía General de la Isla de Cuba? Nada, Rosa, el prestigio de la autoridad lo primero. (474)

Cándido's rationale, i.e. the use of repressive measures to maintain the status quo on the island, points to one of the key issues in the development, first, of the reformist project and, later, of the fight for independence. Touched upon in Chapters 2 and 3, it is worth very briefly reiterating here the rationale behind the reformist project, because it helps to explain the ideology of *Cecilia Valdés*.

In Search for a National Identity and a Sovereign Nation: The Emergence of *Cubanness*

Since the development of the plantation system on the island in the second half of the eighteenth century, the *criollos* always sought from the Spanish crown numerous reforms that benefited their position in Cuban society. The crown generally granted their petitions, which facilitated a cordial relationship between the colonial government and its "subjects". In the 1830s, however, the change to a liberal government in Spain led to mounting confrontation between *peninsulares* and *criollos* in their struggle for political control of the island. Ironically, though, the massive importation of black slave labour, which had provided the *criollos* with economic power, now became a major impediment in their struggle for political power, in glaring opposition to what was happening in the rest of the Latin America territories. The fear of slave revolts, as in Haiti, and of the Africanisation of the island were two crucial factors that made the possibility of any widely supported, serious attempt to gain independence redundant. In view of this situation, the *criollo* elite had no other option than to settle for gradual and very subtle endeavours in order to try to change the status quo.

Hence, the most progressive sector of the *criollo* elite, generally supported by the liberal middle classes, started a campaign in which they used literature in all its forms (press articles, essays, fiction) to try to improve their situation. José Antonio Saco, a middle-class intellectual, became the spearhead of this reformist movement. The Cuba envisioned by these reformists was, however, a European-like, white Cuba; blacks did not have a place in the society they strove for, that is, a "civilised and modern" society as opposed to the savage, atavistic world blacks represented. Blacks were not perceived as Cubans, which was further supported by the fact that a big percentage of the coloured population had arrived in the island very recently or were, indeed, just being imported illegally. They were considered *negros*, either *negros de nación* (those just arrived from Africa) or *negros criollos*, but not Cubans. However, their presence was acknowledged, since it differentiated the island from peninsular Spain and, hence, facilitated the claim for a different identity to that of the metropolis. Furthermore, the coloured population was not considered a serious "problem" for the future by the reformists. The immediate stop to the slave trade, a policy of gradual abolition and of promoting the immigration of white males, who would miscegenate with coloured women, would guarantee a progressive whitening of the population and the final disappearance of the people of colour. The project of a white Cuba could, therefore, be achieved in the long term.

In with the policy of a firm hand that Cándido's rationale suggests in *Cecilia Valdés*, the refusal by the Spanish colonial government to introduce any reform and to allow the *criollos* a share in the political ruling of the island culminated in the alleged Conspiracy of *La Escalera* in 1844. Its repression and crushing not only put an end to the increasing power of the coloured elite but also

forced important reformist ideologues, such as Del Monte, to flee into exile. José Antonio Saco had already been sent into exile in 1834, following the controversy over the *Revista Bimestre Cubana*. The search for changes and reforms, however, continued, sometimes adopting the strategy of threatening the Spanish government with annexation to the United States, which some people, like Villaverde for a time, actually advocated and actively fought for, and finally resulted in the struggles for autonomy and independence.⁵⁰

The key factor for understanding the ideology that permeates *Cecilia Valdés* is to bear in mind that Villaverde was both a writer and a man of politics fully committed to this project. Yet, when he finished the last version of *Cecilia Valdés*, in 1879, the ideology behind the project had been surpassed. The illegal importation of African slaves had continued until the 1860s, so obviously the black population in Cuba was far from diminishing. Furthermore, the contribution of the people of colour to the first war for independence, the Ten Year's War (1868-1878), was extremely important. When Carlos Manuel de Céspedes started the insurgent movement against Spanish colonial rule on 10 October 1868, he shrewdly liberated his slaves on the plantation *La Demajagua*, who thus joined in the liberation struggle in order to secure their own freedom. Blacks, then, were fighting side-by-side with the white *criollos* for the autonomy of the Cuban nation. Not only was their presence impossible to negate but their contribution was also needed to consolidate the new political order. And, consequently, the black intellectual elite demanded the right to equal citizenship.

⁵⁰ See Moreno Fraginalls (1995) for a detailed historical explanation of the reformist movement and the difficult relationship between *criollos* and *peninsulares* on the island.

Villaverde, in fact, acknowledges in *Cecilia Valdés* the contribution of the black element to the formation of the Cuban nation and records the hybrid nature of the emergent feeling of *Cubanness*. Thus, his novel takes as its title the name of the protagonist, who significantly is of mixed race. Cecilia becomes a symbol of the new Cuban "imagined community", since the two "races" that constitute the population and culture of the island coalesce in her. The nickname given to Cecilia by her contemporaries in the novel, *Virgencita de bronce*, synthesises her condition as a symbol of the hybrid nation due to bronze being an alloy of different metals. Furthermore, the nickname also points to the national patron saint of Cuba, *la Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre*, whose veneration was initiated in 1605 in El Cobre, near Santiago de Cuba. As Benítez Rojo (1989) explains, her cult was first articulated upon three sources of meaning: one of indigenous origin (the Taíno deity Atabey or Atabex), another of European (the manifestation of the Virgin Mary in the Spanish form of *Nuestra Señora de Guía Madre de Dios de Illescas*) and the third of African (the Yoruba goddess or *oricha* Oshún). The syncretic nature of the cult is, again, a representation of the hybridity of Cuban identity and culture.

Furthermore, Cándido's denial of his paternity makes Cecilia a representative of the thousands of Latin Americans in symbolic search for the white, European Father, a constant feature in the formulation of the Latin American identities. In fact, this negation of paternity facilitates the occurrence of incest between brother and sister in the novel. But, as Luis (1990) and Aedo (1995) explain, the motif of incest also points to certain political and cultural concerns. The relationship between Leonardo and Cecilia is possible not only because Cándido refuses to acknowledge Cecilia as his legitimate daughter but

also because the society in which they live allows it to happen by condoning the situation and remaining silent. "La ceguera social consciente", as Sosa Rodríguez (1979) puts it, is to blame for the tragedy, which signals the decomposition and degradation of Cuban colonial slave society.

Bearing this in mind, the end of the novel is charged with symbolic connotations. When Pimienta stabs Leonardo to death at the *Iglesia del Ángel* just as the latter is to be married to Isabel, he is not only killing Cecilia's lover in a fit of jealousy and in revenge for the ill-treatment of the *mulata*. More importantly, Pimienta, a *negro criollo*, is killing Leonardo as the white father who is leaving fatherless his illegitimate coloured family, as a repetition of history. Furthermore, as Benítez Rojo (1996-7) has also argued, the fact that the stabbing occurs at the *Iglesia del Ángel* is no coincidence. This church was built in 1689 on the remains of some *bohíos* in which the *cabildos* of *minas* and *carabalíes* used to gather. The neighbourhood in which it was erected, *el Ángel*, is used as the subtitle to the novel, *La loma del Ángel*, and it is the domain of Cecilia and her class. Hence, the killing of Leonardo in this place by his mulatto rival becomes a sacred ritual of the new beginning of the Cuban nation.⁵¹

In order to achieve a fairer society in which situations such as the one depicted in the novel are not allowed to happen, the narrative posits that all individuals have to be considered as equal, that is, legally recognised as children of the same origin. Thus, Cecilia, Adela and Dolores are, in fact, three versions of the same woman, the same daughter and the same sister, and the three of them are Leonardo's sisters. This is symbolically represented in the novel by the three

⁵¹ Significantly, the *Iglesia del Ángel* is the place where José Martí, one of the leaders of the independence of Cuba and key figure in the theoretical elaboration of the Cuban nation was baptised. Humberto Solás, director of *Cecilia*, was also baptised in this church.

being suckled by Maria de Regla; hence, they are *hermanas de leche*. Significantly, the “mother” of all three is black and her motherhood has brought her constant suffering and tears. Thus, María de Regla’s “sinning” nature as a sexualised coloured woman is redeemed in the novel by her condition of abnegated suffering mother, along the lines of *marianismo* thinking.

However, the relationship between the three “sisters” is not portrayed as being totally equal in the novel, as can be seen in the characterisation of the three girls. I have already explained the ambivalence in the portrayal of Cecilia. In the case of Dolores, she is constantly represented as imitating her young mistress, Adela, rather than as developing a consciousness and behaviour of her own. However, Adela is depicted as the compendium of the positive features of both Cecilia and Isabel: she has the beauty of the former and the warmth, intelligence and rational mind of the latter. The white “race” seems, therefore, the one best suited to mediate between all “races” and administer the new modern and civilised free society. Hence, the paradox is obvious: although Cecilia is posited as symbol of Cuban identity due to her hybrid nature, the nation must still be led by the white sector of the population, the only one suited for such an enterprise due to their inherent superiority. Importantly, as well, while Adela is a woman, she is constantly morally and intellectually equated to Isabel, who is characterised by masculine attributes and qualities. The novel advocates, hence, that the white male sector is the best suited for the important task of ruling the nation. This is related to why it is Doña Rosa, who has challenged Cándido’s authority, who is ultimately blamed for the family’s destruction in the novel.

Here lie all the contradictions of *Cecilia Valdés*. Its writer, Villaverde, is not able to get rid of the racial and sexual prejudice with which the reformist

ideologues were imbued. However, the historical development of the island throughout the second part of the century made it impossible not to realise and acknowledge the fundamental contribution of the black and mulatto population to the formation of *Cubanness*. Villaverde does it, but his racism and racial prejudice resurface constantly throughout the novel. Examples are rife, some of them already commented on earlier. Thus, the two types of slavery depicted in the novel, a benign, patriarchal, "good" one represented by the coffee plantation, and the cruel, destructive one on the sugar plantation; and Cecilia's characterisation and the racial stereotyping of coloured women.

Here, the issue of the narrator of *Cecilia Valdés* becomes important. Villaverde resorts to a third-person omniscient (extra- and hetero-diegetic according to Genette's terminology) narrator, who openly makes interpretations, generalisations and comments about the story and poses judgements on the narrated events (overt narrator). By using this type of narrator, Villaverde presents the narrative as coming from an authoritative, well informed source through which he is able to easily filtrate and permeate the narrative with his own ideology. This explains the numerous examples of racial prejudice that can be perceived in the narrator's comments. Hence, the narrator frequently contrasts the civilised, rational world of the whites with the magic, atavistic reality of the coloured people, described as "ánimos fantasiosos" (296). For instance, the devotion that the slaves at the coffee plantation, *La Luz*, feel for their master, Isabel, is seen to be understood by the slaves as supernatural: "[por] la influencia ejercida por Isabel sobre cuantos seres se le acercaban, no creían menos sus esclavos sino que Dios la había dotado de una especie de encanto o poder secreto, el cual no cabía eludir ni repeler" (411). Conversely, Meneses, "bien que, a fuer

de hombre civilizado, no estaba dispuesto a conceder nada sobrenatural en ella, sí creía, como los demás, que era una mujer extraordinaria” (411).

Moreover, the narrator supposedly rations the information that the reader is given as if trying to create mystery and suspense. However, this retrieval of information, as in the case of the brother-sister kinship between Leonardo and Cecilia, which is only confirmed well into the narrative, though actually suspected from the beginning, is both clumsy and obvious, in a text that is generally so detailed that, in fact, it draws attention to the device. Sommer (1993) interprets this “silence” of the narrator as a refusal to let the people within the story and who know it best speak and be heard. Thus, María de Regla and Dionisio, the black slaves directly involved and affected by Gamboa’s “dark” secret, tell the story to other characters within the narrative, the former to the Gamboa sisters and Isabel, the latter to Cecilia, but these refuse to believe it in order to preserve their privileges. The fact that blacks are the ones in possession of the truth and that they want to speak up and be listened to, but are not allowed to do so, symbolises, according to Sommer, the fight for freedom by the people of colour, which whites, including Villaverde as represented by the novel’s narrator, want to ignore.

However, this denial by the whites in general, and by the plantation owners in particular, finally leads to their destruction, which is pessimistically depicted in the novel. Leonardo’s death at the hands of the mulatto Pimienta signifies the end of slavery and the slaveholder family, since the Gamboas are left without a male heir who can continue their lineage. The murderer, however, never seems to have been punished, since the rushed conclusion does not tell the reader anything about what happened to Pimienta. And although Cecilia is punished and sentenced to a year in the *Hospital de Paula*, this allows for her reunion with her

mother. There seems to be a superior moral justice that does not condemn Leonardo's killing, which becomes the symbol for the struggles of liberation of coloured people.

The ending, however, leaves unresolved all the tensions represented throughout the text. There is no closure to the events; no happy ending that suggests a national reconciliation among all individuals and races, as in many of the Latin American foundational romances.⁵² In *Cecilia Valdés*, the project of the nation is pessimistically left unrealised; it is the task for future generations, who are warned of the perils of such an enterprise in the novel. The project seems, in fact, doomed. The only a priori successful couple in the novel, Rosa, Isabel's sister, and Eduardo Meneses, Leonardo's friend, go to live on the coffee plantation, "el trasunto del paraíso terrenal" (234). However, by the end of the 1830s coffee plantations were in complete ruin due to the powerful and omnipresent sugar, which appears here both as the element that facilitated the emergence of Cuba as a nation and also the one that causes the impossibility of its full successful realisation.

⁵² See Sommer (1993) and Ramos (1989) for an analysis of these novels and how they have been used as a locus of reconciliation of the numerous tensions inherent in the societies of the new republics. Both authors point out to the inextricability of politics and literature in nineteenth century Latin America.

V

CECILIA VALDÉS AS A SYMBOL OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Cecilia Valdés es el único mito literario que han conseguido crear nuestros novelistas, una figura de ficción tan singularmente arraigada en nuestras gentes que muchos la conocen sin haberse asomado nunca a las páginas de Villaverde. (Salvador Bueno 1963:178-9)

Cecilia Valdés es la nacionalidad cubana, porque la protagonista de Villaverde simboliza en su carne y su espíritu, la combinación racial y cultural que determina el ser cubano. (César Leante 1975:25)

In this Chapter we will first briefly look at the reception Villaverde's novel had when it originally came out. Second, we shall examine the formulation of the myth of Cecilia Valdés and its influence on the articulation of *Cubanness*, i.e., the reinforcing of the figure of Cecilia Valdés as a powerful symbol of the new Cuban nation is analysed. This partly explains the resilience of Villaverde's novel and protagonists and their powerful hold on Cuba's popular imaginary in general and its art forms specifically. A short review of the numerous re-creations of Villaverde's work is provided, with special emphasis on the *zarzuela*, which, I maintain, has become a key text in the consolidation of the myth of Cecilia Valdés.

Contemporary Reception to *Cecilia Valdés*

The publication of *Cecilia Valdés* in New York in 1882 did not go unnoticed. Soon critics both from the island and abroad praised the novel, highlighting its value as a social and historical document that allowed an invaluable insight into nineteenth-century Cuban colonial slave society. Thus, Enrique José Varona (1849-1933), Manuel De la Cruz (1861-1896) and Diego Vicente Tejera (1848-1903), in Cuba, and the writer Benito Pérez Galdós (1843-1920) in Spain, praised *Cecilia Valdés* in those terms, privileging the kind of reading that was consciously being sought by Villaverde and has permeated most of the literary criticism on the novel to the present.

The racial prejudice with which the novel is imbued, however, was soon denounced by the Cuban black intellectual Martín Morúa Delgado (1857-1910), who expounded his criticism of Villaverde's work in *Impresiones literarias. Las novelas del Sr. Villaverde*, published in 1892.⁵³

Here, Morúa, the son of a white father and an enslaved mulatto woman, denounced the reactionary spirit that permeated the novel and pinpointed what he believed to be its various flaws. He criticised the construction both of protagonists and of minor characters, condemning the inauthentic portrayal of the slaves and the depiction of flat characters or stereotypes whose behaviour is not consistent with their characterisation throughout the novel. Pimienta is a case in point. Not only Morúa but also other critics such as M. Fernández Junco, editor of the newspaper *El Buscapié*, raised objections, in particular, to the final scene of the novel in which Pimienta stabs Leonardo. The fact that Pimienta is a minor character in the novel, whose identity is not very well developed, seems to

⁵³ The article has been reprinted in *Unión*, 2 (1979).

contradict such a daring action in the end. This argument, however, was soon contested by Manuel de la Cruz (1885), who explained Leonardo's killing as motivated by the jealousy that Pimienta constantly shows towards the former in particular and whites in general. Morúa, however, also condemned the novel for not having a moral ending in which Pimienta is punished in an exemplary way, so that society can be improved. Yet, as we have seen, the allegorical reading of the final scene supports and explains Pimienta's action and the reason why it goes unpunished in the context of a superior moral justice that the literary work posits. Bearing this in mind, the accusation that Pimienta's action can also be understood as reinforcing the racial stereotyping of the people of colour as criminal and dangerous (see Gelpi 1991) also seems flawed.

The lack of realism, according to Morúa, did not only affect the depiction of characters but also the development of the plot, which exhibits problems of coherence and plausibility due to the need to continuously elude the revelation of the kinship between the protagonists in a social context characterised by gossip and interactions beyond the racial division. The historical inaccuracies introduced by Villaverde were also perceived by the black writer as shortcomings that are detrimental to realism. Other formal aspects of the novel such as its language, which is full of archaisms, and style were also criticised by Morúa and many other literary critics who followed.

Interestingly, it was Morúa who, due to all these alleged deficiencies, attempted the first re-writing of Villaverde's novel. His novel *Sofía*, written between 1888 and 1890, whilst he was living abroad, and published on his return to Cuba in 1890, was his attempt to comment on and correct the mistakes that he perceived in Villaverde's work. As with other "anti-slavery" novels, *Sofía*

presents the evils that the institution of slavery had originated in colonial society and which led to its degradation and corruption. The slave protagonist, Sofia, who closely resembles Cecilia, also falls into an incestuous relationship with her half-brother Federico and bears him a child. The revelation of their kinship, however, provokes her death. *Sofia* resorts to the numerous motifs and actions that had become customary in the “anti-slavery” narratives, such as the hardships and degradation of the life of the slaves on the plantation, the corruption and vices of the planter class, the relegation of an urban slave to the *ingenio* as a punishment and so on (see Chapter 3).

However, what makes Morúa’s work different is his denunciation of the slavery system as a mode of production, i.e., a system based on economic reasons rather than racial distinctions. His protagonist, Sofia, is in fact a white woman who, notwithstanding, believes herself to be a slave *mulata* and, hence, behaves as such in a society that imposes a pattern of behaviour on individuals depending on their alleged skin colour. Thus, the faults that Villaverde attributed to Cecilia due to her mixed ancestry are, in Morúa’s *Sofia*, shown to have their origin in the social and cultural milieu in which the characters live, rather than in characteristics derived from their racial make-up. Morúa’s ultimate intention, then, when writing *Sofia* and all his other work, including his journalistic texts, was to improve the image and status of the coloured population on the island.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ See Luis (1990), Kutzinski (1993) and Williams (1993) and (1994) for an analysis of *Sofia*. Morúa also wrote a second and final novel, *La familia Unzuazu*, published in 1901, which continues the characters and themes of *Sofia*. See Luis (1990). For Morúa’s works in general, see Deschamps Chapeaux (1963) and Horrego Estuch (1957). Paradoxically, Morúa was responsible for the so-called Morúa Law, which was passed in 1909 by the Senate whilst the black intellectual was its president. The Morúa Law banned political parties based on race or religion, which forced the dismantling of the *Partido Independiente de Color* and ultimately led to the racial war of 1912 and a subsequent halt in the participation of coloured people in politics.

Though some of the criticisms raised by Morúa about *Cecilia Valdés* are highly pertinent, especially with regard to the novel's racial prejudice and its ambivalent representation of the slavery system, Villaverde's novel has, notwithstanding, become *the* canonical text of nineteenth-century Cuban literature, refuting Morúa's prediction that, due to its structural flaws, it was doomed to oblivion. On the contrary, Villaverde's novel has not only become a major influence on many Cuban literary works but has also been re-created and re-written in diverse art forms right up to the present. Ironically, Morúa's *Sofía* was, in fact, its first re-writing.

The Myth of Cecilia Valdés

The reasons why *Cecilia Valdés*, and especially its *mulata* protagonist, have exercised such a powerful hold on the popular imaginary of Cuba are numerous and varied. The first version that Villaverde wrote of *Cecilia Valdés*, that is, the short story published in early 1839, is the first text that introduces the figure of the *mulata* in Cuban literature. Charito Alarcón, Cecilia's mother, inaugurates the long list of female mulatto characters that since then have populated Cuban poetry and narrative.⁵⁵ However, rather than Charito, it is Cecilia who has ultimately become *la mulata* par excellence on the island due to her characterisation and leading role in the novel, which prompts readers to empathise with her rather than with her demented mother. Furthermore, it is not only that Villaverde pioneered the representation of the *mulata* but also that, in the fictional character of Cecilia,

⁵⁵ See Kutzinski (1993) for an analysis of the iconic figure of the *mulata* in Cuban literature and arts.

he gave shape to the social imagery regarding coloured females that was commonplace on the island. As González (1983) explains,

Cecilia Valdés pasó a ser mito en sí, representante de valores colectivamente aceptados y, en muchas ocasiones, muy alejados de la anécdota de la novela. Y así fue porque el personaje de ficción alcanzó a concretar concepciones ya arraigadas en el conocimiento y en las convicciones del pueblo. (González 1983:25)

Hence, the mythical quality that Cecilia has acquired, partly, rests on her story being a reflection of the predicament in which many other women, due to the historical development of the island, found themselves. As explained in the previous Chapter, she epitomises the stereotyping of coloured women, that is, the *mulata* as a beautiful, sensual animal who needs to resort to her only asset, her sexuality, in order to survive in an adverse environment. Cecilia is both one and all, both unique and universal, and this has led to her becoming a larger-than-life figure in Cuba's popular imagination. Hence, if Villaverde moulded his female character on a concrete reality that prevailed on the island, Cecilia has afterwards become a myth that has exceeded her literary dimension. Furthermore, the re-formulation of *Cubanness* throughout the twentieth century has allowed for Cecilia to consolidate her status as a symbol of the new Cuban nation that was to be forged after colonial rule. The struggle for the independence of the island, in which blacks, mulattoes and whites joined together against colonial rule, led to a new articulation of what it was to be Cuban.

Thus, when José Martí, the hero of the independence struggle and spiritual leader of the Cuban nation since, wrote the *Manifiesto del Partido Revolucionario*

in 1895, he stated that “Cubanos hay ya en Cuba de uno y otro color”.⁵⁶ If Villaverde had intuitively recorded in *Cecilia Valdés* the hybrid nature of the Cuban nation, albeit somehow pessimistically due to his ideology being rooted in the reformist project, Martí poses, in powerful abstract and humanist terms, that “Hombre es más que blanco, más que mulato, más que negro. Cubano es más que blanco, más que mulato, más que negro” in his much-quoted essay *Mi raza*.⁵⁷

However, the failure to consolidate the fair and democratic Republic that Martí had envisioned due to United States interference and domination on the island and the unresolved domestic tensions that favoured the predominance of the white population, threatened the unity of the Cuban people and the future of their nation.⁵⁸ Within this context, the ethnologist Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969) theoretically elaborated on the essence of *lo cubano* and coined the term *transculturation* in his seminal work *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y azúcar* (1940).

Ortiz explained Cuban culture as a result of the long, violent confrontation of different cultures in contact on the island. It was not only the European and

⁵⁶ The *Manifiesto del Partido Revolucionario* was written by Martí (1853-1895) and signed by himself and Máximo Gómez (1836-1905), General of the Cuban Liberation Army (*Ejército Cubano de Liberación*) in the Wars of Independence. The manifesto was signed on 25 March 1895 in Montecristi, on the northern coast of the Dominican Republic, when the Second War of Independence was just starting. In this writing (reprinted in Olivio Jiménez 1995) Martí addressed the Cuban people explaining the roots, causes and procedure to follow in the revolution that it was just starting.

⁵⁷ *Mi raza* has become a fundamental essay in the history of Cuba. Here Martí expounds his ideas about the racial problem on the island, which he both resolved and circumvented by proposing a human bonding beyond racial divisions. *Mi raza* was published in *Patria* (New York) on 16 April 1893. See Olivio Jiménez (1995) for a reprint.

⁵⁸ The mounting racial tensions that the new republican government was unable to solve culminated in 1912 with a race war. The Independent Party of Colour (*Partido Independiente de Color*), which had been founded in 1907 and had accused the Republic of betraying the black population, was made illegal under the provision of the Morúa Law (see footnote 54). This led to different and numerous efforts to abrogate the law and finally, in view of their failure, to a rebellion headed by Evaristo Estenoz and Pedro Ivonet. The U.S marines, enforcing the Platt Amendment, soon landed in order to protect American interests on the island and José Miguel Gómez's government sent the army to quickly crush the uprising in order to prevent further U.S intervention.

African element that Ortiz had in mind, but also the Asian and the differentiated cultures that are usually encompassed under the terms European, African and Asian. This confrontation, which he defined as the process of *transculturation*, had given birth to a new cultural code that was both a synthesis and a transformation of all those original cultures in contact. The resulting system was therefore both similar and different to its roots; the communion of the latter had originated Cuban culture, which, notwithstanding, was not free of internal tensions. Ortiz was, in fact, legitimising and celebrating the African contribution to *Cubanness*, which throughout the Republic had been officially repressed and even negated. Furthermore, he perceived the Cuban population of African origin as the true repository of a popular culture that could be posited as a form of resistance to U.S. domination.

Since Ortiz elaborated his conception of *Cubanness*, the mulatto condition of the island has been publicly claimed and reiterated in all spheres of Cuban life, including its political culture. The arts have also played a key role in consolidating *lo mulato* as “el color cubano”, in the words of the Cuban national poet Nicolás Guillén.⁵⁹ In this context, the character of Cecilia, due to her biracial origin and her being neither white nor black yet both and, hence, a locus of reconciliation, acquires a significant relevance as a symbol of mulatto Cuba.

⁵⁹ Nicolás Guillén (1902-1989) was declared *Poeta Nacional de Cuba* by the revolutionary government in 1961 because of his contribution to the Revolution and to the articulation of a national Cuban consciousness. Since the first publication of his book of poems, *Motivos de son* (1930), Guillén's writings have always been politically and socially committed. His poetry celebrates the black contribution to Cuban culture (especially his early works of the 1930s) and denounces the racial segregation, neo-colonialism and poverty in which republican Cuba was submerged. The triumph of the Revolution was hailed by Guillén, who participated actively in the construction of the new society. He became a member of the National Council of Education (*Consejo Nacional de Educación*) and president of the National Writers' Union (*Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba*, UNEAC) until the moment of his death, in 1989.

The Zarzuela Cecilia Valdés

The popularity of Villaverde's novel and its female protagonist were further enhanced in the 1930s by its musical adaptation in a homonymous *zarzuela*. The *zarzuela*, a kind of operetta, is a Spanish musical genre that combines recitals and songs. It emerged in the eighteenth century, but was fully developed throughout the nineteenth century, when it also became popular among the Cuban upper and middle classes, especially after the premiere of Luis Olona and Rafael Hernando's *El Duende* in Havana in 1853. Although immediately after this some *zarzuelas* were written on the island, due to their profitable potential, it was from 1868 that the development of a true Cuban *zarzuela* tradition started. Composers such as Enrique Guerrero, Jorge Anckerman, Laureano Fuentes, José Mauri and Raimundo Valenzuela began to introduce popular Cuban rhythms such as *guarachas*, *danzones* and *rumbas* in their pieces, which facilitated their popularity among all sectors of the population. The full maturity of the Cuban *zarzuela*, however, occurred between 1920 and 1940, when traditional Cuban rhythms and genres were fully adapted to the original Spanish structure of the *zarzuela grande* and Cuban characters and landscapes populated the stage.

The *zarzuelas* from this golden age are always romantic pieces set in colonial times. Many of their characters are Cuban types, such as *el gallego* and *el negro*, who were already easily recognised due to their presence in Cuban vernacular theatre. Among these types, the *mulata* became all-important. The Cuban *zarzuelas* that are traditionally considered the best have a *mulata* in the leading role, whose name gives the title to the piece: *María la O* (1930), with music by Ernesto Lecuona and libretto by Gustavo Sánchez Galarraga; *Amalia*

Batista (1936), composed by Rodrigo Prats and written by Agustín Rodríguez; and, of course, the adaptation of Villaverde's now classic *Cecilia Valdés*.

Premiered in 1932 in the *Teatro Martí* in Havana, with music by Gonzalo Roig and libretto by Agustín Rodríguez and José Sánchez Arcilla, the *zarzuela Cecilia Valdés* closely adapts the unfortunate, incestuous love story of Cecilia and Leonardo, who finally abandons the beautiful *mulata* and their illegitimate daughter in order to marry Isabel. As in the novel, Pimienta kills Leonardo after the wedding and Cecilia is punished by being confined to the *Hospital de Paula*, where she is reunited with her mother. The great success of the *zarzuela* also greatly rests on the powerful score composed by Gonzalo Roig (1890-1970), in which popular compositions, such as *boleros*, *bachatas*, *guajiras* and *sones*, are integrated.⁶⁰

The *zarzuela* criticises, albeit in a light tone, both the slavery system and its pernicious effects on the society of a country that, otherwise, must be celebrated. Thus, there are songs that praise the physical beauty of the island (*Marcha Habana*) intermingled with others that capture the suffering of the slaves and the people of colour in general (*Po, Po, Po; Coro y canción de los esclavos*). The racial prejudice and the disadvantages that blacks and mulattoes confronted are again exemplified in the protagonist, Cecilia. In her duo with Leonardo, a piece reminiscent of Puccini's opera style and charged with great dramatic force, Cecilia expresses her repudiation of her African origin and her frustration for not being white as her rival Isabel:

⁶⁰ Roig is also the composer and writer of some of the most famous musical pieces from Latin America, such as *Quiéreme mucho*.

Una niña blanca del pecho me arranca la calma y la paz.
Mi rabia me mata porque soy mulata y me dejarás.(...)
Leonardo, si un día hurtaras mi amor,
Yo no sé lo que haría,
Si eso pasara, moriría
O, fiera te mataría por cobarde y por traidor.

Cecilia perceives her skin colour as the obstacle that prevents her from improving her social and economic situation by marrying Leonardo. The latter's reply to Cecilia confirms the adverse social milieu that the lovers confront due to Cecilia's skin colour: "Desecha esa duda. Mi amor y mi ayuda por siempre tendrás. Podrá el mundo odiarnos pero separarnos no podrá jamás."

Despite this recognition of a historical reality which constrains the individual on the basis of racial prejudice, as in Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés*, the *zarzuela*, nevertheless, contributes to and further strengthens the stereotyping of coloured women, still pervasive in republican Cuba. Cecilia, like Maria la O and Amalia Batista in the afore-mentioned *zarzuelas*, is represented as the *mulata de rumbo*, *sandunguera* much in the same manner as the mulatto women depicted by Landaluce's lithographs in the late nineteenth century. She is a passionate *mulata* who, despite all her hardships, lives a happy existence and whose beauty is likened to the flowers that she grows in her garden and admired by all. Thus, she sings: "Mis amores son las flores que perfuman mi jardín/ (...) Tengo el sol de la alegría/ Yo canto y bailo a porfía." She is, again, a great dancer whose happiness never seems to end. The way her first appearance on stage is customarily organised and choreographed is a case in point. Whilst the chorus sings her name, she emerges gorgeously dressed and adorned with flowers singing the following verses:

¡Cecilia! (chorus)
¡Cecilia!
¡Cecilia Valdés!

- ¿Sí? Yo soy Cecilia Valdés

Del barrio del Angel, el alma es,
Cecilia es su nombre, Cecilia Valdés (chorus)

- Yo soy Cecilia, Cecilia Valdés.
Hierva la sangre en mis venas,
soy mestiza, y no lo soy,
llorando las malas penas,
yo siempre cantando voy.
Siento en mi alma cubana
la alegría de vivir,
soy cascabel, soy campana.
Yo no sé lo que sufrí (bis),
llorando las malas penas.
Siento en mi alma cubana
la alegría de vivir..."

Her entrance, therefore, is marked by a proud re-affirmation of her identity ("Yo soy Cecilia Valdés"), the first line that she sings. Although she asserts her biracial origin, she also immediately expresses the paradox of being both and neither white and black in terms of being both "mestiza" and not. Her mixed origin, however, is soon replaced by her "alma cubana"; hence, the origins are no longer important, only the "alma cubana". In this manner, she legitimises the resulting "product" of those roots, that is, Cuban identity, which she both majestically incarnates and proudly celebrates. Furthermore, she reiterates all the suffering that she has experienced ("las malas penas"), which parallels the struggle of the Cuban people to constitute their nation-state. And importantly, despite all the adversities that she has confronted and the pain she has undergone, Cecilia still feels "la alegría de vivir" in her Cuban soul. Her proud assertion of identity is, therefore, likened to her thirst for life and enjoyment, for humour and

laughter, features that have traditionally been associated with the Cuban cosmology, even in moments of desolation. This re-affirmation of *Cubanness* becomes even more meaningful if we bear in mind that the *zarzuela* was premiered at a moment of great social unrest (early 1930s), which culminated with the revolution that put an end to the dictatorship of General Gerardo Machado (1925-1933). Furthermore, the ending of the *zarzuela*, which is the same as in the novel, is understood in this context in very positive terms as a sign of the resistance and survival of the Cuban nation, since the white oligarchic family perishes and Cecilia and her daughter survive.

In a country like Cuba, where music plays such a preponderant role among the arts and is undoubtedly the most popular art form, the *zarzuela*, rather than Villaverde's literary work, soon became the entrance door to the world of *Cecilia Valdés* for the general public. This was most definitely the case for a great number of the population that were illiterate at the time of the Republic.

Importantly, Cecilia's role was frequently played and sung by Rita Montaner (1900-1958). Herself biracial, Rita's incarnations of the *mulata de rumbo* in all the above mentioned *zarzuelas* consolidated her reputation and launched her into stardom. Rita *La Única*, as she was nicknamed by Nicolás Guillén, not only became the most famous Cuban female singer of her time with songs such as *El Manisero* and *Ay Mama Inés* but also starred in popular and renowned films of pre-revolutionary Cuba like Ramón Peón's *El romance del palmar* (1938) and *Sucedió en La Habana* (1938). The audience's empathy with Rita and her musical and interpretative talent led to her being proudly named *Rita de Cuba*. As Jorge Smith (2002) explains,

Libertad Lamarque en Argentina, María Félix en México, Carmen Miranda en Brasil, Edith Piaff en Francia y Rita en Cuba. Jamás una artista representó como ella los ideales más caros de un país, el *summum* de todas las artes, *el alma nacional*. (...) [*Ella es*] *la feliz coincidencia de la consagración de la mulatez*. (my emphasis)

Nobody was better suited, therefore, to interpret the role of Cecilia Valdés and consolidate her iconic nature. The fusion *mulata de rumbo-alma nacional*-Cecilia Valdés-Rita Montaner was, therefore, complete. The serialisation of the novel and *zarzuela* with Rita in the leading role shown on the television channel CMQ in 1941 certainly increased the popularity of the piece and reinforced the identification. Specifically, the above commented song, *Salida de Cecilia*, seems to have taken a great hold in Cuba's popular imagination, since the song fitted well with the image of the new Cuban nation that was being striven for. Again, Cecilia-Rita as a beautiful, happy, resilient *mulata* symbolically represented the fruitful compatibility and proud union of the two races in a synthesis that obliterated or surpassed all conflicts and tensions.⁶¹

The First Filmic Re-Creation of *Cecilia Valdés*

The popularity of *Cecilia Valdés* soon attracted the attention of cinema as well. In late September 1950 a re-creation of the novel in a homonymous film was premiered. The film, directed by Jaime Sant-Andreu and produced by Habana Films, was one of the many attempts by Cuban producers and directors to establish a national industry at the time of the Republic. Like this enterprise, the

⁶¹ Rita Montaner has also been the subject of some documentaries made at ICAIC such as Oscar Valdés' *Rita* (1980, short film) and Rébeca Chávez's *Con todo mi amor, Rita* (2001, medium length film).

film, however, was doomed; it was a failure both in terms of critical reception and audience and no copy has been preserved.

The production of the film was fraught with problems. The long pre-production stage had to be frequently interrupted due to the impossibility of gathering all the required funds. Finally, in 1949, the producers collected \$125,000 that facilitated the final shooting, with Leticia Reina in the protagonist's role. A great advertising campaign was launched in the months previous to the premiere. A kind of illustrated novelette, written by the director and screenwriter of the film, Sant-Andreu, was published. The noveletta was widely distributed with leaflets proclaiming that the film was "una película con todo el sabor de La Habana del siglo XIX y que sólo artistas, técnicos y músicos cubanos podían realizar" (Piñera, n/d). The promotion, therefore, drew on the nationalist pride that the *zarzuela* had firmly rooted. In fact, according to the reviews in the press of the time, the film obliterated all the horrors of the slavery system (some reviews talked about censorship) and concentrated on a feeble representation of the incestuous love story between Leonardo and Cecilia amidst scenery obviously made from *papier maché*. The aesthetics of the film were further compromised when problems with the film negative and serious deficiencies in the photography led to the use of a sepia tone in the whole film. Despite all the efforts, therefore, the filmic version of *Cecilia Valdés* turned out to be a failure; the critics trashed the film and the audience did not respond as expected.

Cecilia Valdés and the Cuban Revolution

With the triumph of the Revolution in 1959, the possibility of the fair and egalitarian society that José Martí had fought for seemed to have been realised. In terms of race, the new revolutionary government abolished any official racial discrimination and prejudice and advocated that the racial conflicts that had given rise to situations like that of Cecilia and were ultimately based on economic issues had been or were to soon be eliminated with the political, social and economical structural changes that were being implemented. People of colour, the revolutionary leaders claimed, were no longer at the margins of society. All whites, blacks and mulattoes would work together as true revolutionaries to build the new morally superior Cuban society. Martí's maxim "Cubano es más que blanco, más que mulato, más que negro" was rescued and officially legitimised. The *New Man* that was to be born had no colour but the "color cubano", in a clear merge of Ortiz and Martí's formulations.⁶²

In this context, *Cecilia Valdés* has maintained its privileged position in the canon of Cuban literature, having being re-edited on several occasions. The persistent allure that Villaverde's characters hold over the Cuban people can also be perceived in the renewed interest in finding the real people who might have inspired Villaverde in his elaboration of Cecilia and Leonardo. Thus, in the 1970s,

⁶² *The New Man* refers to Ernesto Guevara's formulation of how the socialist changes were to be implemented in Cuba. Guevara defended a model based on moral incentives, self-discipline, labour mobilisation and revolutionary consciousness. The *New Man* that this society would then create would be a colour- and gender- blind, selfless, hardworking, committed individual with high moral values who would ultimately consolidate on the island a fair society. Although Guevara's ideas and model were adopted in the 1960s, the decision was not exempted from controversies and tensions, since there were also great pressures to establish a more materialistic model based on the Soviet experience. However, as Kacpia (1990) explains, the myth of the *New Man* had more grounded roots in Cuba's polity, since it was the result of both Guevara's formulation in view of the new situation on the island and an underlying moral-nationalist ethos (*cubanismo*) present in Cuban political culture since colonial times.

there was a major speculative investigation by the magazine *Bohemia* to find Cecilia's tomb and the whereabouts of her offspring with Leonardo.⁶³

The *zarzuela* has been frequently staged in revolutionary times, both by amateur and professional groups in Cuba and abroad. The *Teatro Lírico Nacional* toured throughout Eastern Europe in the 1960s representing extracts from Roig's work (*Estampas de Cecilia Valdés*). Cecilia's role has often been played by the *mulata* Alina Sánchez (b. 1947), who also starred in the iconoclastic theatre version produced by Roberto Blanco in 1979. Blanco's play is a re-working of the original text by Villaverde and Roig's music. Significantly, the *zarzuela* was the star cultural activity at the Hispanic American Summit celebrated in Havana in 1999.⁶⁴ A re-creation of Cecilia's story has also been performed by the Cuban National Ballet, with choreography by Gustavo Herrera.

The re-evaluation and re-writing of Cuban history together with a great emphasis on culture initiated with the Revolution have led to increasing studies on nineteenth-century Cuba, and *Cecilia Valdés* has also benefited from this trend. Collections of critical texts on Villaverde's work have been published. And the new perspectives in the analysis of Cuban history have facilitated re-writings of the novel that attempt to surpass the limitations inherent in Villaverde's analysis of colonial society. In these new re-creations of *Cecilia Valdés*, however, that key moment of the emergence of Cuban consciousness in colonial times always establishes a dialogue with the present in a search for the roots, repetitions and

⁶³ See "¿Será esta la tumba de Cecilia Valdés?", *Bohemia*, 13 December 1974, pp. 30-33; and "Leonardo Gamboa (el verdadero) no murió asesinado", *Bohemia* 28 February 1975, pp. 4-9.

⁶⁴ Some scenes of the *zarzuela* with an eighteen-year-old Alina Sánchez in the leading role are shown in the short documentary *Gonzalo Roig* directed by Sergio Giral in 1968. Alina Sánchez was also the *mulata* Dorotea in the re-creation that the filmmaker Sergio Giral did of Suárez Y Romero's "anti-slavery" novel *Francisco*, which Giral entitled *El otro Francisco* (1974). Alina Sánchez has also participated in other Cuban films such as Giral's *Plácido* (1986), Pastor Vega's *Retrato de Teresa* (1979) and Manuel Octavio Gómez's *Patakín (quiere decir ¡fábula!)* (1982).

parallelisms within Cuban history. *Cecilia Valdés* is, therefore, “used” as a tool of analysis not only into the past but also into present-day reality. Thus, in 1994 Abelardo Estorino, *Premio Nacional de Literatura* in 1993, wrote and directed at Havana’s theatre Hubert De Blanc *Parece blanca*, a title taken from a sentence uttered by Chepilla in the novel that encapsulates the identity tragedy of Cecilia. Estorino’s play, significantly subtitled *Versión infiel de una novela sobre infidelidades*, is not only a reflection on both past and present but also an analysis of the process of creation of a literary work and the multifaceted relationship between reality and fiction.

In cinema, besides Humberto Solás’ *Cecilia* (1982), which will be analysed in detail later on, Gerardo Chijona produced, in 2000, *Un paraíso bajo las estrellas*. Chijona’s film is a comedy of intrigue that loosely transplants Villaverde’s interracial love plot to 1990s Cuba, when the difficult economic situation lived on the island after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European block led to a reappearance of problems that seemed to have been surpassed in previous decades. Thus, issues such as foreign economic penetration, poverty, prostitution and tourism are all dealt with in a parodic tone against the backdrop of the luxurious cabaret *Tropicana*.

But attention to *Cecilia Valdés* has not only come from the revolutionary government and Cubans on the island. Its denunciation of colonial rule through the institution of slavery has become a suitable metaphor for those who disagree with the revolutionary power structure and denounce it as a continuation of a patriarchal, white and dictatorial tradition on the island. Like Villaverde, who wrote the novel in his exile in New York, other writers have undertaken recreations of *Cecilia Valdés* from their exile in the United States. Thus, in *La loma*

del ángel (1987), Reinaldo Arenas (1943-1990) attempts a contemporary parodic re-writing of Villaverde's work that not only "corrects" the latter's text but also denounces the present-day evidence of authoritarianism and slavery in Cuba.⁶⁵

Villaverde's novel has also served as an inspiration for many other literary texts. Cecilia and his creator appear as characters in Alfredo Antonio Fernández's novel *Lances de amor, vida y muerte del caballero Narciso* (1994, *Premio Alejo Carpentier* 1993), a fictionalised biography of General Narciso López, the annexionist leader whom Villaverde fought with and worked for as his secretary. Fernández's novel portrays Cecilia as the lover of General López; like the latter and Villaverde himself, she has to endure the painful experience of exile, a condition shared by so many Cubans throughout the last two centuries that has become a constant in the history of the consolidation of the Cuban nation

The hold and influence that Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* has exercised on both Cuban psyche and arts are obvious and powerful, as shown in this brief review of the numerous re-writings that his novel has inspired since the moment of its publication. When Humberto Solás undertook his re-writing of *Cecilia Valdés* and its transposition to cinema in the late 1970s, the literary text was not, therefore, the only stock of knowledge that Cubans had on their minds when confronted with Solás' *Cecilia*.

⁶⁵ See Olivares (1994), Luis (1990) and Ette (1991) for an analysis of Arenas' novel.

VI

ICAIC and HUMBERTO SOLÁS

...que debe ser el cine dentro de la sociedad socialista: un cine de remodelación constante de la sociedad, donde siempre se hacen preguntas, donde las respuestas no son fáciles porque se manejan verdades relativas; es un cine basado en el marxismo. Yo soy marxista y creo que mi deber es “a cada nueva circunstancia, una nueva respuesta”. (...) Lo que yo no puedo pensar es que un marxista sea un hombre con un criterio cerrado de la vida, porque el marxismo es una provocación a que pienses y a que todos los días tú te replantees la historia y tus actos.

Humberto Solás in Castillo (1994: 49)

In this Chapter we analyse in detail the context of production of Humberto Solás' *Cecilia* in order to fully understand the controversy that it generated after its premiere and which has led to its oblivion. Hence, a brief review of the history of ICAIC, Cuba's national film industry, is first carried out to then explain how the project of adapting *Cecilia Valdés* was forged. The reasons why Humberto Solás was the person entrusted with the enterprise are also explored.

The Establishment of a Film Industry: ICAIC

The process of transformation initiated by the revolutionary government in 1959 affected all spheres of Cuban reality, including the cultural milieu. The role of culture in the consolidation and perpetuation of a hegemonic power and its social

order was clearly perceived by the revolutionary leaders. Hence, new cultural institutions and organisations were founded to replace what remained of the republican ones and to integrate the artists and cultural workers who were to help in the elimination of the “old vices” and the construction of the new egalitarian society.

One of these institutions was the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (*Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos*, ICAIC), which was set up to tackle the difficult task of developing a national film industry from practically nothing and with great economic constraints.⁶⁶

Law No. 169, published in the Official Gazette on 24 March 1959, barely three months after the triumph of the Revolution, instituted the creation of the new film institute and the principles that were to govern it.⁶⁷ It claims the status of cinema as an art form that, “liberado de ataduras mezquinas e inútiles

⁶⁶ There had been several attempts to create a national cinema in Cuba. Some early filmmakers such as Enrique Díaz Quesada (1882-1923) and Ramón Peón (1897-1971) tried to develop Cuban film production by using historical and folkloric subjects. However, the high cost of production and the lack of financial sources made their enterprise extremely difficult, especially since the advent of the talkies in the 1920s that demanded large quantities of capital for the transition to the technology of sound. By the early 1930s film distribution and exhibition in Cuba were monopolised by U.S. and Mexican multinationals that populated the screens with their films. In this context, therefore, the development of a national industry was practically impossible. Hence, most Cuban production until 1959 was limited to local consumption newsreels, advertising cinema shorts and pornography. Most of the few feature films produced were imitations of U.S. genres, particularly the musical, the detective film and the romantic melodrama, in which any reference to the problematic Cuban existence was avoided. Parallel to this commercial cinema, since the 1940s, there was an important movement of amateur filmmaking (*cine aficionado*) centred around the numerous *cine-clubs* on the island, which ICAIC grew out of. Among these, the film unit of the radical cultural society *Nuestro Tiempo* at the University of Havana, associated with the Communist Party (PSP), carried out a pivotal role throughout the 1950s. There, Julio García Espinosa produced the documentary *El Mégano* (1955), a critique of the miserable conditions of the charcoal burners in the region of the Zapata Swamps shot in the neo-realist style. *El Mégano* is acknowledged by ICAIC as the only precursor of Cuban revolutionary cinema. See Agramonte (1966), Chanan (1985), Rodríguez (1992), Douglas (1997) and Agramonte & Castillo (1998) for information and/or analysis of the cinema in Cuba before 1959.

⁶⁷ The *Ley de Creación del ICAIC*, *Ley No. 169* is reprinted in *Cine Cubano*, 140 (1998): 1-3. The great importance that the revolutionary government conceded to the film medium can also be seen in the organisation of a film unit called *Cine Rebelde* as soon as they got to power. *Cine Rebelde*, which belonged to the Rebel Army's Culture Unit (*Dirección de Cultura del Ejército Rebelde*), produced two short documentaries before it was absorbed by the ICAIC in March 1959, namely Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Esta tierra nuestra* and Julio García Espinosa's *La vivienda*.

servidumbres, [debe] contribuir naturalmente y con todos sus recursos técnicos y prácticos al desarrollo y enriquecimiento del nuevo humanismo que inspira nuestra Revolución". The necessity of establishing a national cinema that truly portrays Cuban reality, culture and idiosyncrasy without distortion is highlighted, together with the importance of the film medium in the political socialisation of the people, due to its wide appeal and popularity. The need to re-educate the taste of the audiences, which have been conditioned by Hollywood dominance, is also emphasised.

The management and administration of the film industry was to be carried out by a Director-President designated by the head of state (*Primer Ministro de la Nación*), i.e. Fidel Castro. The person chosen was Alfredo Guevara (b.1925, no relation to Che Guevara), who had already been in charge of the writing of the *Ley de creación del ICAIC, Ley No. 169*. Guevara was an old friend of Castro's since their time at the University of Havana, when they both participated in the student movement against Batista's dictatorship. Chanan (1985:78-79) recounts how Guevara and Castro were in rival political student associations at the university, the former in the Revolutionary Socialist Movement (*Movimiento Socialista Revolucionario*, MSR) and the latter in the Revolutionary Insurreccional Union (*Unión Insurreccional Revolucionaria*, UIR). The two became friends, however, when they both went to Colombia in April 1948 as members of a small delegation to a meeting of Latin American students sponsored by the Argentinean regime of Juan Perón. There, they participated in the popular social uprising that ensued from the assassination of the Colombian Liberal Party leader Juan Gaitán on 9 April (the so-called *Bogotazo*). Back in Cuba, Guevara continued to be active both in the cultural and political spheres. As an artist, he participated in the direction

and filming of some works, such as *El Mégano*, and wrote some scripts with Luis Buñuel and Cesare Zavattini. He was also one of the founders of the radical cultural society *Nuestro Tiempo* (see footnote 66). As a political activist, in 1953 he became a member of the Popular Socialist Party (*Partido Socialista Popular*, PSP), the pre-revolutionary communist party, which he abandoned in 1957 to join Castro's 26 July Movement (*Movimiento 26 de Julio*); this obviously strengthened Fidel and Guevara's personal relationship but also provoked the animosity of the members of the PSP towards the latter. Since his student days, therefore, art and politics were the main activities of Guevara, who, once the Revolution triumphed, stayed active in both as the head of ICAIC.

When the film institute was established, all the technical equipment and qualified personnel of the cinema medium came immediately under its supervision. ICAIC, therefore, controlled film production on the island. The nationalisation of all distribution companies and exhibition outlets throughout the early 1960s left in its hands the three branches of the cinema industry.⁶⁸

Once film production, distribution and exhibition were under state authority, profitability was no longer the main criterion to follow when making a film. The artistic quality and the true revolutionary nature of the film became the measures of the new productions. The projects to be undertaken were decided through discussions and debates by the filmmakers themselves, who were the ones

⁶⁸ Other institutions also produce films on the island, namely the Film Unit of the Revolutionary Army (*Sección Filmica de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* [ECIFAR-TV]), the Cinematographic Department of the Cuban Institute of Radio and Television (*Departamento de Cinematografía del Instituto Cubano de Radio y Televisión* [ICRT]), the cinema department at the Ministry of Education (CINED), the *cine aficionado* movements, the International School of Cinema and Television (*Escuela Internacional de Cine Y Televisión* [EICTV]) founded in 1986 in San Antonio de los Baños and the cinema unit at the *Asociación Hermanos Saíz* (a cultural association linked to the Communist Youth Union, *Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas*, UJC). ICAIC, however, is the organisation in charge of the national film industry.

that ran ICAIC with Guevara at their head. Still, most films have recovered the subsidised capital in the home market, and some have even become international successes and blockbusters, despite the practical and technical limitations that Cuban cinema has always encountered due to its scant economic resources. Cuban audiences have always attended massively the projection of Cuban films; the demand, in fact, has never been satisfied with the films made.⁶⁹

ICAIC has also performed an important role in the training of artists. When it was created, very few personnel had any cinematographic qualifications. Only two of its founders, Julio García Espinosa (b.1926) and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (1928-1996), had studied cinema direction at the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia* in Rome from 1951 to 1953. The experience of the other founders and personnel was limited to the amateur filmmaking movement (*cine aficionado*) of the 1940s and 1950s. Many international filmmakers, writers and technicians were invited by ICAIC in the early 1960s to share their expertise with the Cubans, who also travelled abroad to complement their preparation.⁷⁰

An internal system of training was tacitly established. Artists started helping in the productions of the more advanced filmmakers and progressively increased their responsibilities until they were ready to create their own work. They first practised their expertise with the documentary genre to then go on to

⁶⁹ Cubans have traditionally been frequent cinema-goers. As Burton (1985:139) notes, already in pre-revolutionary times the Cuban cinema market was the most profitable in Latin America. Out of a population of less than seven million, there was an average of one and a half million spectators per week, despite the fact that cinema had not yet reached many rural areas.

⁷⁰ Artists such as the French director Agnes Varda, the Italian screenwriter Cesare Zavattini, the documentalists Joris Ivens from Holland and Theodor Christensen from Denmark came to the island to participate in courses and seminars and to advise Cuban directors in their productions. Once the links with the Communist block were forged, many ICAIC personnel went to train to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe; filmmakers from these countries also came to Cuba and participated as directors in co-productions such as *Para quién baila La Habana* (Vladimir Cech, 1963, co-production with Czechoslovakia), *Preludio 11* (Kurt Maetzing, co-production with Eastern Germany) and *Soy Cuba* (Mihail Kalatozov, 1964, co-production with the Soviet Union).

fictional films. Veteran filmmakers always contributed to the productions of the less experienced colleagues for two main reasons: first, to provide their assistance and help; and second, to distribute fairly the meagre budget that ICAIC was allocated so that everybody had their opportunity to produce their film. This partly explains why some of the most renowned Cuban filmmakers such as Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Humberto Solás do not have a large filmography.

The early years at ICAIC were a period of experimentation in search for a truly original and popular Cuban cinema both in terms of form and content. As was happening in other Latin American countries during this decade, Cuban filmmakers attempted to honestly capture “la realidad nacional” and “el pueblo” with their cameras, so that films improved the audience’s understanding and analysis of the nation’s historical development and present-day situation. This unadulterated representation of their countries on the screen required new original forms of expression since, they argued, only an autochthonous film language would be able to fully apprehend a reality that had been distorted by Hollywood films for decades.⁷¹

The new films had to be popular and genuinely revolutionary, both formally and thematically, in order to help in the creation of a better society, as was explicitly stated in the law of the creation of ICAIC. And *revolutionary*, Cuban filmmakers carefully stated and repeated, was not synonymous with political propaganda and complacent representations of the Revolution’s

⁷¹ In the 1960s the so-called New Latin American Cinema (*Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano*) emerged as a movement. Not only in Cuba but also in countries such as Brazil, Argentina and Bolivia a new generation of filmmakers were trying to create a politically committed cinema that helped in the social transformation of their nations. The movement has also produced a large body of theoretical investigation on cinema. See Martin (ed., 1997:1) where the most important manifestos are reprinted. For analysis and information on the New Latin American Cinema, see King (1990), Pick (1993) and Martin (ed., 1997:2).

achievements. Conversely, a revolutionary film must always involve a questioning of reality that aids the spectator in comprehending the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in all historical events and political struggles. Revolutionary films pose questions, but do not give answers. It is the spectator who has to provide those answers, which are never absolute truths, and to behave accordingly. As Guevara (1969:2) reflected in an article published to commemorate the tenth anniversary of ICAIC, in which he summed up the cinema achievements of that decade:

Entiendo por [artistas revolucionarios] a cuantos en la práctica y en su teoría –independientemente de canonizaciones más o menos “ideológicas” –, pero sobre todo en su práctica, disponen de la capacidad de ruptura necesaria para considerar *cada punto de llegada, como el próximo punto de partida*.

This process of experimentation and the quest for a revolutionary national cinema produced throughout the 1960s, in the hands of Santiago Álvarez, some of the best documentaries in world cinema. In the fictional genre, 1968 marked the year of maturity; two of the feature films produced then, Humberto Solás' *Lucía* and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, are unanimously considered masterpieces not only in the Cuban and Latin American context but also in international cinema in general. Retrospectively, in fact, 1968 represents the zenith of the cinema industry on the island. The daring treatment of Cuban reality and the audacious formal experimentation in both films have not been surpassed in the following decades. 1968 marks also the beginning of a difficult period in the arts in Cuba, as will be explained below.

Challenges to ICAIC's Policies

The triumph of the Revolution in 1959 and the overthrowing of Batista's callous regime was received with enthusiasm and relief by the majority of the Cuban population. Artists and intellectuals, who in many cases had also been involved in the struggle against the dictator, shared these feelings and showed their eagerness and commitment to participate in the changes that were to take place. This initial happiness and unity, however, soon dissipated and disagreements about the road the Revolution should take soon emerged.

On the eve of the CIA-sponsored *Playa Girón* invasion by Cuban exiles in April 1961, Fidel Castro declared that the Revolution was a socialist one. Two months earlier, in January 1961, U.S.-Cuban diplomatic relations had been formally broken. Many people who had taken active part in the armed struggle and in the organisation of the revolutionary government had already left the island throughout 1960 and early 1961 due to the increasing influence of communism. The public and official declaration by Castro of the socialist character of the Revolution was not approved by all sectors of the population; dissension and clashes immediately followed. The increasing economic problems that Cubans were beginning to experience contributed to make matters worse.

Within this context, fraught with tensions and rivalries, ICAIC's policies were not to everybody's liking and were soon challenged by other sectors of Cuba's artistic and political field. The first serious conflict happened in May 1961, when the short film *PM* was not granted a licence for theatrical exhibition. Directed by Sabá Cabrera Infante (brother of the writer Guillermo) and Orlando Jiménez Leal, *PM* was a fifteen-minute documentary shot in "free cinema" style that portrayed the marginal black Havana nightlife, a world of drunkenness where

prostitution and drug trafficking still persisted. The film was shown on television and the filmmaker Néstor Almendros wrote a favourable review in the independent cultural weekly *Bohemia*. Cabrera Infante and Jiménez Leal applied then for an exhibition license, which the ICAIC refused to concede alleging that the film was “en este momento, nocivo a los intereses del pueblo cubano y su Revolución” in view of the difficult circumstances in which the island was submerged. At this point, the liberals of the magazine *Lunes de Revolución*, a literary supplement directed by Guillermo Cabrera Infante in Carlos Franqui’s newspaper *Revolución*, became involved in the confrontation and started a campaign denouncing ICAIC’s policies and attitudes.

After weeks of intense discussions, escalating accusations and ICAIC’s final ratification of their decision, the crisis had to be solved by Fidel Castro himself, who met the intellectual and artistic community in several assemblies held at the National Library on 16, 23 and 30 June 1961.⁷² In his closing speech, the often-quoted *Palabras a los intelectuales*, Castro endorsed ICAIC’s resolution and elaborated profusely on the issue under discussion, i.e. “el problema de la libertad para la creación artística” (7).⁷³ He acknowledged that, understandably, there were many sectors of the Cuban population who did not yet have a revolutionary attitude towards life. The *revolucionarios*, he said, were at the vanguard of the people and their duty was to lead the people until they all finally marched together. But, importantly, the Revolution could not forget all the honest people who still had their doubts about the processes of transformation that

⁷² See Chanan (1985) for a full account and different views on the conflict. Significantly, extracts from *PM* can be seen in the final credit sequence of Julian Schnabel’s film *Before Night Falls* (2001), based on Reinaldo Arenas’ autobiography *Antes que anochezca* (1992). Its use in Schnabel’s film, which depicts Arenas’ intensely critical account of Castro’s Cuba, supports the view of *PM* as the first victim of an open act of censorship in revolutionary Cuba.

⁷³ Reprinted in Santana (1977: 3-47). Quotes are taken from this edition.

were happening; there were room and responsibilities for them, only the reactionary and counter-revolutionary did not have a place in the new society.

Castro then went on to expound the cultural policy of his government:

La Revolución tiene que comprender esa realidad y, por lo tanto, debe actuar de manera que todo ese sector de artistas y de intelectuales que no sean genuinamente revolucionarios, encuentre dentro de la Revolución un campo donde trabajar y crear y que su espíritu creador, aún cuando no sean escritores o artistas revolucionarios, tenga oportunidad y libertad para expresarse dentro de la Revolución. Esto significa que dentro de la Revolución, todo; contra la Revolución, nada. Contra la Revolución nada, porque la Revolución tiene también sus derechos y el primer derecho de la Revolución es el derecho de existir y frente al derecho de la Revolución de ser y de existir, nadie. Por cuanto la Revolución comprende los intereses del pueblo, por cuanto la Revolución significa los intereses de la Nación entera, nadie puede alegar con razón un derecho contra ella. (17)

He also favoured the development of a culture to which everybody had access, “el verdadero patrimonio del pueblo”, and an absolute freedom of form and experimentalism in the artistic works.

The confrontation over PM, as Chanan (1985) explains, was the climax of the incipient rivalries between different political trends that lay beneath the surface during the period of the *cine aficionado* in the 1950s. The liberal group around *Lunes* was not ready or did not want to take the path of Marxism that ICAIC had embraced from the very beginning of the Revolution. The conflict was officially “resolved” after the meetings in the National Library. ICAIC came out undamaged but a re-structuring in other organisations followed. The direction of *Casa de las Américas* was changed and a new institution was created in order to foster a better understanding among the intellectual and artistic fields, namely the Cuban Union of Writers and Artists (*Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba*, UNEAC), which was also to publish a new cultural magazine, *La Gaceta de*

Cuba. The literary supplement *Lunes* appeared only once more; most of the artists who had gathered around it took the road to exile in the next few years.⁷⁴

ICAIC, however, was not only attacked by the liberals around *Lunes*. The more orthodox cadres of the National Council of Culture (*Consejo Nacional de Cultura*, CNC), directed by Edith García Buchaca, and the old guard of the PSP, headed by Blas Roca Calderón (1908-1985), publicly showed their disagreement with ICAIC's policy of artistic freedom and risk-taking. Throughout 1962 and 1963, the debates centred on the cinema poster school set at ICAIC and the film institute's exhibition programme. The first dispute revolved around the quality and convenience in a revolutionary context of abstract artistic forms such as the posters that were being made. At this moment, abstract art was condemned in the Soviet Union as counter-revolutionary, but the filmmakers and artists at ICAIC firmly defended their right to artistic experimentation and, at least for the moment, succeeded. As regards the latter, the controversy was initiated on 12 December 1963 by Blas Roca, when he condemned ICAIC's exhibition policy in his answer to a reader's letter received in the newspaper that he edited, *Hoy*, co-Official Organ of the United Party of the Socialist Revolution (*Partido Único de la Revolución Socialista*, PURS).⁷⁵ Roca, from the column *Aclaraciones*, condemned the exhibition of decadent bourgeois films, such as Federico Fellini's *La dolce*

⁷⁴ Néstor Almendros, Sabá Cabrera Infante and Orlando Jiménez Leal left the island in 1962-63. Guillermo Cabrera Infante departed in 1965. See López (1996) and D'Lugo (1996) for the work of Cuban filmmakers in exile.

⁷⁵ In 1961 a new party called Integrated Revolutionary Organisations (*Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas*, ORI) was founded on the island in order to merge the three main organisations that had participated in the struggle against Batista, namely the 26 July Movement (*Movimiento 26 de Julio*), the PSP and the Revolutionary Student Directorate (*Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil*). The party changed its name to United Party of the Socialist Revolution (*Partido Único de la Revolución Socialista*, PURS) in 1963 and to its definitive Cuban Communist Party (*Partido Comunista de Cuba*, PCC) in 1965. *Hoy* shared its status as Official Organ of the Party with *Revolución*.

vita, Pier Paolo Passolini's *Accatone*, Lautaro Murúa's *Alias Gardelito* and Luis Buñuel's *El ángel exterminador*, on the grounds that they were damaging for the education of the audiences, particularly the youth, and expounded his ideas about the type of films that should be exhibited and made (ironically, he also acknowledged that he had not seen the films under discussion). Guevara immediately answered Roca writing from the same newspaper. He elaborated on the role of art and the artist in the Revolution and defended their *carácter contestatario* in the following terms:

No es revolucionario, o más revolucionario el artista, o el artesano, que canta la acción diaria, es artista revolucionario, a nuestro modo de ver, aquel que con su ingenio y sensibilidad, con su saber y con su audacia, con su penetración y su imaginación, descubre el hilo de las cosas, o un hilo, o un hito del mundo real, hasta entonces inalcanzado, o no suficientemente explorado, y encuentra el modo de expresarlo. (...) La propaganda puede servirse del arte, debe hacerlo. El arte puede servir a la propaganda revolucionaria, debe hacerlo. Pero el arte no es propaganda, y ni en nombre de la revolución resulta lícito el escamoteo de sus significaciones. (reprinted in Guevara 1998:204)

He also explicitly refuted socialist realism as a possible direction for a truly revolutionary art and culture due to its Manichaeian and simple representation of reality.⁷⁶ If we followed that route, he stated, “quedaríamos expuestos a un general proceso de embrutecimiento y en realidad provocaríamos, no una revolución cultural ni una revolución en la cultura, sino simple y llanamente un retroceso en el hombre, y también en la revolución” (205-6). The controversy continued with other interventions by intellectuals, artists and the general public and new statements by both Roca and Guevara; it was ultimately

⁷⁶ Socialist realism was the official cultural doctrine devised in Stalin's Soviet Union by Zhdanov and Gorky in the 1930s.

settled by Guevara in an article, where he resorted to Fidel's words "Dentro de la Revolución, todo; contra la Revolución, nada", which had become the maxim of the revolutionary cultural policy.⁷⁷

Humberto Solás, director of *Cecilia*, in an interview with Rufo Caballero (1999), enlighteningly and succinctly describes the situation lived at ICAIC throughout the 1960s. He explains the type of cinema they aspired to do and the attacks that ICAIC had to deal with in the following manner:

Los años sesenta fueron el período HEROICO de la cinematografía cubana. En ese ámbito se crearon las canciones de gesta que fundaron el cine nuestro, como resultado de la irrupción revolucionaria. Grosso modo, se trató de un ciclo fuertemente nacionalista, donde urgía hacer una reescritura de nuestra historia pasada y presente, en términos de reedificar nuestra dignidad como pueblo; y a ello se le nombraba "búsqueda de nuestras raíces", "sentimiento de identidad", o incluso "legitimidad". Los enemigos ya estaban a la vista: por un lado los que querían teñir este proceso con el corset post-stalinista del realismo socialista, y de otro, los que propugnaban un cosmopolitismo cultural a nombre de la "modernidad" y que ya avizoraban, aunque ingenuamente, la futura globalización. (...) Lo que creo fue acertado fue el punto intermedio de equilibrio que caracterizó al ICAIC de entonces".(5)

The root of these confrontations and others that were to come, partly, lies in the indefiniteness of Fidel's precept about cultural policy, since locating the limits of what is within the Revolution and what against can vary considerably depending on the prevalent mood of the time, as has frequently happened.

Hence, from 1965 onwards, a progressively increasing ideological dogmatism can be perceived in the government's policies and attitudes. The Cuban Communist Party (*Partido Comunista de Cuba*, PCC) was created and a

⁷⁷ Guevara (1998) includes a dossier where the articles written by the head of ICAIC are reprinted and a list and chronology of all articles and notes that appeared in press is given. *Cine cubano* 140 (1998) also partly reprints Guevara's writings and Blas Roca's *Aclaraciones* (pp. 76-84).

tighter ideological control on artists and their work started. "Deviant" writers and intellectuals were sent to join "el trabajo de producción" and interned in forced labour camps (*Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción*, UMAPS), a policy that was soon reversed.

The disastrous economic performance, the political isolation and the counter-revolutionary violence from which the island was suffering, contributed to an intensification of the ideological struggle and a greater stress on the *New Man*. In 1968, the so-called Revolutionary Offensive (*Ofensiva Revolucionaria*) was launched.⁷⁸ Signs of government pressure on artists and their involvement in and commitment to the Revolution also became increasingly noticeable. And if, in 1961, those artists who were not revolutionary were accepted and deemed necessary, now they were asked and even forced to become active militants. It is throughout these years, 1965-1968, that the bulk of departures of ICAIC personnel occurred (see López 1996).

The tensions culminated in the so-called Padilla case. Although this conflict was not directly to do with cinema and the ICAIC, it is worth recounting here briefly since it marked a turning point in the government's cultural policy, which obviously affected the cinema industry, and marked the definite end of the honeymoon between the Revolution and many Latin American and international intellectuals and artists.

The first episode of the crisis took place at the end of 1967, when the poet Heberto Padilla criticised the novel *Pasión de Urbino*, by Lisandro Otero, the vice-president of the CNC at the time. In the literary journal *El Caimán Barbudo*,

⁷⁸ The Revolutionary Offensive (*Ofensiva Revolucionaria*) consisted mainly of the wholesale nationalisation of what remained of the private sector, an emphasis on a moral economy and mobilisation for the sugar harvest of 1970.

the poet dismissed Otero's novel, which had lost to Guillermo Cabrera Infante's *Tres tristes tigres* in the 1964 Seix Barral competition in Barcelona, and praised the latter's work. He also condemned the fact that Cabrera Infante's novel had not been published in Cuba, despite being artistically superior to *Pasión de Urbino*.

In 1968, Padilla won the prize of the international jury of the *Premio de Poesía "Julián del Casal"* organised by UNEAC with the collection of poetry *Fuera del juego*. Some of the poems disapproved of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and showed disillusionment with the state of affairs in Cuba. The armed forces' journal, *Verde Olivo*, denounced the book as counter-revolutionary. The book, however, was published, albeit with an introduction by the board of directors of UNEAC that condemned the poems.

The confrontation between Padilla and the state reached its climax with his imprisonment on 20 March 1971 and his release on 27 April. That same day, at a meeting of UNEAC, Padilla blamed himself for his detention, pinpointed other "guilty" artists and begged for forgiveness for the harm he had caused the Revolution. Padilla's speech, however, was interpreted as a Stalinist-type confession by many left-wing international intellectuals, who publicly expressed their indignation with the direction in which the Revolution was leading.⁷⁹

The reaction of the Cuban government was immediate. Fidel Castro's speech closing the First National Congress on Education and Culture (*Primer Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura*), celebrated in Havana from 23 to 30 April 1971, censured the "Señores intelectuales burgueses, los liberalistas

⁷⁹ Casal (1971) is a compilation of declarations, documents and other information about Padilla's case. See also Díaz Martínez's personal account (he was a member of the jury) (1997) and the articles published on the occasion of Padilla's death in *Encuentro de la cultura cubana, 2000-2001* (invierno), 19, where his literary work is also analysed. Padilla went into exile in March 1980.

burgueses, los agentes de la CIA, las ratas intelectuales, los traidores y los tráfugas”. A new policy towards the arts could be perceived in both Fidel’s speech and the final declaration of the conference, which stated:

Los medios culturales no pueden servir de marco a la proliferación de falsos intelectuales que pretenden convertir el esnobismo, la extravagancia, el homosexualismo y demás aberraciones sociales, en expresiones del arte revolucionario, alejados de las masas y del espíritu de nuestra Revolución. (...)

La cultura, como la educación, no es ni puede ser apolítica ni imparcial, en tanto que es un fenómeno social e histórico condicionado por las necesidades de las clases sociales y sus luchas e intereses a lo largo de la historia. El apoliticismo no es más que un punto de vista vergonzante y reaccionario en la concepción y expresión culturales.(...)

El arte es un arma de la Revolución.(...)

La cultura de una sociedad colectivista es una actividad de las masas, no el monopolio de una élite, el adorno de unos pocos escogidos o la patente de corso de los desarraigados.⁸⁰

The government’s new cultural policy, therefore, favoured an art servicing the Revolution with an overt ideological content, *el arte como arma de la Revolución*. Socialist realism had finally been officially instituted at the beginning of the 1970s on the island, after years of internal struggles among the intelligentsia, the artists and the different sectors within the revolutionary leadership.

The new attitude towards the arts was most intensely felt in the literary sphere. Many prizes of literary competitions were declared “desiertos”; the few works published were less experimental than those of the 1960s, used a simple literary style and language, and explicitly praised the achievements of the Revolution without any critical acumen, hence reflecting official government

⁸⁰ Reprinted in Santana (1977:49-64). Quotes are extracted from pages 52-53, 57 and 58.

policy. It is what has become known in Cuban literature as the *Quinquenio gris* (1971-1975).

In cinema, by comparison, the new cultural policy was less destructive. The personal and direct relationship that Guevara enjoyed with the government elite, his skilful capacity for negotiation and manoeuvring and his honest belief in and defence of artistic freedom provided a wider, less oppressive space for the filmmakers and personnel at ICAIC. In fact, many writers such as Jesús Díaz, Antonio Benítez Rojo and Ambrosio Fornet looked for refuge in the film institute, where they worked as filmmakers and/or screenwriters. However, the new guidelines were also felt and, if 1968 was the climax of Cuban cinema with the premiere of *Memorias del subdesarrollo* and *Lucía*, it was also the start of a progressive period of crisis, as in the other art forms.

The representation of contemporary reality became a controversial and difficult issue for many filmmakers. This is the case of Humberto Solás, for instance. In 1969 he started to film *Un día de noviembre*. The protagonist of the film, Esteban, is a *revolucionario* who is working in a Ministry when he is diagnosed with an incurable illness that will end his life in a few months. After taking permanent sick leave, he spends his days searching for answers to his new and final life stage amidst a hostile society that is too immersed in material reality and no longer cares for the spiritual and affective side of the human soul. The film, once finished, however, was not granted permission for exhibition. Although it is not free of faults (some problems with the script and the acting, for example), its “intimista” nature and Esteban’s malady symbolising the demise of the early spirit of the Revolution are the factors more likely to have delayed the film’s release until 1978. Although Guevara (1999) has stated that the decision of the

late premiere of the film was jointly taken by himself and Solás, the latter has frequently shown his disappointment and annoyance for what happened.

In order to avoid such problems with the establishment, most filmmakers resorted to the distant past as the subject matter for their works. As Solás explains in a recent interview, this turn to the past “no fue una opción; fue una obligatoriedad para poder continuar en la profesión sin mayores sobresaltos” (Caballero 1999:6). Hence, many of the films produced throughout the 1970s were re-writings of the history of the Cuban nation, which also generally established a dialogue with the present and served as a vehicle to allegorically comment more or less overtly on contemporary reality. The false bourgeois conception of history had to be corrected, said the filmmakers; a scientific analysis of history was needed in order to understand the complexities and contradictions in the development of their country and other “naciones hermanas”, the popular struggles undertaken and the present-day situation. Those who wrongly had not yet enjoyed a place in history now became the protagonists; the black people and their traumatic experience of slavery came then to the forefront on the Cuban screens. Fictional films such as Gutiérrez Alea’s *La última cena* (1976), Manuel Octavio Gómez’s *La primera carga al machete* (1969) and black filmmaker Sergio Giral’s trilogy (*El otro Francisco*, 1974; *Ranheador*, 1976; and

Maluala, 1979), exalted and legitimised the contribution of the multi-ethnic black population to the painful birth of the Cuban nation.⁸¹

The Late 1970s: The Process of Institutionalisation of the Revolution, ICAIC and the Project of *Cecilia*.

The failure of the radical, idealist political model followed in the late 1960s was indisputable after the fiasco of the sugar harvest in 1970. As a last attempt to make the model work, the revolutionary leadership had embarked upon a utopian ten-million-ton harvest of sugar which, despite an allocation of all available resources to the sugar industry and massive, unprecedented popular mobilisations, could not be fulfilled. Although a record figure of 8.5 million was produced, the economy was shattered. Castro's power was also shaken. The revolutionary leadership accepted the blame and a re-organisation of the economy and the political system inspired by the Soviet Union's experience began. The pressures exercised by the latter on the Cuban government in this process of transformation have been well-documented and extensively debated in scholarly literature. Undoubtedly, the increasing influence of the Soviet Union in all spheres of Cuban

⁸¹ Both *El otro Francisco* and *Rancheador* are based in nineteenth-century literary works. The former is inspired by Suárez y Romero's 'anti-slavery' novel *Francisco*. Giral's film is in fact an exercise of cinematic literary criticism. It is both a re-creation of the romantic, sentimentalised portrayal of the relationship between the slaves Francisco and Dorotea that appears in the novel and a deconstruction of such image through a thorough historical analysis of its context of production. The film depicts 'the other history' of Francisco, Dorotea and the other slaves that Suárez y Romero did not represent due to his class interests. *Rancheador* is based on the *Diario de un rancheador* that Cirilo Villaverde transcribed (see Chapter 4). Gutiérrez Alea's *La última cena* is also inspired in a literary text, in this case a fragment from the historian Moreno Fraginals' seminal book *El ingenio*. See the interview with Gutiérrez Alea by Gerardo Chijona in *Cine cubano*, 93: 81-88.

life played an important role, but the inadequacy of domestic policies from the 1960s and the maturity of the revolutionary leadership were also crucial in deciding the changes that took place (Mesa Lago 1978). In the end, what seemed to be a viable alternative in the process of building communism was chosen.

The process, defined by the leadership as the structuring and formation of the socialist state machine, consisted of the re-arrangement of old institutions and the creation of new ones that were to govern and administer society. A decentralisation of power was to happen and the mass organisations were to perform a fundamental role in decision-making in order to make the system truly democratic and avoid bureaucracy. A new legal system was also created to legitimise the new state authority and a new Constitution was proclaimed in 1976.⁸² The process of institutionalisation was officially concluded that year.

One of the newly created institutions was the Ministry of Culture (*Ministerio de Cultura*, MINCULT), established following the resolutions of the First Congress of the PCC held in Havana on 17-22 December 1975. MINCULT, headed by Armando Hart Dávalos and divided into five vice-Ministries, was welcomed by intellectuals and artists after the dark years of the early seventies.⁸³

⁸² The commission in charge of drafting the Constitution was set up in 1970 and headed by Blas Roca, who had maintained the controversy about the role of art in a revolutionary society with Guevara in the early 1960s. The Constitution was approved in a referendum held on 15 February 1976 and proclaimed a few days later, on 24 February 1976. Blas Roca was elected president of the National Assembly (*Asamblea Nacional*; the Organ of People's Power [*Órgano del Poder Popular*, OPP] at a national level; the legislative power) in late 1976. He was also in the Council of State (*Consejo de Estado*, the executive committee of the National Assembly) and a member of the Politbureau (*Buró Político*) and the General Secretariat (*Secretariado General*) of the PCC.

⁸³ The MINCULT was divided into the Vice-Ministry of Theatre and Dance, the Vice-Ministry of Plastic Arts and Design, the Vice-Ministry of Books, the Vice-Ministry of Music and Entertainment and the Vice-Ministry of Film.

Certainly the tensions lessened and the atmosphere relaxed, but a tight control still persisted. The resolutions passed at the PCC Congress on Art and Culture, 'Sobre la cultura artística y literaria', emphasised the socialist character that every work of art should have; no fissures for "los elementos negativos sobrevivientes de la cultura burguesa" (85) should be allowed. The cultural interchange with the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries was exhorted, but "la necesidad de una vigilante valoración de la literatura y el arte provenientes de los países capitalistas, a menudo portadores de desviacionismos ideológicos bajo el manto de deslumbrantes novedades" (85) was advised.⁸⁴ The same was stated in the articles on culture and education in the new constitution.⁸⁵

The repercussions of the creation of MINCULT for ICAIC were far-reaching. Until 1976, ICAIC had been an autonomous institution. Guevara had always discussed the resources and policies directly with the government elite. After the founding of MINCULT, he was designated the Vice-Minister of Film and continued in charge of the cinema industry on the island.⁸⁶ Thus, he was able to provide in the film sphere a continuity in the policies he had been implementing at ICAIC since its founding. However, now he had to negotiate everything, including the budget, with MINCULT, rather than with revolutionary leaders.

⁸⁴ See 'Sobre la cultura artística y literaria. Tesis y Resolución del Primer Congreso del *Partido Comunista de Cuba*'. Diciembre 1975 (Santana 1977: 79-133).

⁸⁵ See Santana (1977: 135-139).

⁸⁶ The Vice-Ministry of Film was in fact divided into three departments that corresponded to the three branches of any film industry: (1) the Office of Cinematic Diffusion, which was in charge of the distribution branch; (2) the Office of Technical Assistance to the Exhibition Sector, which helped in the maintenance of the theatres that were now administered by the Film Exhibition Enterprise of each province and that belonged to the provincial OPP; and (3) the Office of Cinematic Production, Empresa ICAIC, which was in charge of film production. Although strictly speaking ICAIC became now exclusively the production branch of the film industry, the industry as a whole kept on being called ICAIC.

ICAIC, therefore, lost its privileged independence and became one of the many institutions that MINCULT had under its control.⁸⁷

The creation of MINCULT also deprived ICAIC of one of its key figures. Julio García Espinosa, one of the founders and head of Artistic Programming (*Director de Programación Artística*) left the film institute to become the Vice-Minister of Music and Entertainment. His departure was highly felt, since he had always been a major player in the relations both between the filmmakers and ICAIC's leadership, and ICAIC and other cultural institutions on the island. The death in February 1977 of another of the founders and pillars of ICAIC and head of the Department of Foreign Relations (*Departamento de Relaciones Internacionales*) since its inception, Saúl Yelín, was also a great loss for the film institute's *modus operandi*.

As already mentioned, in terms of cinematographic production, many of the films made throughout this decade concentrate on the re-evaluation of the history of the Cuban nation (*cine rescate*). Although some of them are definitely among the best works ever produced by ICAIC (e.g. Gutiérrez Alea's *La última cena* has over time become a classic of Cuban cinema), the daring formal and thematic experimentation that characterised the 1960s was gone. *La última cena* and the great domestic success of Cuban cinema in the late 1970s, Pastor Vega's *Retrato de Teresa* (1979),⁸⁸ resort to classical narrative plot development and to a

⁸⁷ This policy was partly reversed in 1986, when ICAIC became economically independent from MINCULT and, thus, regained its autonomy.

⁸⁸ *Retrato de Teresa* portrays the problem of *machismo* that persisted in Cuba in the 1970s. Through the character of Teresa and her relationship with her husband Ramón, the daily problems that many Cuban women confronted (the exhausting double shift, the pressures at work to participate in worker's activities, the arguments at home, the double morality in the sexual behaviour of men and women, the constraints in the development of a spiritual fulfilment) were denounced. The film provoked a great debate in Cuban society and became one of the blockbusters in the domestic market.

more traditional cinematic language, features that were so much criticised in the previous decade in the search for an autochthonous form of expression. As was happening elsewhere in the Latin American continent, the stifling political and economic situation lived throughout the 1970s seemed to have suffocated the great “truly Latin American” cinema produced in the 1960s. Or so filmmakers and film critics, both internationally and abroad, said.

It is within this context of external and internal re-organisation, loss of autonomy and nostalgia for the great international successes of the 1960s that the project of the re-creation of *Cecilia Valdés* was forged at ICAIC. Cuban cinema needed to return to the spotlight of the artistic scenario both on the island and abroad; the transposition to film of the Cuban literary classic seemed an appropriate and safe bet in the regaining of past glory. The filmmaker to whom the task was entrusted was Humberto Solás, who, at the early age of twenty-six, had provided ICAIC with one of its zeniths, *Lucía*.

Humberto Solás

Humberto Solás was born in the neighbourhood of San Juan de Dios (Habana Vieja) on 4 December 1941. The day of his birthday was the feast of Santa Bárbara, who incarnated the African Yoruba deity Shangó in the religious syncretism that had originated in Cuba. Following tradition, the black women of the area went to the house of the recently born and performed a ritual around the cradle in honour of Shangó; they handed in a layette that had been prepared

throughout the year for the baby who was born the same day as the Yoruba god of war. Days later, the boy was baptised in the *Iglesia del Ángel*.⁸⁹

Solás passed his childhood at the heart of Habana Vieja, an area that was a melting pot of races and cultures re-created by Cirilo Villaverde in *Cecilia Valdés*. He has frequently acknowledged that his early years spent amidst the great Baroque buildings and the *solares* that populated Habana Vieja impressed him so much that he wanted to become an architect to interpret and re-create all these spaces. As exemplified in the above-related anecdote, the African element, so ubiquitous and vibrant in this quarter, was always present in Solás' life, who was born to a white family of humble means.

At the early age of fourteen, he joined the clandestine struggle against Batista as a member of an urban "action and sabotage" cell (*célula de acción y sabotaje*) of the 26 July Movement. With the triumph of the Revolution and the establishment of the revolutionary government, Humberto started to work as a secretary in the Ministry of Labour (*Ministerio de Trabajo*). At this stage he had already abandoned his old inspiration to become an architect for that of filmmaker; cinema would allow him to express his aesthetic and intellectual concerns whilst reconstructing multiple spaces and architectures, he thought. The discovery of Vittorio de Sica's film *Umberto D* (1951) and other Italian neo-realists works showed him a different cinema that he perceived as a possibility for his personal development: "Esos filmes transcurrían en los ámbitos de una

⁸⁹ For biographical data on Humberto Solás, see the numerous interviews with him collected in the bibliography, particularly Guerra (1997) and Flores González (2001). The documentary *El cine y la vida: Humberto Solás y Nelson Rodríguez*, directed by Manuel Iglesias in 1995, is an invaluable source on Solás' life and filmography. The documentary traces the long personal and professional relationship between Solás and Nelson Rodríguez, editor and collaborator in all his films. It is structured as two long interviews with both artists and footage of the works that they produced. For my account, I rely on all these sources, as well as personal interviews I had with both Humberto and Nelson in 1999.

arquitectura que me fascinaba y que también se exhibía a mi alrededor. Aquí se hacía sentir lo universal; estaban los referentes para desarrollar mi aspiración de cineasta o arquitecto” (Interview with Guerra 1997: 39).⁹⁰

With no formal knowledge and training in filmmaking, Solás taught himself the rudiments of the cinematic art and produced with his scant resources a five-minute experimental film in 16mm. that he presented in the recently created ICAIC. The short, entitled *La huida*, portrayed the last minutes in the life of a *revolucionario* who had been betrayed and was captured by Batista’s security forces. In its first screening at ICAIC, the negative broke due to its low quality and deficient montage technique; however, his resolute determination to become a cineaste and the potential the film showed, earned him a place at the film institute at the age of eighteen.

At ICAIC, he started to work as a typist in *Cine Cubano*, a journal that, following the policy of universal film literacy, had been established in order to provide serious film criticism and theory for viewers and young cineastes. Solás recalls that this job allowed him to become acquainted with the latest theoretical and historical developments in the cinema art that were being published throughout the world. Like the other young filmmakers at the film

⁹⁰ The neo-realist cinema movement was developed in Italy in the 1940s. It postulated a cinema of everyday life in opposition to the grandiose, monumental films of the Cinecittà studios promoted by Mussolini’s regime. Neo-realist cinema resorted to non-professional actors, real locations, natural light and sound, and many other devices of documentary filmmaking in order to create fictional works that became a ‘mirror of reality’ and were cheap to produce. In terms of content, it focused on the daily life of common people and their relationship to the society they were integrated. The difficult economic conditions of post-war Italy were portrayed in the films of cineastes such as De Sica, Fellini, Rosellini and Visconti, the latter one of the major influences in Solás’ cinema. The impact of neo-realism in the early films of the New Latin American Cinema has been extensively analysed. In the case of Cuban cinema, as mentioned earlier, two of the founders of ICAIC, Gutiérrez Alea and García Espinosa, studied in Rome at the filmmaking school *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia*. On their return to Cuba, they produced *El Mégano* (1955) following neo-realist principles. Cesare Zavattini, the screenwriter and theoretician par excellence of neo-realism, was frequently invited to ICAIC in the early 1960s to help in the training of young filmmakers.

institute, he started a process of practical apprenticeship as producer and assistant director. He soon began directing his own shorts, which, in Solás' case and conversely to the other ICAIC cineastes, were frequently in the fictional genre rather than the documentary since he was not interested in the latter. His first work was *Casablanca* (1961), which was a contribution to the *Enciclopedia Popular*, a department created at ICAIC that produced ten-minute shorts of a didactic-informative nature.⁹¹ Between 1962 and 1963 he co-directed some shorts such as *Variaciones* (1962, documentary co-directed with Héctor Veitía), *Minerva traduce el mar* (1963, fiction co-directed with Oscar Valdés) and *El retrato* (1963, fiction co-directed again with Valdés).⁹² Inspired by the French new wave and the experimental European cinema in general, Solás has frequently stated that these early works were just attempts to dominate the cinematic language imbued by an inferiority complex that determined his uncritical adoption of European forms of expression. His trip to Italy in 1964, however, led him to become aware of his spiritual and cultural heritage amidst the shortages and difficult moments that he endured and the nostalgia for the island, as he explains:

Ese viaje fue muy azaroso y muy importante, porque fue también al interior de mí mismo y en el que me acerqué muy rápidamente –dentro de las posibilidades de aquel momento de mi vida –a saber quién yo era, mis límites y mis posibilidades, los valores éticos perdurables en mí. Fue un aprendizaje, un viaje al interior de mi personalidad, de mi espíritu, de mi alma, a lo más esencial de mí mismo; (...) le otorgué la verdadera dimensión que tenía para mí, lo que significaba en mis entrañas, qué

⁹¹ The *Enciclopedia Popular* was created in 1961 and served as a cinema school for many of the young artists. Thirty-two shorts or *notas*, as they were called, were produced until it was closed in 1963.

⁹² *Variaciones* is a documentary about the creation of the Art Schools (Escuelas de Arte) in Cubanacán, Havana. *Minerva traduce el mar* is a choreographed *comedia dell arte* in which Pierrot and Colombina dance around a sculpture of Minerva next to the sea whilst Lezama Lima recites in voiceover one of his poems. *El retrato*, based on a short-story by Aristides Fernández, is the account of a painter who discovers a portrait of a woman in an abandoned house and spends his days looking for this imaginary woman in his search for inspiration.

quería decir la cubanía, la nación, todas esas cosas. (Solás in Flores González 2001)

Back in Cuba in 1965, he aimed at producing a cinema different from his early works since, “en ninguno de esos films *estaba* yo. Y no sólo era yo el que no estaba. No se veían tampoco ni mi generación, ni mi país.” (Vega 1967: 144). He resorted to the immediate Cuban revolutionary past as his subject matter and produced the short *El acoso* (1965), in which a mercenary who has escaped from the *Playa Girón* invasion seeks refuge at a peasant girl’s house until he is hounded down by the *milicias*.

In 1966 he directed the first film that provided him with domestic and international recognition, the medium-length *Manuela*. It deals with the story of a peasant girl who, out of personal revenge, joins the revolutionary struggle in the Sierra Maestra but gradually acquires a *conciencia revolucionaria* and dies in one of the skirmishes. The realism and documentary-like character of many of the sequences, its daring and vibrant photography and montage, and the richness and realism of the dialogues were hailed as the beginning of truly Cuban forms of expression in cinema.

In September 1968 Solás finished *Lucía*, traditionally considered to be his best work and one of the climaxes of Cuban cinema. The film, which had been the most expensive produced by ICAIC so far, was one of a group of works that commemorated the one hundredth anniversary of Cuba’s struggle (*cien años de*

lucha) for independence.⁹³ Retaking the theme from *Manuela*, Solás portrays the progressive acquisition of *conciencia revolucionaria* of three women, all named Lucía, when confronted by personal crises that parallel crucial historical moments in the formation of the Cuban nation: 1895 and the War for Independence, 1932 and the fight against Machado and 196... and the efforts in the revolutionary times to eradicate old prejudices such as *machismo*. Each of the three parts of the film (the whole work lasts 160 minutes) is shot in a different style that encapsulates the mood and atmosphere of each epoch: a passionate melodramatic, opera-like aesthetic for the first; a 1930s and 1940s Hollywood look for the second; and a realist, comic tone for the third.

Amidst the international success of *Lucía*, Solás undertook his next project, *Un día de noviembre*. As explained earlier, the problematic situation in Cuba, in general, and in the artistic field, in particular, in the early seventies resulted in the film not being premiered until 1978, despite being finished in 1972. As Solás explains in the documentary made by Manuel Iglesias (1995), “La película mostraba cierto aire de desilusión, había toda una serie de metas que la sociedad se había propuesto y que finalmente no configuraban la realidad.” Its release in 1978 occurred without much publicity and after some cuts to the original had been made.

⁹³ The anniversary of the hundred years of struggle refer to the so-called *Grito de Yara* that initiated the first war of independence on the island in 1868, when Carlos Manuel Céspedes liberated his slaves at *La Demajagua* and declared war against the colonial authorities. The revolutionary leadership has always maintained that the Revolution was the continuation of that war for independence started in 1868, hence the ‘hundred years of struggle’. Other films produced for this commemoration are *La primera carga al machete* (Manuel Octavio Gómez, 1969); *La odisea del General José* (Jorge Fraga, 1968); and the documentaries *Hombres de Mal Tiempo* (Alejandro Saderman, 1968); *1868-1968* (Bernabé Hernández, 1970) and *Médicos mambises* (Santiago Villafuerte, 1968).

On several occasions Solás has stated that the whole affair with *Un día de noviembre* was the first cataclysm in his career as a filmmaker and marked a new direction in his work:

Yo me quedé prácticamente sin trabajo en esa época y Nelson [Rodríguez] fue un gran respaldo moral. Toda esa etapa fue muy triste, el quinquenio gris a mí me resultó un quinquenio negro, un quinquenio de inactividad, de parálisis, de falta de perspectiva, de desazón y de no aceptar un sentimiento de culpa que no podía asumir porque yo no era culpable de nada. (...) Entonces decidí no hacer nunca más cine sobre la contemporaneidad. Para qué vamos a hacer una película sobre la contemporaneidad si no vamos a poder ser sinceros, si no vamos a poder decir todo lo que pensamos, pues entonces es un juego que no entendemos. Es mejor hablar o de otros países o de otros momentos históricos. (Solás in Herrera 1995)

After a few years of his projects not materialising, Solás was asked to do a documentary on the Haitian singer Martha Jean Claude. The enterprise was clearly below his expertise and status within the film institute, but he undertook it and produced a wonderful piece in which he portrayed the history of Haiti. Through a mixture of music, dance, plastic arts and fictional reconstruction, he reflected on the Haitian revolution of 1789, its betrayal and the apparently deterministic cyclical nature of history. The film, significantly entitled *Simparelé*, which means "Si no grito, estallo", won the award for best documentary at the XXII International Festival of San Sebastián (Spain) in 1974, besides many other prizes in lesser international film festivals.

His next film also concentrated on the struggles of the Latin American nations to achieve their independence, in this case Chile, where Salvador Allende's government had recently been violently deposed and replaced by General Pinochet's dictatorship. *Cantata de Chile* (1975) reconstructs the history

of the Chilean people in their fight against colonialism and neo-colonialism through a mixture of different artistic forms all integrated into the cinematic language. The film, which is too Manichaeic and didactic in its presentation of the conflicts, was, however, definitely within the cultural policy promoted by CNC and MINCULT.

After another incursion in the documentary genre with a work about the artist *Wilfredo Lam* (1979), Solás was finally offered a substantial project by ICAIC, the re-creation of the nineteenth-century classic *Cecilia Valdés*.

Several reasons impinged on ICAIC's decision to entrust Solás with the filming of what was to be the most important Cuban film of those years. Villaverde's novel fitted well within Humberto's oeuvre. If we review Solás' filmography previous to *Cecilia*, his most important works presented female protagonists. Both on the island and abroad, Humberto was labelled "the great painter of the female psyche". And the women he depicted, Manuela, the three Lucías, were always located at fundamental moments of Cuban history. Solás, therefore, seemed to be the one best-suited to develop the seminal character of *Cecilia Valdés*. Furthermore, although his works placed women at the centre of history, they were not feminist films per se. As he has explained:

Yo nunca he hecho una película con el personaje femenino a partir de una óptica femenina. Es decir, que he escogido al personaje femenino porque he pensado que es otro auditor de las contradicciones de la sociedad. (...) Cuando he escogido a una mujer es porque, dentro de la temática que quiero plasmar, la mujer me ha parecido el personaje más rico y con mayores posibilidades de llegar al concepto que planteo. (Castillo 1994:43)

Importantly, therefore, his films had more to do with society than with women as such; the female characters were “used” as vehicles to represent the contradictions inherent in their epochs, like Cecilia Valdés in Villaverde’s text. Similarly, many of Solás’ films focused on the struggles for independence of both the Cuban and other Latin American nations since colonial times, which is a fundamental issue in the novel. In fact, he had already reconstructed colonial Cuba in the first part of *Lucía* and shown an exquisite attention to detail in the production design. He had also shown great sensitivity in portraying the contribution of black people to Caribbean societies, as seen in *Simparelé*, *Wilfredo Lam* and *Lucía 1895*.

Also, Humberto Solás was, together with Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (Titón, 1928-1996), the most nationally and internationally recognised filmmaker at ICAIC. The two of them were very different artists; they had opposite styles of production and showed divergent aesthetics in their works. In terms of their working habits, Titón was a rational, organised, systematic filmmaker who generally planned the filming meticulously:

La improvisación es un recurso aprovechable en determinadas circunstancias y gracias a ella se logran a veces cosas de extraordinario interés. *Pero sólo puede realizarse con cierta comodidad cuando se trabaja con un equipo ligero, sin la presión de un horario muy estrecho.* Además, como regla general, siento que debemos ir a la filmación con todos los problemas bien resueltos, y siempre con la disposición de aprovechar hasta el último momento cualquier idea que surja y que pueda enriquecer y hasta modificar la puesta en escena. No se garantizan los

resultados si se pretende confiarlo todo al espíritu de improvisación. (Gutiérrez Alea as quoted in Évora 1996: 71, my emphasis)⁹⁴

Conversely, Humberto is an adamant defender of an intuitive style of work. He has explained that it originated when he was co-directing one of his first shorts, *Minerva traduce el mar* (1963). The day the filming was about to start, the original script was blown away into the sea at the moment they were preparing the setting and the image composition. Since there was no other copy and the whole technical team, including some foreigners who were temporarily working at ICAIC, were there, Humberto decided to go ahead with the shooting and to improvise. The technique was repeated in *Manuela*, where he started to film with a vaguely elaborated script. As Nelson Rodríguez, the editor of all Solás' films, recounts in Iglesias' documentary (1995), when Humberto first looked at all the filmed material, in order to decide the montage, he abandoned the screening before it was finished and disappeared. He came back three days later in a pitiful state after having wandered around in desperation due to his failure as a filmmaker, he said, since all the material was useless. Nelson, however, edited it and they realised that only a few more shots were needed. In the same documentary, Solás describes the working method for *Lucía*, the most expensive film produced by ICAIC in the 1960s, as "a technique of participation":

⁹⁴ In his masterpiece *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968), Titón, however, acknowledged that he worked with a good degree of flexibility and improvisation that led to the filming and inclusion of some scenes that were not contemplated in the original script. Importantly, however, he emphasised in the working notes of the film that this had been possible because they worked with a small team and with very few resources: "La filmación se efectuó con un equipo bastante reducido. A cada paso sentimos que el subdesarrollo nos tocaba, nos limitaba, nos impedía soñar como el protagonista. (...) Teníamos la convicción de que lo que estábamos realizando no iba a ser logrado plenamente, que iba a estar lleno de defectos, descuidos, suciedades, pero sabíamos que lo llevábamos a cabo de la manera más espontánea, que expresábamos lo que queríamos y que por lo tanto algo nuestro estábamos aportando. Ahora también: quizás este no sea un filme tan logrado como otros, pero esperamos que resulte mucho más interesante" (Gutiérrez Alea 1968: 46, reprinted in Fonet 1987: 96-97).

Todos los factores de la puesta en escena participaban. Los actores participaban porque re-escribían los textos de la película. La cámara participaba porque no se pre-establecía como iba a ser el trabajo de la cámara. Y el montaje participaba y era co-autor del conjunto de la obra en general porque tampoco estaba pre-establecido en el guión el carácter que iba a tener el montaje; se desprendía, se sentía en el tratamiento como iba a ser, pero no estaba pre-establecido en planos.

Solás' idea of the artist and the work of art as something in continuous change is what leads him to this style of work, he says, although there is always an initial objective that guides the whole production:

Yo creo mucho en las circunstancias del momento de rodaje y de la realidad inmediata, siempre que defiendas un objetivo temático y conceptual que no puede ser traicionado pero que sí puede ser alimentado y enriquecido. (...) Hay directores que trabajan muy bien con un guión técnico, pero para mí eso significa hacer un juego determinista y yo no puedo establecer ahora mismo la conducta visual de la película y pensar que ésta me va a resultar eficaz un año después, porque la vida es un movimiento eterno y ya para entonces yo no seré la misma persona. (Solás in López Coll 1993: 33)

Despite the improvisation and apparent disorganisation, Humberto has always enjoyed the reputation of being a perfectionist. The actors who have worked with him describe the intensity and the high demands of the filming, although also the freedom they have to develop their characters. The extreme care and meticulous detail in the re-creation of the settings that characterise all his films definitely involve a great deal of work before the production. From his style of filming, however, it is obvious that Humberto understands his work as a shared, evolving experience in which he is generally surrounded by a group of artists and technicians that he completely trusts and who repeatedly collaborate in his works (Titón also had a constant group of collaborators in his films). Thus, Nelson

Rodríguez has been the editor of all Humberto's films and artistic co-author of most of them. Both Humberto and Nelson have also written the scripts for all their works. Jorge Herrera first and Livio Delgado afterwards have been in charge of the photography. And a small group of actors, particularly actresses (Eslinda Núñez, Raquel Revuelta), have generally played the protagonists in his films.

In terms of aesthetics, Gutiérrez Alea and Solás are also contrasting personalities: the rational, realist Titón versus the passionate, operatic Humberto. The latter has explained their different attitudes and aesthetic concerns in the following manner:

Definiría la estética de Titón como un intento de plasmar el triunfo de la razón, de la lucidez, por sobre la peligrosa sensualidad de nuestra particular, efervescente y a menudo caótica realidad nacional. Algo así como un último paladín del enciclopedismo, del cartesianismo en nuestro archipiélago. Confiaba en los presupuestos del Iluminismo, en sus técnicas de exploración intelectual. Yo, en cambio, he preferido entregarme de manera empírica y sin prejuicios a nuestra temática, quizá aspirando, con lo dionisiaco de mi cine, a indagar en una reflexión no demasiado preelaborada sobre nuestras esencias culturales. Ciertamente, dos métodos muy distintos. (Solás in Caballero 1999:11)

When Gutiérrez Alea (1982) elaborated theoretically on the role of the spectator, he proclaimed the necessity of a cinema that, in the Brechtian manner, allowed viewers to identify with the situations and characters, but which also sometimes distanced and estranged them from what was rendered on the screen to promote a rational critical attitude. Humberto, on the other hand, explains, when talking about cinema, that "El problema consiste en interesar al hombre en los

aspectos más trascendentales de la vida con los medios de la emoción y la belleza” (González 1989: 15).⁹⁵

Importantly, Humberto’s aesthetics was more closely shared by Alfredo Guevara, the head of ICAIC, when the whole project of the adaptation of Villaverde’s novel was being developed. The affinity has recently been acknowledged by Guevara himself, when he stated that “De seguro no será muy prudente lo que voy a decir, pero como la prudencia ya no aporta nada, confesaré que es en el cine de Humberto Solás en el que mi persona se siente realizada” (1999:78).

Summing up, therefore, Humberto Solás was the filmmaker chosen by ICAIC’s authorities to carry out the re-creation in cinema of *Cecilia Valdés* due to the novel perfectly fitting within the director’s previous work, his recognised merit both nationally and internationally, and the personal preference shown by ICAIC’s leadership for his films.

⁹⁵ These differences between not only Solás and Titón but also other filmmakers were the reason for the establishment in 1987 of the so-called *grupos de creación*. Three groups, with marked different aesthetic and conceptual concerns, were formed, each headed by a senior filmmaker, namely Titón, Solás and Manolo Pérez. The *grupos de creación* allowed for a decentralisation and fluidity in the process of production of films, since the examination, discussion and decision of the works were carried out within the group. Some directors, however, opted for working independently and continued to account for their decisions and projects to ICAIC’s head. Solás explained the reform in the following terms: “Cuban cinema, or at least the Cuban revolution, is always seen as a homogenous universe without differences. The contrary is the case. (...) The left-right debate and all the nuances of such a debate in the West – centre left, centre right – are to be found in Cuba too, simultaneously more subtle and bitter. And there are sometimes very narrow, neo-Stalinist cultural positions about culture. And on the other hand, there are expressions of avant-garde, open, receptive, and in my view truly revolutionary. Those polemics (...) can be seen in our films, in which very different positions find expression. Now, in order to structure those currents better, we decided to divide the film industry, to decentralise it. Not for economic reasons but for ideological ones, i.e., in function of the aesthetic and conceptual affinities and according to the rather different views on reality which exist here. The three creative groups that have been formed in this way of course represent very opposed tendencies, and at times there can be a lot of tension between them” (Solás in Paranagua 1988:99-100). Solás’ statement blatantly expresses the profound differences at all levels that existed among the filmmakers. In the early 1990s, after the resignation of ICAIC’s head García Espinosa and the collapse of the Cuban economy, the *grupos de creación* disappeared.

VII

Cecilia

This Chapter analyses in detail Solás' filmic re-creation *Cecilia* (1982). The different phases in the production of the film will be explained in order to understand the expectations that the film created and some problems that it exhibits. Then the controversy that ensued after its long-awaited premiere will be studied in order to fully comprehend the reasons and the nature of the fierce attack which culminated in Guevara's resignation. The Chapter concludes with a textual analysis of the film focusing on its main differences with regard to its literary source. A better understanding of the role of the different art forms on the island and their contribution to the construction of reality will thus be achieved.

The Pre-Production Stage

When Solás was approached with the project of taking to film Villaverde's classic, he confirmed with ICAIC's authorities that he was allowed a free re-creation of the novel. Once the permission had been granted, he enthusiastically accepted the proposal, since it was the only attractive possibility he had at that moment to make cinema after the dark years of the 1970s (personal communication). Importantly, "el proyecto de *Cecilia* surge como una voluntad, no como una obsesión; no es una película que tú dices *es una ambición que he*

cumplido, no es un sueño cumplido. *El siglo de las luces* sí, me obsesionó desde que la leí".⁹⁶

Preparations for the film started. The script was co-written by Humberto Solás and Nelson Rodríguez, following their usual work pattern. As Nelson Rodríguez has explained (personal communication), they carried out a meticulous and detailed investigation into Cuban colonial history in the first half of the nineteenth century; they read not only the latest developments in the scholarly historical account of that period but also analyses contemporary to Villaverde's works such as those of the main ideologues of the reformist movement, José Antonio Saco and Domingo del Monte. They also consulted some Cuban historians, such as Jorge Ramos, credited as one of the screenwriters, and the renowned Moreno Fragnals, credited as *asesor especial*. For their depiction of black and mulatto myths and practices, they sought advice from Norma Torrado, a film editor working at ICAIC, who was also a *santera* (she is credited in *Cecilia* as screenwriter), and the scholar Rogelio Martínez Furé, whose contribution is acknowledged as *asesor especial* in the credits. As Solás explained in the press conference organised before the premiere of the film:

Estimo la obra de Villaverde un clásico. A la hora de trasladarla al cine me asaltaron graves dudas. ¿Tenía yo que hacerlo literalmente sabiendo que muchos de los aspectos planteados habían sido ya superados? ¿Iba a insertarme en un estilo romántico que yo, como autor contemporáneo, consideraba obsoleto? Preferí hacer una versión libre como todo clásico permite. Debía escoger entre la novela y la historia, me decidí por esta última. (Solás in Alonso 1982)

⁹⁶ In 1992 Solás directed a re-creation of Alejo Carpentier's novel. The resulting serial and film were also surrounded by controversy.

Solás and Nelson, therefore, cast a modern and contemporary perspective on Villaverde's novel, giving great importance to a well-researched and more accurate historical analysis of the epoch portrayed. The fact that Solás had recently finished his university degree in History (1978) also, partly, explains his enthusiasm for the subject and his emphasis on it in the re-creation of the novel.

One of the main concerns throughout the pre-production stage was obviously the casting for the two leading roles, Cecilia Valdés and Leonardo Gamboa. A one-page advertisement was placed in the magazine *Opina* throughout the month of September 1979, asking for new talents to play the two parts. Both of them had to be *trigueños*, that is, dark hair and white skin. According to the racial classification prevailing in Cuba, *trigueños* may or may not have black ancestry; if they do, however, it is indiscernible. In the case of Cecilia, this characterisation was particularly suited for the character Villaverde had created since, as is frequently stated in the novel, she looked white. The leading role in the *zarzuela*, however, has generally been performed by mulatto artists. In terms of age, candidates should have been between eighteen and thirty years old for the women and between twenty and thirty-two for the men. A minimum height was also specified (5 foot 5 inches for the females, 5 foot 7 inches for the males) and neither artistic experience nor singing talent was required.

The advertisement also stated that the film was to be a free version of Cirilo Villaverde's novel with the title of *Cecilia*, rather than *Cecilia Valdés*. This change in the title is highly significant, since it marks for the audiences from the beginning the departure(s) and independence of the film from its literary source. The fact that Solás would rather cast unknown artists also certainly obeys his intention that the spectator should watch the film "afresh". That is, when an actor

and/or actress are already popular, the viewer enjoys a previous knowledge of them and their films, the type of roles they usually play and their lives; this leads the spectator to certain pre-conceptions, which are evidently at play before watching the artists' new film. This is especially important in the case of an adaptation, since readers of the novel have created an image in their minds, albeit generally diffused, of the characters they have been reading about. And, on most occasions, this image does not tally with that of the famous actor or actress that the readers and potential viewers enjoy. This is particularly true of the character of Cecilia Valdés, who has been re-incarnated by different artists in the many recreations the novel has had and enjoys huge popularity in Cuba's imagery. A reader of *Cecilia Valdés*, therefore, not only attends the projection of its film recreation with the knowledge of Villaverde's character but also with the numerous re-workings she has experienced in the different artistic forms, particularly in Roig's *zarzuela*. The latter are the main source of knowledge for those spectators who have not read the literary text, or those who have only read fragments of it, as seems to be the case with most Cubans. Opting for an actress who had already played the part of Cecilia in the *zarzuela*, such as Alina Sánchez (b. 1947), who had also incarnated the *mulata* Dorotea in Sergio Giral's *El otro Francisco* (1974), would definitely have created certain expectations with the audience that Solás wished to avoid in view of his reading of Villaverde's text, as will be explained later on. This was reinforced by the change in the title, to *Cecilia*, which importantly separated the film not only from Villaverde's literary text but also from Roig's *zarzuela*.

Numerous people attended the auditions held at ICAIC from 15 to 30 October. César Évora (b. 1959), a recent graduate from the Higher Art Institute

(*Instituto Superior de Arte, ISA*) and with no previous experience in professional filmmaking, was the actor selected to play Leonardo Gamboa. Hundreds of females turned up for the role of Cecilia Valdés, but none of them convinced Solás (personal communication). Meanwhile, Daisy Granados was suggested for the role from within ICAIC's elite. Daisy (b. 1941) was one of two actresses on ICAIC's permanent payroll (the other was Eslinda Núñez). Her interpretation of Teresa in Pastor Vega's film *Retrato de Teresa* (1979) had made her an extremely popular artist on the island and an icon of the revolutionary woman (see footnote 88). Internationally, however, she was little known, despite the fact that she had performed in Gutiérrez Alea's *Memorias del subdesarrollo* as Elena, the young girl who the protagonist, Sergio, seduces. Her casting as Cecilia was likely to provide Daisy with international success from which *Retrato de Teresa* and, hence, ICAIC, could also benefit. Significantly, at this moment, her husband, Pastor Vega, who was also the director of *Retrato de Teresa*, had become the head of the Department of International Relations after Saúl Yelim's death in 1977. Although she was a great actress, Daisy's age and mature physical appearance were important drawbacks. The decision by Solás was delayed, since securing the necessary resources was becoming a more pressing issue at this stage.

The resources required for a project of such scope were far beyond ICAIC's limited budget, so it was necessary to resort to foreign financing. *Cecilia* became the first co-production between ICAIC and a Western European

country.⁹⁷ A verbal agreement had been reached with Italian national television, RAI. However, when the contract was about to be signed in Italy, a change in the board of directors of the television company motivated its suspension. After a year looking for financing elsewhere, Solás finally negotiated a deal with the Spanish production company *Impala S.A.* The arrangement provided ICAIC with some resources for costumes and with the film negative that was to be used. The plan was to develop it in Spain, where the copies of the film were also going to be made. In exchange, one of the protagonists had to be Spanish, in order to attract the audiences there.

Solás immediately discarded the option of having a Spanish actress as Cecilia due to the character's symbolic status. The only other possible alternative was Leonardo, despite the fact that César Évora had already been chosen for the role. The change was, however, obligatory and Évora was given the role of the poet Mariano, one of the new characters introduced in the film. For a month, numerous auditions were done in Spain. After several problems and doubts, the

⁹⁷ In the early 1960s a few co-productions with Communist countries had been done at ICAIC (see footnote 70). In the following years, however, ICAIC financed the whole cinema industry on the island. In the late 1970s the film institute took a more active role in the continuity and development of the New Latin American Cinema and participated in co-productions with other countries from the continent. However, they generally benefited Latin American filmmakers rather than Cuban ones. At this time, many Chilean cineastes fleeing from Pinochet's dictatorship also sought refuge on the island and benefited from the film institute. Thus, Miguel Littin directed several films co-financed by ICAIC: *El recurso del método* (1978) co-financed by Mexico and France; *La viuda de Montiel* (1980), co-financed by Mexico, Venezuela and Colombia; and *Alsino y el cóndor* (1982), co-financed by Nicaragua, Mexico and Costa Rica. Patricio Guzman's famous documentary *La batalla de Chile* was also edited at ICAIC. Many other co-productions directed by Latin American filmmakers have been done since then on the island. The interchange between ICAIC and Latin American filmmakers was enhanced with the creation of the International Festival of the New Latin American Cinema (*Festival del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano*), celebrated for first time in Havana in 1979 and still going on today. Many other initiatives have been promoted by ICAIC to foster the communication between Latin American national cinemas and cineastes. Thus, the *Fundación del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano*, established in 1985 and the *Escuela Internacional de Cine y TV* (EICTV) created in 1986 in San Antonio de los Baños, which is the first cinema school to train young artists from Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. *Cecilia* was, however, the first co-production made with a capitalist European country since 1959. Since then, ICAIC and Cuban filmmakers have often resorted to this form of financing, particularly since the early 1990s, when the Cuban economy collapsed after the dismantling of the Soviet Union and COMECON.

actor finally selected was Imanol Arias (b. 1956), who had extensive experience in the theatre, but had never worked in cinema.

When Solás returned to Cuba, the decision of who was going to interpret Cecilia had to be made. Since no new actress who measured up to the role was found, he finally accepted ICAIC's proposition and Daisy Granados became the new Cecilia Valdés, despite her being forty years old, fifteen years older than Imanol Arias-Leonardo Gamboa and looking approximately her age.

The filming of *Cecilia* was finally ready to start by May 1980, as was announced in the whole Cuban press throughout the month of April. The initial budget allocated to the production was 1,000,000 pesos (\$1,000,000), a huge figure if we take into account that ICAIC's entire annual budget those years was around 7,000,000 pesos. According to the filmmaker Jorge Fraga, head of Artistic Production at ICAIC throughout the 1980s, this capital had to cover not only all the production costs of the industry but also salaries for the 1,100 film institute's employees (Burton 1985). The usual financial allocation for the production of a film at that time was around 200,000 pesos and up to a maximum of 500,000 pesos. The resources given to Humberto Solás and his re-creation of *Cecilia Valdés*, therefore, were unprecedented in the Cuban cinema industry. This was especially surprising if we consider that these were the years in which the whole of the Cuban economy was being re-structured in order to lower costs and increase productivity. ICAIC, however, was perilously risking everything on one throw.

Production and Post-Production

For an average length film that is safely commercially viable (less than two hours), the normal shooting time is between two and three months. The shooting of *Cecilia*, which was originally conceived as a two-hour film, started in May 1980 and, therefore, should have been concluded approximately at the end of the summer. However, it extended until September 1981, i.e., it lasted a total of one year and four months in which the whole production budget of the ICAIC for those two years was invested. Throughout all that time, material was filmed to finally produce not only the original two-hour film but also a five-hour television series. The reasons for such a long shooting process and subsequent change in original plans were many, due to both external and internal problems of the project.

In 1980 the island was ravaged by an epidemic of haemorrhagic dengue fever, which appeared for the first time in the Northern hemisphere. The outbreak caused many deaths and became a terrible danger when Cuba was obstructed by the embargo in its attempt to obtain insecticides to suppress the carrier of this new fever, the resilient *Aedes aegypti* mosquito (Ellis 2000:167). The plague greatly affected the work rhythm of the shooting of *Cecilia*, in which not only a group of more than a hundred artists and technicians were routinely participating but also more than literally thousands of extras were needed for some sequences. Particularly among the latter, the dengue fever caused great harm, which provoked a need to constantly search for new extras, instruct them and alter their costumes. This obviously increased the financial cost of the production and motivated delays.

As for the difficulties inherent to the project, only a few weeks into the shooting, it was obvious that the long script was going to demand more than a two-hour film. This is related to the much debated issue in adaptation theory of how to transpose to cinema a long literary work, in this case a six-hundred page novel, in less than two hours. Although some of the story lines in the novel's plot had been eliminated and many simplified when the script had been written in the pre-production phase, others had been added. The resulting long script was also highly descriptive, which implied a slow tempo in the narration and a detailed and careful preparation in the *mise-en-scène* and composition of the image. The epic-like tone also required the use of thousands of extras, who were difficult to mobilise and coordinate. Many of the sequences were shot on location, which complicated the process further. The issue, therefore, had not been solved when writing the script and emerged at the moment of the shooting. As Solás has stated:

El guión era excesivamente largo. En aquella época no teníamos experiencia para darnos cuenta de esto. Era un guión enorme, muy descriptivo, tenía unas 180 páginas. Cualquier persona con conocimientos profundos de este mundo te podía decir que 180 páginas eran por lo menos 180 minutos. Pero bueno, era falta de calificación profesional de todos al respecto. (personal communication)

In the same interview, Solás explained that there were also scenes that had not been contemplated or hardly drafted in the original script that, during the filming, became crucial to the development of the cinematic text, such as the rebellion of the slaves on the plantation. Notwithstanding, Solás says that he generally followed the script: "Realmente el guión se mantuvo bastante, yo diría que casi en un 90%." The whole production, however, demanded a painfully slow

rhythm of work in consonance with the stagnancy and sluggishness of the historical period that was being portrayed. Solás maintains:

La película exigía un ritmo determinado que no respondía a la dinámica del guión. El asunto pedía un ritmo particular, una cadencia determinada y eso sólo lo descubrí en el rodaje. Como yo no hago ensayos, no podía preverlo. (...) Fue un largo proceso de rodaje que yo no podía transformar. Yo no podía decir a partir de hoy va a cambiar el espíritu y la esencia de la película; lo subyacente, lo telúrico de la película requería ese ritmo. Yo la veo, he visto pasajes recientemente, y tiene un ritmo exasperante a veces, pero también yo me digo, esa es La Habana de la primera mitad del siglo XIX, una ciudad llena de angustia, una ciudad que vivía una gran tragedia y que estaba al borde de grandes cataclismos. Había una especie de estupor, de agonía. Es la calma chicha, viscosa, sudorosa, llena hasta de lujuria, porque todo ese potage cubano del sincretismo cultural está fecundando; el hervor ha llegado a la calidad justa y está a punto de explotar. Es el nacimiento de la nación cubana. (personal communication)

Cecilia's long process of shooting and especially its absorption of the whole budget allocated by ICAIC to film production during 1980 and 1981 soon provoked divergences among the cineastes associated with the film institute, which had always remained united up to this moment. Humberto Solás was internally accused of lack of professionalism. Most of the problems and delays experienced throughout the shooting process should have been foreseen in the pre-production stage, it was argued. The use of all the material resources available at ICAIC for his film not only prevented other filmmakers from producing their works but, importantly, also threatened the stability and position of ICAIC in the artistic institutional sphere of the island at a particularly delicate moment. The failure of *Cecilia* could end up in unpredictable consequences for ICAIC. The internal differences were, therefore, due to personal issues and rivalries, but also to serious objective concerns regarding the future of the film institute. The cultural policy and the mode of production that ICAIC's leadership was

implementing was again being questioned, but this time from within the institution.

ICAIC's leadership, however, fully supported Solás, who firmly defended his work and was able to continue with the project without major interferences although amidst a generally negative atmosphere. As he states:

Yo tenía esa arrogancia del que cree en lo que está haciendo y entonces eso me ayudó como un motor, como una palanca, para enfrentarme a las innumerables discusiones que se suscitaron durante el rodaje porque yo no había cumplimentado el proyecto inicial de la película. (...) Eso convirtió la filmación en algo difícil desde el punto de vista de mi relación con el sistema de producción a despecho de que dentro de la esfera superestructural, la dirección, depositaban mucha fe en el proyecto y realmente lo defendieron porque ese tipo de películas generalmente se detiene, cambian al director. Yo tuve la libertad de poder continuar. (personal communication)

The conditions enjoyed by Solás in his production of *Cecilia* are certainly exceptional, as he acknowledges. No capitalist cinema industry would have allowed a director to continue with such a costly production in which the shooting extended for more than a year. Thus, the Spanish actor Imanol Arias explained in one of his numerous interviews with the Cuban press:

Las condiciones de trabajo durante el rodaje han sido estupendas. Creo que pocas veces en la historia de cualquier cine se darían otras como las de esta cinta. Las largas horas de filmación, sin que hayan preocupado fechas, creo que esto ha sido excepcional, ninguna industria capitalista podría hacer esto. (César, *Trabajadores* 31/12/1981)

If the shooting process was difficult and long, the editing was a similar experience. Nelson Rodríguez started the montage before the filming was finished in order to speed up the whole production phase. In total, it took Nelson a year

and a half to complete the editing of the different versions, which were ready for exhibition in the spring of 1982.

Four versions of *Cecilia* were finally made: (1) a television series of five hours divided into six episodes; (2) a two-part film of four hours and seven minutes (first part 147 minutes, second part 100 minutes), which was distributed on the island; (3) a two-hour, fifty-minute film, which was made to be presented to the Film Festival at Cannes; and (4) a two-hour film, which was made in order to access the international markets, since it would be impossible to find commercial distribution and exhibition abroad for a film as long as the other versions. The cinema versions are reductions of the television series; they concentrate mainly on the love story between Leonardo and Cecilia and on the social and personal difficulties they confront to pursue it. The cuts, hence, affected mainly the subplots in the story; some shots were also added, mainly at the beginning and end of the sequences, in order to give coherence and unity to these shorter versions. Minor problems and faults in the narrative structure of the shorter versions, resulting from this extensive reduction, however, can be seen (e.g., some characters that appear integrated in the action and have not been presented earlier). As Nelson Rodríguez recounts in Iglesias' documentary (1995):

el trabajo de montaje fue tremendamente difícil. Difícil técnicamente porque reducir cinco horas a dos y pico no es fácil. Pero además, tenía un enemigo en el propio cuarto de edición, que era Humberto Solás, que no quería cortar. Cada vez que le decía que tenía que llevarme una escena, él me decía "si tú te llevas esa escena, yo no quiero crédito de director de la película". ¡Convencerlo era una tragedia!

A fifth version of the film was done in Spain by the production company that had co-financed *Cecilia*, *Impala S.A.* This film is a further reduction of the

previous versions, since it was thought that they were still too long for a successful commercial release; it is only one hour and a half. Neither Nelson nor Humberto were consulted at any stage about this version, which was a commercial failure.

Problems in the developing and copying of the film complicated things even further. The master negative was to be developed in Spain, as had been negotiated in the co-production agreement. The difficulties encountered throughout the filming and editing, however, led the Spanish production company not to comply with their contracted obligations, so that the developing had to be carried out by ICAIC. The film was shot to be developed and copied in Eastman Kodak negative and all the technical issues had been adapted for such a negative (light, sensitivity measurement and so on). ICAIC, however, did not have this material and had to resort to one produced in Eastern Germany that required totally different technical parameters. The final copies of the film, therefore, present important deficiencies in the colour and lighting, which become extremely obvious in the make-up of the characters, particularly Leonardo and Cecilia. The make-up used for the two protagonists was intended to help in the portrayal of the torturous inner struggle that both characters experience, giving them a phantasmagorical-like quality. This, however, is only appreciated in one of the copies made for international distribution, the only one developed in Eastman Kodak; in all the other copies, it just comes across as excessive, whitish make-up which distorts their faces.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ These deficiencies are extremely obvious when *Cecilia* is watched in a cinema auditorium and minimise when on television by regulating the colour and brightness.

Throughout the long months that *Cecilia* was being shot and edited, the whole Cuban press frequently published articles on the film. Newspapers, magazines and journals such as *Granma*, *Trabajadores*, *Juventud Rebelde*, *Verde Olivo*, *Revolución y Cultura*, *Mujeres*, *Muchacha*, *Opina* and so on, discussed details of how the production was going and why it was so long and difficult; they accounted for each new delay, whilst explaining some of the alterations that Solás had introduced with respect to Villaverde's classic. Many interviews with the actors, actresses, director and other members of the crew were also published. The fact that *Cecilia* was a free version of the novel was continuously emphasised. The whole media publicity, which logically increased towards the last months before the premiere, shows the wide appeal that the film was having and contributed to the enormous expectations that was being created. None of those articles, however, openly criticised the cost of the film nor the long process of shooting; neither *Cecilia* nor ICAIC's mode of production was censured externally, yet. The internal disagreements and tense situation at the film institute was never suggested, either.

The Premiere

Once *Cecilia* was eventually finished in 1982 and before it was premiered nationally, one of its versions (3) was presented to the selection committee for the Cannes Film Festival and successfully chosen to be included among twenty other films (none from Latin America) in the official competition section. The international recognition was important and the chances to win appeared to be quite high, especially since some members of the jury such Gabriel García

Márquez and the actress Geraldine Chaplin were openly sympathetic to Cuba and had links with its cinema industry. After all the pain and hardship experienced throughout the two preceding years, the possibility that *Cecilia* finally became another great international hit of the Cuban cinema industry and its first film to win the renowned *Palme d'Or* seemed within their grasp. Hence, a certain degree of triumphalism circulated on the island, although amidst further dissensions within the film institute and alleged news of considerable expenses incurred by the delegation that attended Cannes. When the festival awards were officially announced at the end of May, the *Palme d'Or* went to two other films, Costa Gavras' *Missing* (United States) and Yilmaz Güney's *Yol* (Turkey). *Cecilia* did not get any of the minor prizes, either.⁹⁹

The announcement, however, was surrounded by controversy. García Márquez immediately called a press conference at the Festival's headquarters and publicly accused the director of the film festival, Robert Favre Le Bret, of pressurising the members of the jury so that *Cecilia* was left without any award, since "there were already many prizes for leftist films". The Colombian writer regretted the showing of the Cuban film on the last day of the Festival and the fact that the copy screened was faulty.¹⁰⁰ And he praised the film stating that it was an important artistic contribution to the search for national identity not only in Cuba but in the vast region of America.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ The Special Jury's Prize went to *La notte di San Lorenzo* (Italy), directed by the Taviani brothers. Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* (Western Germany) won the best production design and Jerzy Smolinowski's *Moonlighting* (England) the best setting.

¹⁰⁰ Two copies had been handed in to the festival organisers, as required by the competition's rules. One had been developed with Eastman Kodak negative, the other with the Eastern German material and, hence, presented the already explained problems in the colours and lighting. García Márquez's remarks obviously prove that the latter was shown to the jury and public.

¹⁰¹ García Márquez's statement is reproduced in the journal *Cine Cubano* 102 (1982:18), published on the island at the same time that *Cecilia* was released domestically.

The fact that *Cecilia* was not awarded any prize, however, had also to do with the fact that the film was not the expected example of Cuban “imperfect” cinema (such as *Memorias del subdesarrollo*) but a consciously visually elaborated historical melodrama highly influenced by European styles and aesthetics that, in European minds, was, notwithstanding, easily equated with a Latin American *telenovela*, albeit much more sophisticated. John King’s judgement of *Cecilia* in his seminal history of Latin American cinema is a case in point; he describes it as “a six-hour soap opera, a travesty of the great nineteenth century novel *Cecilia Valdés* by Cirilo Villaverde” (King 1990:155).

The news, however, was received with disillusionment and frustration by the Cuban delegation, who returned to the island amidst a new scandal. One of the most important poster designers working at ICAIC, Antonio Fernández Reboiro, who had attended the film festival as the creator of *Cecilia*’s poster, asked for political asylum in France and did not go back.

The domestic premiere of *Cecilia* (the four-hour film) was organised for 1 July 1982 amidst wide publicity and great expectation. Two special screenings were held that day in Havana; one took place at the *Teatro Carlos Marx*, where around five thousand people attended the projection, among others, the artistic and technical team of the film, Alfredo Guevara, Julio García Espinosa and the ballet dancer Alicia Alonso; the other was organised at the *Cine Rampa* for the members of the National Assembly of the People’s Power (*Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular*). For the general public, ten other cinema theatres in the capital showed the first part of the film, which was on until 8 July, when it was replaced by the second part. The *Cinemateca de Cuba* and *Cine Rialto* offered the whole

film in two sessions held every day. After the first week of July, the film was premiered in other cities and towns on the island.

During its first week, *Cecilia* was seen by more than 100,000 spectators, an impressive figure considering that it was only shown in thirteen cinemas in the capital. The first reviews in the national press were generally positive, although also highlighted constructively some of its defects as a cinematic work of art (Carlos Galiano in *Granma*, Alejandro G. Alonso in *Juventud Rebelde*). Different surveys among the audiences published by several journals revealed a mixture of opinions about the film, as was to be expected.

On 12 July, however, an article, '*Cecilia*. Algunas observaciones preliminares', by Mario Rodríguez Alemán in *Trabajadores*, started an alleged analysis of the film that continued throughout the following two days in another two articles written in the same newspaper, namely '*Cecilia vs Cecilia Valdés*' on 13 July and '*Cecilia: La realización cinematográfica*' on 14 July. The first article criticises the film because it is not a faithful transposition of Villaverde's novel, which the author defines as "un monumento histórico-literario de suma importancia". Using an architectural analogy, he equates *Cecilia* to an attack on the national heritage in which the policy that MINCULT implements in the restoration of the old urban areas has been betrayed. The film, he warns, should be preceded by a clarifying note stating that "Cualquier parecido con el argumento, personajes e intenciones de la novela de *Cecilia Valdés*, de Cirilo Villaverde, es pura coincidencia". He then criticises the cultural policy at ICAIC, which, in order to finance this "sosas que indigna a un pueblo" has not produced any significant work in the last two years whilst competent filmmakers have been "unemployed". And he concludes by regretting that "se ha perdido esta brillante oportunidad de

conservar en el cine una fiel adaptación de nuestra novela del XIX y ya no habrá en el futuro una ocasión igual para hacerla de verdad con respeto y devoción; es algo que duele mucho y hiere la sensibilidad nacional”.

Rodríguez Alemán's second article, '*Cecilia vs Cecilia Valdés*' highlights the differences between the novel and the film; the latter, however, is always much worse, since “el reflejo de los verdaderos problemas sociales y políticos que presenta el original villaverdiano pasa a un plano secundario para dar prioridad al mito, al onirismo y a un misticismo religioso de subido tono y a un folclorismo constante”. The problem, the critic suggests, is that the film has not been made according to the parameters of the critical realism that Villaverde's novel presents. Although the phrase “socialist realism” is not used, the reference, however, is obvious. Alemán's derogatory and dogmatic tone is blatantly explicit in his last sentence: “Quien diga que el filme supera a la novela debe empezar a usar espejuelos para ir al cine.”

His last article, '*Cecilia, La realización cinematográfica*' supposedly analyses *Cecilia* as an independent cinematic text, although he constantly refers to the novel in order to refute the film's portrayal of the historical epoch and characters. He also accuses the film of folklorism and a racist bias, since only the black women are seen naked. After pointing out foreign cinematic influences on Solás' work such as German impressionism, Alemán deploras again that “falta al argumento una composición a partir de las posiciones de análisis del socialismo real”.

Two days later, another article published in *Viernes de Tribuna*, the cultural supplement of the newspaper *Tribuna de La Habana*, and written by Isabel Larguía, took up Alemán's criticism and regretted the influence of foreign,

decadent European styles on *Cecilia*, which distance the film from Cuban and American nineteenth-century history and make of it “un amanerado discurso cinematográfico”. She finishes the article by stating that: “La libertad de creación es justamente uno de los derechos inalienables del socialismo real. Pero jamás debe confundirse la búsqueda de lo nuevo con el manierismo decadentista que surge del fraccionamiento estilístico conjugado con la ausencia de una cosmovisión coherente”. The attack on the film is obvious, but the harsh censuring of ICAIC’s policies and its defence of experimentalism and risk-taking also becomes apparent, especially when taking into account the ironic title of her article, ‘*Cecilia* o ¿la caída de la casa Uscher?’. The use of Edgar Allan Poe’s title clearly refers to the state of decadence and decline that Larguía attributes to ICAIC and implies in its rhetorical question that some measures should be taken to solve such a situation. Since “caída” (fall) implies also dismantling, the message was evident.

The vilification of *Cecilia*, therefore, was two sided. On the one hand, it was a direct diatribe against the film, particularly related to the issue of its lack of fidelity to the novel, privileged by some critics as not only the literary source work but also a historical document. Surprisingly and highly significantly, however, none of these articles attempted to go beyond a superficial comparison of plot and characterisation between the cinematic and literary texts and to search for Solás’ motivations in his new reading and re-creation of the source text. On the other hand, however, the attack was a new episode in the fight for predominance and power among the cultural institutions on the island and favoured the imposition of a single dogmatic conception of the arts. *Cecilia* and the whole controversy that surrounded its filming provided Guevara’s detractors

with the opportunity once again to challenge ICAIC's mode of production and its policy of allowing total freedom to the artists.

The charge this time was publicly headed by Mario Rodríguez Alemán, a film and theatre critic since the 1940s, who, in the early sixties, had become the head of the Centre for Cinematic Diffusion (*Centro de Información Cinematográfica*) at ICAIC. In 1967, after leaving the film institute due to important discrepancies with Guevara, he started his own cinema programme on television, *Cine en Television*, transmitted by *Canal 6* three times a week. Throughout the seventies and eighties he directed and presented other film programmes on television, such as *Cine Debate*, *Noche de Cine*, *Cine Vivo* and *Tanda del domingo*, unofficially enjoying the power of decision-making in the cinema area on television. His style of introducing and discussing the films, very accessible for all type of audiences, made of him an extremely popular figure on the whole island. His work was also facilitated by the good relationship that he had with the revolutionary leadership and with the cultural world in general, which provided him with the necessary resources to situate his programmes amidst the most successful of Cuban television.¹⁰² The fact that Rodríguez Alemán was the person chosen to publicly condemn *Cecilia* and ICAIC is important, since he enjoyed wide popularity and was trusted by the general public. His opinions were highly respected by laypeople, which explains why Humberto Solás after this whole campaign was publicly insulted and humiliated on a few occasions in the street. As he has stated: "Todo el mundo leía que *Cecilia* y su autor eran unos demonios que habían osado mancillar la memoria literaria de

¹⁰² His brother Eduardo, who belonged to the *26 July Movement*, had participated in the attack to the Moncada barracks with Castro and been jailed in the Isla de la Juventud-Isla de Pinos with the revolutionary leader.

nuestro país. En la calle me encontraba con personas que me vilipendiaban verbalmente. Yo fui objeto de escarnio” (personal communication).¹⁰³

Although Rodríguez Alemán was the official spokesman in the fierce campaign against the film institute, the ideas that he voices were in accordance with the more dogmatic and rigid policies encouraged by the PCC and its Ideological Secretary (*Secretario Ideológico*) Antonio Pérez Herrero, an old rival of Alfredo Guevara in the heated discussions about the function of art in society.¹⁰⁴ After all, Alemán’s criticism of *Cecilia* focuses mainly in two issues: the puerile question of fidelity to the literary source, which he wrongly sanctions not only as a literary work but also as a historical document; and the film’s alleged betrayal of realism and historical accuracy due to the lack of a Marxist perspective towards the narrated events. As he states in his first article: “Hacia falta el enfoque marxista que actualizase la obra y, sobre todo, insertar esta versión dentro del concepto de cultura popular”. His words are openly reminiscent of the resolutions approved by the PCC Congress on Art and Culture in December 1975.¹⁰⁵

As regards Alemán’s censuring of the high expenditure on *Cecilia*, although it is undeniable that the film engulfed ICAIC’s production budget for two years and, hence, no other film was made, its final cost, something between

¹⁰³ Rodríguez Alemán’s criticism, however, seems not to have been only influential among the Cuban audiences. The above-mentioned statement by King (1990), also wrong in the appreciation of the film’s length, takes up again the much debated issue of fidelity to the literary source in terms similar to those of Alemán (“travesty of the novel”).

¹⁰⁴ The Ideological Apparatus of the Party (*Aparato Ideológico del Partido*) was created in 1973 in order to safeguard the revolutionary principles and policies. Pérez Herrero was its secretary until 1983, when he was appointed Vice-President of the Council of Ministers and Minister of Central Planning. Balaguer became then the *Secretario Ideológico del Partido*.

¹⁰⁵ Rodríguez Alemán’s sympathy towards the PCC’s and the Soviet Union’s cultural policy can also be perceived in his being granted, in December 1982, the Association of Filmmakers of the Soviet Union’s prize as the foreign critic who best analysed and promoted Soviet cinema.

2,000,000-3,000,000 pesos, is still considerably low when compared to some productions being made at other cinematographic institutions on the island. Thus, for instance, throughout 1982, at the same time as the whole scandal with *Cecilia* was going on, the Film Unit of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (*Sección Fílmica de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias*, ECITV-FAR) produced *La gran rebelión*, a fictionalised television serial about the Revolutionary Army. The series, directed by Jorge Fuentes, was shot throughout a whole year not only in Cuba but also on locations abroad, such as Ethiopia and the Soviet Union. This obviously implied a much more expensive budget than that enjoyed by *Cecilia*, although an official figure has not been made available (disparate unofficial figures range from 5,000,000 to 11,000,000 pesos).¹⁰⁶

The importance of this new attack against ICAIC is, however, that the film institute was for the first time in its history internally divided. ICAIC's leadership was not only censured from outside, as it had been frequently in the past, but also from within the institution itself. As mentioned earlier, the use of all available resources on just one film had been openly objected to by other filmmakers. Hence, when Rodríguez Alemán's articles were published in *Trabajadores*, the cineastes called a meeting and discussed the strategy to follow in order to defend both Humberto Solás' work and ICAIC's policies. A letter was written refuting Alemán's criticisms and accusatory manners with the intention to have it published in the same newspaper so that an open debate took place. The tactic had already been successful in the past, as with the controversies about the cinema

¹⁰⁶ The television series *La gran rebelión* was converted into a film and exhibited in commercial cinemas on the island in 1988. It was the second film produced by the ECITV-FAR that enjoyed commercial theatrical release. The link between Solás' and Fuentes' works was shrewdly established at the time by the humorist Héctor Zumbado, who from his section *Reflexiones* in *Juventud Rebelde* suggested that both films should be united into a unique work entitled *El gran Cecilión*.

poster school and ICAIC's exhibition programme. Importantly, though, this time some filmmakers refused to sign it, among them the influential Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (personal communication with the filmmaker Manolo Pérez). The letter, however, was never published due to the intervention of the Minister of Culture, Armando Hart, who convinced the cineastes of the inconvenience of such a public debate in view of the difficulties the island was suffering. Hart calmed the cineastes by ensuring them of the continuation of the film institute.

After a prudent couple of months in which the stir about *Cecilia* ceased and the atmosphere calmed down, on 10 October 1982, ICAIC was notified by Núñez Giménez, one of the Vice-Ministers of Culture, of the departure of Alfredo Guevara. He had just been appointed Cuba's Cultural Ambassador to UNESCO. His position at the head of the film institute was to be occupied by the filmmaker Julio García Espinosa, another of the founders of ICAIC and Vice-Minister of Music and Entertainment. The resolution of the conflict, therefore, was a compromise between the two fronts: Guevara had to go, but ICAIC was still run by a filmmaker from within the institution. García Espinosa's cultural policies, in fact, were generally a continuation of Guevara's, although there were important changes in the mode of production.¹⁰⁷ A whole generation of artists who had long been training in the documentary genre were given the opportunity to produce

¹⁰⁷ Julio García Espinosa was the influential filmmaker who in the 1960s had written the manifesto *Por un cine imperfecto* (1968), based on his experience in the direction of *Aventuras de Juan Quin Quin* (1967). He was the head of ICAIC until 1991, when he resigned in view of the restructuring of the cinema industry that the revolutionary leadership was about to carry out. ICAIC was to merge with ICRT and ECIFAR-TV under the direction of Enrique Román, the former editor of the newspaper *Granma* and head of ICRT since 1990. The whole confrontation between the filmmakers and the authorities reached a climax with the controversy generated by Daniel Díaz Torre's film *Alicia en el pueblo de Maravillas*. After weeks of intense discussions and mobilisations at ICAIC, the direction of the film industry was surprisingly again entrusted to Alfredo Guevara, who remained in post until 2000. Guevara was then relieved by Omar Gonzáles, although he is still the director of the International Film Festival of the New Latin American Cinema held in Havana every December (traditionally, the director of the Film Festival was ICAIC's head).

their first fictional films.¹⁰⁸ Incentives to finish the productions in the projected time and within the allocated budget were also introduced.

As for Humberto Solás, after the traumatic experience that he was involved in, he was “forced” to produce a new film as soon as García Espinosa became head of ICAIC. In co-direction with Nelson Rodríguez, he produced *Amada*, a filmic re-creation of Miguel de Carrión’s unfinished novel *La esfinge*.¹⁰⁹ The film presents again a female protagonist, Amada (interpreted by Eslinda Núñez, Isabel Ilincheta in *Cecilia*), confronted with an unhappy marriage and existence in the troublesome 1920s Havana. The mutual love between her and her sensitive, idealist cousin opens up the possibility of another more fulfilling life, but her social prejudices prevent her from breaking free. Death ultimately becomes her only way out. The whole film, charged with restrained lyricism, takes place within a mansion, which contributes to the oppressive atmosphere that Amada has to endure; the house becomes, thus, a microcosm for the island.

Amada was a very cheap film that was shot in only seven weeks. As Nelson Rodríguez points out in Iglesias’ documentary (1995), “había que demostrar que podíamos hacer una película en tiempo industrial sencilla y barata”. Although the film was directed by both Nelson and Humberto, the ICAIC leadership, however, did not allow the former to be credited as director. Humberto explains that “no le dieron el credito a Nelson porque consideraron que no era oportuno que apareciese como director. Unido a la aventura anterior de *Cecilia*, se podría pensar que yo necesitaba un bastón para hacer una película” (Solás in Iglesias’s documentary [1995]).

¹⁰⁸ See Paranagua (1988) for a discussion on these filmmakers and some of the changes introduced under García Espinosa’s leadership.

¹⁰⁹ *La esfinge* is the last novel by Miguel de Carrión (1875-1929), who died before finishing it.

The full rehabilitation and recognition of Solás came in 1986, when his new film *Un hombre de éxito* won the *Gran Premio Coral* and many other minor prizes at the VIII International Festival of the New Latin American Cinema held in Havana. In 1987 he was paid homage by the *Cinemateca de Cuba* with a retrospective of his filmography. Abroad, already in September 1982, the *Cinematheque Française* had organised a similar tribute.¹¹⁰

Cecilia (the television serial), meanwhile, became the work most widely sold internationally and, hence, the most commercially successful produced by ICAIC until 1993, when Gutiérrez Alea's and Juan Carlos Tabío's *Fresa y chocolate* was released. Solás' serial was shown on Spanish national television (TVE 2) in 1985, on the English Channel 4 in 1988 and, significantly, only in 1997 on Cuban television. Before, in 1994, the *Cinemateca de Cuba* had provided Cuban audiences with the possibility of watching the serial for the first time on the island.

We will now turn to a textual analysis of Solás' *Cecilia*, which will clarify further the vicious attack on the film.

¹¹⁰ After shooting some documentaries such as *Obataleo* (1988) and *Buendía* (1989) and supervising as head of *grupo de creación* the compilation of short films included in the work *Mujer transparente* (1990), Solás directed in 1992 a film and television series based on Alejo Carpentier's *El siglo de las luces* (1952). Again, the film was surrounded by controversy, although to a much lesser degree than *Cecilia*. After a long parenthesis in his film production, partly due to the difficult economic circumstances lived on the island throughout the 1990s, Solás has just released in 2001 his latest film, *Miel para Oshún*. It is a road movie that deals with the return of a Cuban-American to the island; he was taken to Miami by his father when he was only seven years old and goes back now in order to look for his estranged mother. His trip around the island ultimately becomes a voyage of self-discovery, which allows Solás a reflection on the issue of identity. *Miel para Oshún* is the first Cuban commercial film shot with digital technology.

Textual Analysis of *Cecilia*

Like Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés*, Solás' filmic re-creation presents us with a portrait of Cuban colonial society in the first half of the nineteenth century. Both the literary and the filmic text use the ill-fated relationship between Leonardo and Cecilia as a device which allows an insight into the different worlds they inhabit. Importantly, however, Solás explains that when he took on the filmic re-writing of the literary text, "lo que pretendí hacer fue una interpretación muy personal inspirada en un hecho cultural notable de aquel siglo, pero partiendo de las premisas que condicionaron mi existencia en este siglo, mi visión de autor" (Flores González 2001). His overt intention of being unfaithful to the literary original by casting a twentieth-century perspective on it and on the historical period portrayed is fundamental in order to understand the reasons for the numerous changes that he introduces into the film with respect to its literary source.

For methodological purposes, I have divided the film text into 48 sequences, which also consist of different scenes (see Appendix 2). All these sequences appear in both the television series and the domestic version of *Cecilia*, albeit some are reduced in the latter (it is fifty-three minutes shorter). In the Cannes version, despite being two hours and twenty minutes shorter, only nine of those sequences are totally eliminated, as detailed in the Appendix. My analysis refers to the television series and the domestic version since the Cannes version ultimately also addresses the same issues. It concentrates on the major conceptual differences between the literary and filmic texts, namely a Marxist critique of the family institution, a completely different portrayal of the main characters, particularly Leonardo and Cecilia; and a profound distrust of the rational

European heritage that forms part of the Cuban identity, paralleled by a re-evaluation and praise of its African roots.

Both Cecilia's and Leonardo's families are depicted in Solás' film. Importantly, however, their kin relationship is eliminated and they never have a child; Cecilia, however, is still fatherless. These changes have major implications for the development of the plot, since all the characters and events concerned with Cándido Gamboa's extramarital relationship with Charito, Cecilia's mother, are obliterated from the film. Hence, important characters in *Cecilia Valdés* such as the slave María de Regla and her husband Dionisio are not developed; Cecilia is no longer Adela's sister, who is expunged from the film text, and this affects the whole symbolism implicit in the novel about a Cuban nation constituted of three races (Adela, Cecilia and Dolores) with a shared origin (María de Regla as the suffering mother) and led by a male-type white rational ruler (Isabel).

Several reasons explain why the motif of incest between brother and sister has been obliterated. It has traditionally been considered by literary criticism as a melodramatic, *folletín*-type, device that was detrimental to realism, an opinion that Solás seems to share, as he has stated in various interviews that appeared in the Cuban national press whilst the film was being shot. Although the kin relationship between Leonardo and Cecilia has also been symbolically explained as that between the two races they represent and that constitute Cuban identity (Leante 1975), Solás resorts to other narrative devices in order both to express the contribution of the two races to *lo cubano* and to challenge the complacent view of brother/sisterhood between them inherent in Leante's and other Cuban scholars' interpretations. The same can be said of the use of the incestuous relationship and society's connivance with it as a proof of the decadence and

degradation in which Cuban slave colonial society was submerged. Solás' film carries out a modern analysis of the failure of reason, the class struggle and the bourgeois family that depicts such state of corruption. Finally, the incestuous nature of Leonardo and Cecilia's relationship facilitated an easy and authoritative condemnation and rejection of their bond. Solás, however, wants to prove that social censure is purely based on racial and class differences.

The Gamboa family is represented as an epitome of moral decline. Cándido is only concerned with the material wellbeing of his family: we only see him in scenes where he is involved in commercial activities, such as the slave trade and the sugar industry. He is a harsh father to his only child and heir Leonardo, unable to comprehend the spiritual problems that the latter experiences and to offer him support. The sympathetic and humane slant that the character had in *Cecilia Valdés*, as perceived in his material and moral care for both his legitimate and illegitimate family and his profound feeling of guilt, disappears in the film. His relationship with his wife is portrayed as cold and detached; for both their marriage is a convenient arrangement rather than a love bond, as suggested in Villaverde's text. Their colonial mansion becomes a sort of pantheon in which cold colours and dark rooms predominate.

Doña Rosa, on the other hand, as in the novel, is portrayed as the spoiling mother whose life concentrates exclusively on her son. Her dissatisfaction with her marriage leads to her distortion of motherhood and incestuous feelings for Leonardo, something that in the novel could only be inferred. In the film, however, it is explicitly portrayed in Sequence 9, where the whole episode of the Genevan watch, which had also appeared in the novel, is developed. The sequence starts with Leonardo embracing his mother's legs whilst she is sewing. After

talking about the profitability of the slave trade, justified by Rosa on religious and civilising grounds and objected to by Leonardo due to its cruelty, he asks for a new Genevan watch that he has just seen in the jewellers. Although she first refuses to buy it until he finishes his studies at the *Seminario de San Carlos*, once he departs, she immediately sends the book-keeper Reventos to buy it. In the next scene, she is seen placing the watch in Leonardo's trousers, whilst he is sleeping in his bed. The camera then slowly tilts over Leonardo's naked body, adopting Rosa's point of view. In the next shot, an extreme close-up, Rosa is first seen complacently admiring his beauty and then horrified by her newly-discovered feelings. She then runs away to her room, where she kneels down in front of a crucifix and repents racked with pain.

The whole sequence is highly (melo)dramatic due to an affected style of acting in which the characters either hardly move or do it very slowly in order to heighten the oppressive atmosphere that surrounds them. The extensive use of close-ups also draws attention to the painful emotional distress that the characters are experiencing, at the same time as it slows down the narrative rhythm, which adds to the feeling of stillness and stagnancy that permeates all the film. In fact, these techniques are used throughout the whole of *Cecilia* in order to highlight the adverse social environment that the characters inhabit and the internal struggles that most of them have to confront.

Leonardo's characterisation is a case in point. In the novel he is a selfish, carefree individual, in continuous search for temporary material pleasures, whose psychological and spiritual dimension is hardly developed. In the film, however, he is an extremely complex and contradictory agonistic being suffocated by the social system to which he belongs. His appearance, always dressed in black with

an extremely white face and frequent bloodshot eyes, invests him with a phantasmagorical halo that denotes his deeply troubled psyche. His mother drives him to marry the blonde, fair-skinned Isabel Ilincheta, “alguien de tu clase y condición”, as in Villaverde’s text. Importantly, though, in the film he explicitly says that he is not in love with her and only consents to the marriage in order not to confront his mother and society. As he tells Doña Rosa: “Es ya tiempo de que hablemos claro. A mi la Isabel ni me va ni me viene. Para mí no existe, ¿comprendes? Si he accedido a hablar de matrimonio es porque no quiero que también tú la cojas conmigo” (Sequence 26). His weakness leads him to accept a relationship that he describes as “una cárcel”, symbolically visualised in a shot in which he is seen behind the bars of a colonial window whilst his mother states: “Quién mejor que Isabel para traernos un poco de aire fresco” (Sequence 35).

Isabel’s characterisation in *Cecilia* is completely different to the ideal role model that she was in *Cecilia Valdés*. In the film, she is an independent, manipulative woman who is eager to marry Leonardo in order to achieve the economic power that she lacks and needs for her projects. In fact, she embodies and voices the ideas of the liberal reformists, such as José Antonio Saco and Domingo del Monte, which in Villaverde’s text were frequently authoritatively expressed by the omniscient narrator: this sometimes charges her speech with an overwhelming didactic tone. Like Del Monte, who also married a wealthy partner in order to enter the selected group of the plantocracy and enjoy their wealth, she organises literary *tertulias* and musical evenings. She has even bought the freedom of a young talented black violinist, who performs for her and her guests (Del Monte bought Manzano’s liberty). But, as she explains to Leonardo, her attraction to the black musician is related to the latter’s extraordinary capacity and

her own interests, rather than to philanthropic feelings and moral concerns about slavery:

El talento es lo que cuenta en el mundo. Ese, ese es más blanco que tú y yo. En este país los blancos sólo quieren ser abogados, dentistas o curas. Nos parece indigno hacer todo lo demás, incluso el arte. Los negros se aprovechan de eso y ahí los tienen. ¿Qué no daría yo porque fuera un blanco el que estuviera sentado ahí? Pero mientras tanto, ¿qué hago? ¿No oigo música? (Sequence 20)

The quote also expresses another of the main concerns of the Cuban reformists, namely the disdain for manual work by the white population, which perpetuated the dependence on the black slave labour force and, hence, tied the island inexorably to its colonial ruler. The fear of Cuba becoming a black republic like neighbouring Haiti is also conveyed through Isabel in her nightmare about a slave revolt when she spends Christmas at the Gamboas' sugar plantation. Meneses, Leonardo's friend, is also "used" in the film as a spokesman of the reformist ideology. He talks about black slaves as men who have already established a free republic in Haiti, whilst in Cuba "Sólo esperan la oportunidad de vengar tanta ignominia" (Sequence 10).

The film's Marxist analysis presents Isabel as an intelligent, opportunistic individual who is cynically aware of the necessity of adapting to changes in the name of progress and of the economic forces underlying history. The same, of course, applies to the reformist ideologues that she represents in the film. As Isabel explains to Leonardo, the perpetuation of slavery as a mode of production,

es una batalla perdida. Los ingleses tienen máquinas para procesar el azúcar, máquinas de vapor. El trabajo que hacen los esclavos en el trapiche lo hace ahora la máquina, por eso los ingleses quieren que España no traiga más africanos a Cuba y, en cambio, le compre sus máquinas.

- *Leonardo*: Yo creía lo contrario. Pensaba que se oponían a la trata por problemas de filantropía o de moral.

- *Isabel*: El mundo no se mueve por problemas de moral, Leonardo, no seas tonto. Tus padres son una época superada, si lo comprenden a tiempo, se salvan, sino ... el mundo se los traga. (Sequence 13)

Isabel's full understanding of the importance of economic power is what leads her to seek a marriage with Leonardo, whom she despises due to his inability to cope with the surrounding world. Leonardo, on the other hand, is also painfully aware of her material interest in him and talks about their marriage as a business. In Sequence 30, he aggressively interrogates her about her reasons for marrying him, after overtly acknowledging that he is not interested in her:

- *Isabel*: Tú no sirves, Leonardo. Para mí no cuentas. ¿Qué se puede esperar de uno como tú? Eres un caso perdido, Leonardo. Hay que tomarte bien firme de las riendas porque si no...

- *Leonardo*: ¿Entonces, qué quieres de mí? Te lo vuelvo a preguntar. ¿Por qué no estás en La Habana con tus señoritos de tertulia? Esos que quieren cambiar el mundo... ¿Es la hacienda, verdad? Ellos no la tienen. Tú lo que necesitas es poder. Tú necesitas recuperarte y yo soy el imbécil que te va a dar esa oportunidad, ¿no? ¡Vamos, contesta!

Leonardo's internal agony is repeatedly portrayed as resulting from his acute critical and analytical capacity, which provokes his contempt for and repulsion of the degraded reality that surrounds him and in which he, however, auto-destructively partakes. Although he abhors the institution of slavery and is deeply distressed by the cruelty and savagery that some individuals exert on others, he is not able to control his instinctively violent side, either. Thus, in Sequence 15, on his way back to Havana, after he has been rejected by Cecilia, he rapes a young mulatto peasant girl who is picking up logs. The desolate setting in which the rape takes place, a bare stony sandy area by a grey sea under a drab sky,

symbolically visualises the dark side to humankind that lies behind the alleged supremacy of reason and civilisation. The next sequence, of a high melodramatic charge, presents a repentant Leonardo brimming with tears, whilst taking confession and accounting for his action by blaming the girl, “de la clase inferior y mestiza”. After a morbid questioning by the priest, the latter also justifies Leonardo’s behaviour by demonising the black and mulatto race in general and, following a long Christian tradition, women, in particular:

Tu pecado ha sido grande, hijo. Sólo lo atenúa que no fuiste tú el instrumento del Diablo, sino ella. Y una honda lección debes sacar de todo esto: sólo recogerás infamias al rodearte de gente de baja condición, que han venido a la tierra a purgar las miasmas de sus miserables almas. ¿Qué necesidad tenías tú, hijo mío, que no estás en esa situación pues de buena cuna eres y de honrados progenitores has nacido, de mezclar tu alma tan cercana a la de el Señor con aquellos que sólo esperan de Él su infinita clemencia ante sus vilezas? (Sequence 16)

The vileness and inferiority of a sector of the population, in this case the non-whites, justifies all the cruelty and humiliation inflicted on them by those who allegedly search for a virtuous and better society and, hence, need to repress the former.

The moral corruption that surrounds Leonardo and in which he also participates, leads him to a profound distrust of humankind and the lack of belief in the possibility of change and improvement. When he is interrogated by Meneses about his point of view on the issue of slavery and the status of the black population in society, he states:

De que son personas no me cabe duda. En cuanto son libertos, no más bien ganan unas onzas de oro y ya los vemos comprando esclavos. Y no los tratan mejor que los blancos, aunque sean de su misma sangre. No sean

ilusos, señores. El hombre es siempre el mismo al despecho del color que tenga. (Sequence 10)

The exploitation of humans by humans is perceived by Leonardo as an inevitable condition throughout history. As he pessimistically tells Cecilia: “El mundo no cambia, es siempre la misma porquería. Cambia por fuera, pero no por dentro.”

Leonardo, in fact, epitomises the modern predicament: on the one hand, he expresses the failure of reason to create a better world, which in this case is exemplified by the existence of the institution of slavery, but could be applied to any other instance of exploitation and humiliation of one sector of a population by other; on the other, he experiences the rigid demands of society for compliance, which finally annihilate him as an individual and provoke his atomisation in the name of progress and civilisation. As his mother explains when she convinces him of the necessity of his marriage to Isabel:

En la vida todo tienen un precio. Los años me han enseñado esta amarga verdad. No te hagas ilusiones, Leonardo. Perdona esta franqueza de tu madre, hijo. No pienses más con el corazón, que no sabe nada de las cosas de este mundo. Sé que te pido un precio duro de pagar, pero te lo estamos dando todo a cambio. (my emphasis)

The constraints that a system such as the bourgeois family can impose on the individual's identity are epitomised by the character of Doña Rosa, as exemplified in the above quote. Importantly, in Sequence 7, she is overtly represented as a castrating force. The sequence, which is a faithful transposition of an episode narrated in the novel (Chapters 7 and 8, Part 1), presents us with Leonardo in the *Plaza de la Catedral* whilst he is watching a procession of a

woman who is being taken to be executed. He is told that the convict has killed her husband with an axe and cut him into pieces. In the novel, the scene provides the narrator with a long digression about the conditions of jails in Havana and the colonial system of justice, on which he casts doubt. In the film, however, when Leonardo looks at the woman, he actually sees his mother as the offender who stares back to him both painfully and defiantly. The scene can be explained as a representation of the repression that a patriarchal and capitalist society exert on women, particularly if we consider that in the previous sequence Cándido had authoritatively settled an argument whilst his wife was left distressed in tears. Hence, the killing of the husband becomes a symbolic form of resistance. On the other hand, however, Rosa is also depicted as the victimiser of Leonardo: she is the person who actually convinces or rather forces him to marry Isabel, curtailing his freedom of choice and preventing his full development as an individual. Therefore, her crime can also be metaphorically understood as the killing of Leonardo's spiritual and emotional life. In fact, his physical death at the hands of Pimienta actually also occurs at the church, once he has been wed to Isabel (in the novel the murder takes place before the wedding).

The internal struggle that Leonardo experiences, his helplessness and fear are explicitly expressed by his friend Meneses in the sequence, when he approaches a crying, distressed Leonardo and says: "Que se ve que hay dos Leonardos y que uno trata de que el otro no salga a flote, porque el Leonardo que da la cara es un cobarde y se avergüenza del otro y no encuentra otra solución que aplastarle."

In Villaverde's novel, Leonardo's interest in Cecilia was portrayed as a powerful physical attraction that the *mulata* exerted not only on him but also on

any other man. Hence, her conquest was a personal triumph that proved his virility and enhanced his male status. Once enjoyed, she had to be abandoned, repeating the destiny of her mother and many other mulatto women. In the film, however, Leonardo is truly in love with Cecilia, through whom he perceives the possibility of his redemption. He constantly emphasises his necessity of her love and friendship in order to escape from the corroded reality he lives and control his irrational destructive side. In the first encounter that they have alone, he recites the first verses of a poem that he has been practicing while waiting for her, which, therefore, is repeated a few times: "Entonces tu amistad celeste, pura / mitigaba el horror / a los insomnios de tu amigo proscrito y sus dolores." In their second encounter, when she accepts his love advances, he states:

Yo necesito amar y ser amado. Yo también tengo miedo, un miedo feroz que me invade día a día. A veces no sé quién soy ni que es lo que quiero y hago cosas horribles. Entonces mi alma arde de odio y de temor, me arrepiento de mis actos y de estar vivo. Mi miedo es mayor que el tuyo. Si supieras qué horror, qué sufrimiento. Necesito amar, sé que será mi redención. Un amor que me limpie de culpas, que me de paz en este infierno. ¿No ves que a quien temo es a mí mismo? Haré lo que tu quieras, pierde cuidado.

- *Cecilia*: Leonardo, te amo.

- *Leonardo*: Entonces, sálvame. (Sequence 24)

Leonardo's love for Cecilia can also be understood as a timid form of rebellion against his family and society. He is, however, too weak and immature to confront them and pursue the relationship. He does not fit into his world and progressively destroys himself, although he is not able to renounce his privileges either. In Sequence 42, after visiting with his mother and fiancée the mansion where they are going to live once married, Leonardo attends a cock fight with his friend Meneses. First, a panning shot shows a disagreeable violent cheering crowd

that pushes the cocks to fight and kill. Among them, Leonardo, who, beside himself, continuously shouts “¡Mátalo! ¡Mátalo!”. Meneses tries to calm him down and suggests leaving, but Leonardo distressingly acknowledges that there is no place for him to go to:

- *Meneses*: Vámonos, Leonardo

- *Leonardo*: ¿Adónde? La amo, Meneses, la amo con locura. [*He starts crying*]

- *Meneses*: Pero estás atrapado en tu clase y tu condición, ¿o es que no comprendes?

- *Leonardo*: Quisiera ser libre de amarla y renunciar a todo, pues pienso que sólo a su lado podría encontrar eso que se me niega día a día, que no logro alcanzar. La felicidad de ser yo mismo, Meneses. La felicidad de vivir sin restricciones ni miedo. Ayúdame tú a alcanzar esa felicidad. Ayúdame tú a escapar, salir de esta trampa. No quiero saber más de mi mundo, ni de pactos ni de obligaciones de familia. Quiero ser libre, Meneses. Libre de amarla.

- *Meneses*: ¡Pobre Leonardo! Llamas libertad a vivir desheredado por tus padres, a renunciar a tus buenas monedas de oro. Tú que serías incapaz de asumir trabajo alguno, que a duras penas podrías ser un escribiente o un letrado. No seas iluso, Leonardo, no permanecerías en tu libertad más que unos días y ella, el objeto amado, se convertiría a poco en víctima de tus escarnios y en ella descargarías tu ira y tu vergüenza y volverías a tu casa con el rabo entre las piernas pidiendo, lloroso, clemencia y perdón. Y entonces, sí será difícil para ti tu odiado mundo, Leonardo. Porque, entonces, a razón de pago, sí vivirás en una cárcel y tendrás que poner fin a tus antojos para siempre. Dale, vamos, vamos.

The two friends lucidly understand the constraints that society imposes upon them, but while the fearful Leonardo is unable to deal with the situation in any way and deceptively seeks refuge in his chimeric relationship with Cecilia, the practical Meneses exposes the futility of such an escape, which will just lead to other restrictions.

Like Leonardo's, Cecilia's family is also represented as a source of repression of the individual in Solás' film. In the novel, Cecilia has been brought up by her grandmother Chepilla, a pious old woman who has educated her in the

Christian values. The grandmother, albeit imbued with racial prejudice, is permanently warning her granddaughter against *señoritos* like Leonardo, who will only bring her downfall. Cecilia's mother, Charito, is secluded in a mental institution, due to her becoming insane after giving birth to her daughter. Cecilia only finds out about her mother's existence at the end of the novel, just before the latter dies.

The film, however, depicts the three generations of women living in the same house and with a characterisation totally different to that of the novel. They represent the different steps in the progressive whitening of the population that the reformists advocated in order to *adelantar la raza*: the black Chepilla, the *mulata* Charito and the *trigueña* Cecilia. The latter is the only asset that the family has in order to achieve a better social and economic position through her relationship with a white man. Thus, both Cecilia's mother and grandmother urge her to start an affair with Don Cosme, an old rich married man who lavishes attention on her. However, despite her family's pressures, she refuses to accept his presents and rejects his advances:

- *Grandmother*: La señorita no acepta regalos. A buen paso vamos. De este tugurio no salimos más nunca, aquí nos entierran.

- *Cecilia*: Lo de Don Cosme está bien claro, ya saben lo que el viejo quiere. A no ser que el calor les haga perder los escrúpulos.

- *Grandmother*: Yo no tengo nada que perder, como no sea la vida. Soy demasiado pobre. Pero tú si tienes mucho que ganar. Dios te ha dado un don que todas quisieran, la belleza, y tú no sabes que hacer con ella. Me das lástima.

- *Mother*: Pierdes tiempo. La belleza es ahora que eres joven, pero pasa pronto y si no se aprovecha (...) No pierdas más tiempo. ¿No te miras en el espejo? ¿Quién puede decir que eres hija mía? Codéate con la gente de rango. A ti no te van a prohibir la entrada en el salón más blanco.

-*Grandmother*: Sé ambiciosa. Que no es vida esta que llevamos, metidas en esta cárcel, rodeadas de crápulas. Dios me castigue por esto que digo, pero no me callo.

Cecilia, therefore, is presented as a dignified individual who rebels against the traditional destiny of many mulatto women like her; as in the novel, her beauty could provide her with material wellbeing, if she became a white male's concubine. Her family encourages her to behave like Mercedes Ayala, whose relationship with the superintendent Cantalapiedra allows her an easy life surrounded by comfort. Cecilia's family, on the contrary, live in a small single room, defined by the grandmother as a hovel (*tugurio*), where the suffocating atmosphere impregnated with darkness, humidity and sweat becomes a reflection of their social and personal struggle in a hostile colonial society. However, despite their material difficulties, Cecilia refuses to prostitute herself.

Her motivations in starting a relationship with Leonardo are very ambiguous and complex. In Sequence 4, at the beginning of the film, she begs the *Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre* for "riqueza y poder", which she immediately identifies with "un blanco que me adore y me haga su señora, reina mía". Importantly, though, she aspires to find a white man who marries her, rather than just makes her his mistress, as Don Cosme would. She entertains that illusion with Leonardo. Her attraction to him is also portrayed as a mixture of friendship, care and sympathy for the distressed Leonardo, interwoven with an obsession that makes her life impossible without him, much along the lines of the traditional Western love-passion relationship. On the other hand, however, the way that she finally yields to Leonardo's sexual and love advances adds an ambiguous revolutionary and sacrificial dimension to her consent. She only agrees to their relationship if he proves his love to her: he has to provide a refuge for an old

black man, Jesús María, who is being persecuted by the colonial authorities due to his involvement in a conspiracy for the independence of the island.

Her relationship with the mulatto Pimienta is also much more ambivalent than in Villaverde's novel. In the latter, although the musician was in love with Cecilia, she saw him as a brother-friend and never entertained any other feelings for him. Their relationship was reinforced by the strong friendship between Pimienta's sister, Nemesia, and Cecilia. In the film, however, Pimienta and Nemesia are not siblings and Cecilia is portrayed as blatantly feeling a powerful attraction for him. In the sequences in which Pimienta and Cecilia appear together, the complicity and sexual play between them is explicit. He always speaks of his love for her, and she generally accepts his flirting and physical proximity, sometimes with an overt power-sexual relation in which Cecilia is not always the winner. In fact, they have already had some type of romance, as Cecilia makes clear in one of their sexually-charged interchanges: "Pórtate bien, hombre, no sufras más, que me duele el alma verte así. Lo que pasó una vez no volverá a pasar. Fue cosa de inocentes. Tú eres como un hermano para mí, pero nada más. ¿Ves que es casi imposible?" (Sequence 11). Certainly, the chemistry between them seems much more intense than that between Leonardo and Cecilia, due greatly to the patent age difference between Leonardo (Imanol Arias) and Cecilia (Daisy Granados), which does not exist between the latter and Pimienta (Miguel Benavides).

Pimienta, however, is always aware that their relationship is unlikely to develop, due to Cecilia and society's racial prejudices. As he tells her: "Si yo fuera un bitongo de piel blanca te tendría a mis pies como una esclava" (Sequence

11). He also confronts her with a more harsh reality that compromises her moral and spiritual integrity:

- *Pimienta*: Te engañas. Te quieres hacer creer a ti misma que te interesa mucho la salvación de Jesús María, pero en el fondo lo que buscas es un pretexto para que el otro te dé pruebas de un amor que dudas. Y tienes razón en dudar. Estoy seguro que todos los días te preguntas: ¿Será cierto? ¿Por qué se habrá fijado en mí? Y lo peor es que te sigues engañando. Crees amarlo y eso es lo que destruye, Cecilia. Tú no lo amas a él, sino a lo que él representa. El es blanco, rico y uno como yo, demasiado pobre para ti. El hambre es mala consejera. No se le puede pedir demasiado al hambriento. Pero piensa un poco y verás, ¿no es extraño que no te hayas fijado en alguien como yo, de tu condición? ¿Por qué en él?

- *Cecilia*: Yo no amo a Leonardo ni quiero nada de él. A Leonardo le tengo lástima. Es un hombre solo y necesita ayuda.

- *Pimienta*: Yo también estoy solo y nadie me ayuda. Sí, claro. Ve con él, yo no tengo nada que darte, él sí. El tiene hacienda, oro y esclavos, sobre todo eso, esclavos. Corre, traiciónate a ti misma. (Sequence 25)

The fact that Cecilia denies being in love with Leonardo proves her ambivalent feelings towards the two of them. Her denial also points to her sense of shame, since she seems to be conscious of the moral flaw that accepting Leonardo partly represents: her attraction is undoubtedly based on his being white and rich, and she consents to the relationship despite the the unlikelyhood of a final official, socially-approved recognition of their affair. It is also important that Pimienta talks of betrayal (“traiciónate a ti misma”), which refers to Cecilia’s betrayal both of the black and mulatto people and of her ethics as an individual.

But Cecilia is constantly pressurised by society, exemplified by her family and friends, to advance socially and economically through keeping the company first of Don Cosme and then Leonardo. When Leonardo announces to her his marriage to Isabel, she rebels and does not accept the role of concubine. Her

mother, however, warns her that the prize she might have to pay for her defiance is high:

No quieras tanto en la vida, Cecilia, porque no eres blanca y sólo las blancas pueden aspirar a todo. Confórmate con lo que te dan, porque si no vas a sufrir mucho y no vale la pena. Déjate de orgullo que a nuestra raza le cuesta muy caro no querer bajar la cabeza. Entiende esto. (...) Y si pares, mejor. Entonces él te va a amar para toda la vida, y te dará lo que quieras, y será un niño blanco, y todas las puertas se le van a abrir. Hay que adelantar la raza, comprende esto. (Sequence 43)

Cecilia, however, does not passively comply with what is expected of her in colonial Cuba; she rejects her role as a mere tool for male pleasure and an instrument to whiten society and starts a vain and doomed fight to assert her rights and freedom. As she tells Mercedes Ayala: “No voy a recoger migajas. Prefiero su muerte y la mía. La suerte está echada, Mercedes. No doy un paso atrás. Que sea lo que Dios quiera” (Sequence 36).

In the novel, Cecilia Valdés is symbolically identified with the national patron of Cuba, la *Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre*. Since the saint is also perceived as the Yoruba goddess Oshún in the religious syncretism that emerged on the island, Cecilia can also be equated with Oshún. This, which could only be inferred in Villaverde’s text, is explicitly developed in Solás’ film, where Cecilia is characterised with different elements traditionally associated with the African goddess, such as honey, sunflowers and white dresses worn with a golden shawl. In the film, the identification actually works in inverse order: that is, Cecilia-Oshún-*Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre*, hence, giving prominence to the African source of the cult rather than to the Christian-European one.

The equation Cecilia-Oshún is fully developed in Sequence 2. In fact, this sequence and the next, Sequence 3, are a free and skilful transposition and interpretation of the episode narrated in Chapter 3, Part 1 of Villaverde's text. In the novel, Chepilla tells Cecilia the story of the young girl Narcisa who, following the music of a violin, encounters a handsome youngster and consents to accompany him to a party; he soon turns into the devil and kills her by throwing her from the tower of the *Iglesia del Ángel*. Chepilla narrates this story to a twelve-year old Cecilia in order to scare her and prevent her drifting in the streets.¹¹¹

In the film, we are presented with a mulatto child who is sitting with her grandmother at their house's threshold contemplating a religious procession that passes by. The grandmother, then, narrates to her the story of Oshún, which is exquisitely visualised on the screen while we hear the grandmother in voiceover:

Dicen que Oshún nació donde brotan los arroyos de agua fresca, no se podría decir quién fue su padre, porque su mamá, que era como la miel dorada, fue probada por todos los hombres, por Shangó, por Oggún, por Babalú. Oshún creció sola y salvaje; su cuerpo se ondulaba como una serpiente; y sus manos finas imitaban el vuelo de los pájaros; y su cintura, las aguas del arroyo que van de un lado al otro buscando la senda segura. Su piel era dorada de tanto alimentarse de la miel y del sol. Las otras mujeres le tenían envidia y celos porque todos los maridos querían beber la miel de sus carnes, pero Oshún siempre reía y bailaba. (...) Un día, mientras se bañaba con las aguas de los plátanos salvajes, fue apresada por los hombres blancos vestidos de hierro. La metieron en una jaula de pájaros y la trajeron por los mares. (...) Entonces llegó aquí, a la isla lejana, y la llevaron a la plaza para venderla como esclava. Allí se presentó una mujer vestida de rojo, que no era una mujer, pues era Shangó disfrazado, y la compró por ocho monedas. Después la llevó para el monte y Shangó sacó su espada y volvió a ser macho y Oshún bailó para él toda la noche. Shangó la enseñó a disfrazarse de blanca y así engañar a los hombres vestidos de hierro. Le untó tanta miel que la puso mulata, la coronó con esmeraldas y rubíes, le puso una saya blanca bordada de nieve

¹¹¹ This episode was already part of the short-story *Cecilia Valdés* published in 1839 (See Chapter 4).

y una capa de oro, como una reina. Y le dio una niña aceitunada para que bebiera de su miel y le cantara siempre. Estaba tan bella Oshún que el pueblo la consideró su reina, y le dio el poder del amor y la lujuria. Y por siempre reinó al lado de Shangó y por siempre le engañó con todos los hombres y con todos tuvo hijas hembras, pero ninguna tuvo apellido porque no se sabía quién era el padre de tantos que habían lamido su miel. (Sequence 2)

The first words of the film, therefore, recount the myth of the African *orisha* and her arrival in Cuba. If we pay attention to Oshún's description, she encapsulates the social imagery pertaining to *la mulata* in Cuban consciousness: beautiful and sensual, desired by men and envied by women, her life passes among laughs and dances. The myth explains how, once in Cuba, she is rescued by the Yoruba god Shangó and learns to "pass as white" in order to deceive the whites; importantly, however, she is still the same Oshún of golden complexion who rules over men's desires. In the myth, therefore, her whitening is interpreted as an external, superficial change that allows her to retain her true self and preserve her sexual allure and power. The myth, thus, offers a reading of the situation of mulatto women, Oshún's daughters, in Cuban society in a much brighter and positive tone than the traditional Western Christian perspective.

The next sequence, however, presents us with the same mulatto girl who listens to and follows the music of a violin. She arrives at a square presided by a fountain that rests on top of some lions, a traditional heraldic Spanish symbol. There, a young white man, Leonardo, invites her to a party, takes her to the tower and pushes her into the void.

These two sequences are preceded by the credit opening one, which narrates the myth of formation of the Cuban nation. The first scene presents us with black people who, carrying torches, advance walking silently and with

defiant and dignified faces. They are about to cross a tunnel. The film, therefore, situates in Africa the birth of the Cuban nation. The next scene depicts a religious procession throughout the streets of Havana, in which the mixture of African and European elements is obvious. We see black people smiling and dancing to the rhythm of African drums mixed with distressed, suffering whites who are representing Jesus Christ's Way of the Cross, whilst pained, disturbing music is heard on the soundtrack. The film depicts the very different cosmogonies of the two main roots of Cuban identity: the positive and bright African conception of the universe, represented by the dance and music, in which humankind inhabits with their gods a world that is a re-creation of a superior absolute reality; versus the pessimistic Christian-European conception in which humankind has been expelled from the Garden of Eden and lives in perpetual longing and atonement, as symbolised in self-flagellation and Christ's chains, cross and crown of thorns, in order to recover, after death, the lost heaven.

If we consider these three sequences, which act as a sort of prologue to the story of Cecilia and Leonardo, the film is proposing a conception of *Cubanness* that gives pre-eminence to the African roots; hence, the cradle of the Cuban nation is located in Africa, from where a more humane view of the world stems. This, however, is being corroded by a paranoiac European stance, as represented in Sequence 3, when a vampire-like Leonardo murders one of Oshún's daughters. The colour range employed throughout the film also symbolically highlights these differences: all blacks and mulattos are dressed in warm earthy colours (Cecilia, Pimienta), whilst all whites wear either cold pale shades (Isabel) or funereal black (Rosa, Leonardo). The prologue, in fact, metaphorically prefigures what is to come in the rest of the film.

If Cecilia is explicitly identified in Solás' work with Oshún, the mulatto Pimienta is likewise associated with the Yoruba deity Shangó, the god of lightning and fire. Significantly, in the above-quoted myth of Oshún, Shangó is presented as Cecilia's rescuer. Pimienta's characterisation in the film is very different to that of Villaverde's novel. The timid Pimienta of *Cecilia Valdés* becomes an active revolutionary in *Cecilia*.

The film portrays some of the events that took place in Havana in the so-called Conspiracy of *Los Soles y Rayos de Bolívar*. The Masonic society *Sol y Rayos de Bolívar* was founded in 1821 with the intention of establishing the free independent Republic of Cubanacán. Headed by José Francisco Lemús and with the supposed moral and material support of the *Libertador* Bolívar, the conspiracy was, however, easily broken up by Captain-General Francisco Dionisio Vives' colonial government on 19 August 1823. Among the more than six hundred arrested, many were coloured people, both free and slave, which was used by Vives to surround the conspiracy with a sinister character, which again secured against it the support of the majority of the white population, in permanent fear of slave revolts (Guerra y Sánchez 1938:191). Most of the main organisers of the separatist plot were sent to prison in Spain; others, such as the poet José María Heredia, managed to escape and sought refuge abroad; while some were just jailed in Cuba and finally liberated after paying a fine.

The film, in fact, not only depicts this conspiracy. Several historical inaccuracies are consciously introduced in order to draw attention to the many revolts and separatist attempts that occurred in the first half of the nineteenth century, which are all symbolically conflated into the plot of *Los Soles y Rayos de Bolívar*. Thus, we are told that many joint uprisings have taken place in the area

of Matanzas, which historically occurred in 1839. The slave revolt in the sugar plantation of Juan Batista Armenteros actually happened on 6 January 1838 in the Trinidad Valley, rather than in 1823. Finally, as in Villaverde's novel, the introduction of the tailor Uribe, who enjoyed reputation among the white elite between 1833 and 1844, immediately recalls the Conspiracy of *La Escalera* in 1844, of which he was a victim. By consciously introducing these historical inaccuracies, Solás calls attention to these struggles for freedom and independence as an on-going revolution for the liberation of the island; both slave and separatists insurgencies are portrayed as part of the same process.

The fact that *Los Rayos y Soles de Bolívar* is the conspiracy explicitly depicted allows Solás to introduce an all-important symbolic figure in colonial Cuba's emergent national identity and fight for independence, the romantic poet José María Heredia. As mentioned elsewhere, Heredia had been at the centre of a polemic, disguised as a literary debate, between *peninsulares* and *criollos* in the early 1830s. Due to his participation in the conspiracy and his subsequent forced exile, first in the United States and finally in Mexico, he had become a role model for many young Cubans; his poems, which expressed his longing for the island, were considered a symbol of *Cubanness*. Villaverde's novel had already resorted to verses written by Heredia as epigraphs to some of the chapters, as explained in Chapter 3. Solás introduces in his work the character of the poet Mariano, clearly modelled on Heredia. He is portrayed as one of the main leaders of the conspiracy and, importantly, has to flee into exile in Mexico. The film represents the poet as a mythical, romantic hero bursting with idealism and patriotic fervour: "La vida del que ama la libertad es así, llena de riesgos y siempre presta a pasar vicisitudes. No

sé cuándo volveré a mis palmas, a mi mar, a mis valles, quizás nunca. Pero ella, la libertad, no tiene precio. ¿No crees?" (Sequence 18).

Historically, Heredia was only allowed to return once to Cuba after having signed a letter accepting culpability in which he recanted his earlier independentist feelings; this provoked the condemnation and repudiation of those, such as Del Monte, who had stayed on the island and had made a symbol of him. Thus, two issues can be inferred from the poet's inclusion in the film and his characterisation. On the one hand, the film highlights the high price that is paid in order to pursue ideals and freedom; in this case it is exemplified by the painful experience of exile, which, at a personal level, provokes an alienation from one's family and society, but, at a social level, also involves a high cost, since an individual who can actively contribute to society's improvement is lost. On the other hand, the fact that Heredia had to retract himself from his separatist enterprise in order to be allowed to visit his family on the island before he died and was then repudiated by those who had made a symbol of him, also suggests the difficulty of harmonising the historical role that one is sometimes forced to play with one's personal life and fulfilment.

Both Pimienta and Uribe are also part of the conspiracy. The former is the resolute, idealist revolutionary; the second is the taciturn, sceptical one. Thus, Pimienta firmly believes that: "Para eso se hace la conspiración para que todos seamos libres o iguales como en Colombia." Uribe, conversely, warns him that coloured people, rather than being treated as equal partners, are again just being used as mere instruments for the whites' plans. Once the project has succeeded, and blacks and mulattoes are no longer needed, their position in society will not be much altered:

Libertad, igualdad, fraternidad... ¡Qué tonto eres, Pimienta! ¿Es que desde ahora te consideran como a ellos? ¿Puedes ir a las logías a conspirar igual que los blancos? ¿Eh? ¡Qué mal comenzamos, Pimienta! Tú eres nada más que un instrumento de ellos y, si el asunto se pone caliente de verdad, es a ti al que van a coger las balas. Es más, si sales vivo y las cosas triunfan, tú no tendrás voz ni voto. Los blancos son los que van a decir la primera y la última palabra. La libertad de ellos de ganar más dinero; la igualdad en derecho de echarse a todas las mujeres, lo mismo las negras que las blancas; y la fraternidad... (Sequence 11)

The long sequence that ends the film occurs on the 6th of January, the Day of Kings, when African *cabildos* were allowed by colonial authorities to jointly celebrate and reaffirm their African identity and past in public. Two main episodes are crosscut in the sequence, namely the arrest of those involved in the conspiracy against the backdrop of the African festivity and Leonardo and Isabel's wedding. The sequence starts with the portrayal of the celebrations by the coloured people. They are dancing to the music of drums, dressed in a multitude of colours and costumes that identify them with their tribal groups. The camera seems to dance among them, showing close-ups of their faces, hence personifying the dancers and including the spectator in the celebration.

The next scene shows how the conspirators are being detained. In the previous sequence, Doña Rosa has denounced the separatist plot to Captain-General Vives after having found out that Leonardo was hiding the black fugitive Jesús María in their warehouse; she agreed to provide information on those involved in exchange for total protection for Leonardo. We now first see how Jesús María, covered in blood, is taken by the colonial police forces. Then, how Uribe is arrested by superintendent Cantalapiedra. Pimienta realises that they have been discovered and goes in search of Cecilia, who is ill at home, to inform her of

Leonardo's betrayal. The next scene presents a distressed Mercedes Ayala, Cantalapiedra's concubine, being forced at gunpoint to pinpoint among the coloured dancers those who have participated in the conspiracy. Pimienta and Cecilia manage to escape and seek refuge in a deserted alley, where Cecilia begs Pimienta for justice:

- *Cecilia*: Haz justicia, José Dolores.
- *Pimienta*: Voy a hacer justicia, pero no la que tú quieres.
- *Cecilia (shouting)*: A él, no; a él, no; a ella.
- *Pimienta*: Mi justicia será otra. (Sequence 48)

In the next scene, after Leonardo and Isabel have been married, the doors of the church open widely and Pimienta, transfigured in Shangó, wearing the Yoruba god's axe and banner, stands on the threshold surrounded by mist whilst the sound of thunder is heard on the soundtrack. He then runs towards Leonardo and stabs him with the knife that Cecilia had given him in the previous scene. At this point, Cecilia, who is hiding among the dancers in the streets, starts screaming madly, racked with pain. The whole sequence is very slow, with long takes and predominantly medium and close-up shots; the melodramatic charge becomes, thus, very intense, intensified by consciously affected acting.

Cecilia is then dressed by the dancers with the symbols of Oshún, the crown and the golden shawl, and escapes into the deserted streets. She first crosses the square with the lions' fountain that we saw in the prologue (Sequence 2), goes up to the tower and commits suicide by throwing herself into the void. Pimienta, who has followed her, arrives to the top when she has just jumped. The last shot of the film shows him despairingly kneeling down against an arch of the tower and staring into the void.

Cecilia's delirium and suicide can be interpreted in very different ways. It first recalls Richard Wagner's opera *Tristán and Isolde*, both in terms of the highly melodramatic and operatic style of filming but also in the identification of Cecilia with Isolde, who lets herself die after her lover has been killed (the so-called death by love). The scene, thus, supports the impossibility of consummating the love-passion relationship on earth; only death will ultimately allow the lovers to be reunited. In Wagner's opera, Isolde's death actually becomes a sort of ecstasy in which her soul and being are finally merged with Tristan's and both dissolve into the world's essence.

In *Cecilia*, however, the ending does not provoke this catharsis, since the love relationship is represented as impossible due to social constraints. The pessimism inherent in the portrayal of a sick society that finally leads Oshún's daughter to commit suicide becomes, in fact, a representation of the impossibility of being in a society corrupted by white European prejudices and rules. The *mulata* Cecilia-Oshún has followed the path that the film represented in the prologue.

Solás' modern interpretation and re-creation of Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* was difficult to digest for Cuban audiences and critics alike. *Cecilia*'s highly allegorical nature and the profound pessimism-turned-into nihilism that permeates it are very far from the complacent, simplistic and "tropical" vision that the numerous re-creations of *Cecilia Valdés*, particularly the zarzuela, had spread and consolidated on the island.

Furthermore, the contemporary reading that Solás' interpretation allows is highly negative of Cuban society and history. The attack against the bourgeois family and capitalist society that the film overtly carries out can easily be applied

to any rigid social system that constrains and even castrates the individual's identity in the name of a social or national identity. The implications for Cuban audiences at the beginning of the 1980s are quite easy to draw. After a decade like the 1970s, in which increasing militancy was demanded and material concerns and satisfaction replaced spiritual fulfilment, Leonardo's situation was easily equated to that of many Cubans. However, his characterisation as a weak and immature anguished man was not easy to assimilate, identify and empathise with in a society where macho values still prevail.

The character of the poet Mariano, inspired by José María Heredia, explores the issue of exile, which has become a constant in Cuban history. The film's production actually started at the time when the Mariel events were taking place; the social tensions and violence that characterised this period in Cuban history and which culminated in the so-called *mítines de repudio* and the exodus of some 125,000 Cubans to the United States can be equated to the conflicts and brutality also portrayed in the film. Particularly, the cock fight sequence, with the disagreeable crowd cheering and inciting violence and humiliation, and the scene where Mercedes Ayala is held at gunpoint and forced to denounce the conspirators show clear parallelism with what was happening with the *marielitos*,

described by the writer Eliseo Alberto as “la página más gris de la historia de la Revolución” (1996:175).¹¹²

The burden that history can represent for the individual, as in Heredia’s case, was also familiar to many Cubans, who were repeatedly reminded of their country’s heroic revolution and their important role in world history. The personal sacrifices demanded of people in the name of constructing the ideal society on the island can also be easily compared to those demanded of the slave labour force in the name of economic progress and of the population, in general, in the name of progress and civilisation.

Uribe’s reflection that blacks and mulattos are only being used by the white sector of the population in order to achieve the latter’s objectives, rather than everybody’s equality and rights, is a clear reminiscence of what has repeatedly happened in Cuban history. As explained in Chapter 5, the role of the coloured population in the Independence War was decisive. The Republic, however, soon forgot about their contribution and the incipient blacks’ rights

¹¹² On April 1980 six Cubans took refuge and asked for political asylum in the Peruvian Embassy in Miramar, Havana. The Peruvian authorities refused to return the refugees to the Cuban authorities, who decided to withdraw their guards from around the Embassy. The news rapidly spread throughout Havana and the Embassy soon filled with other Cubans. A few days later, Cuban authorities stated that they would not oppose those who wanted to depart. A system of granting visas to those who were in the Embassy was instituted throughout the following weeks; the refugees abandoned the Embassy and returned to their homes waiting for their visas to come. During those weeks, good *revolucionarios* were urged to denounce those who were to leave so that *mítines de repudio* could be organised by the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (*Comités de Defensa de la Revolución*, CDRs) and the *Centros de Trabajo* against the suspected *marielitos*, “the scum of society” in the terminology of the time, in order to show them society’s disapproval and rejection. They finally left through the port of Mariel, where boats fled by Cuban-Americans picked them up. The writer Eliseo Alberto (1996:175) describes the events in the following manner: “Se escribe entonces la página más gris de la Revolución, cuando se ordenaron los llamados mítines de repudio, salvaje carnicería política que nos avergüenza. Se trataba de jugar en serio al gato y al ratón, de apedrear el ejemplo de los que pretendían abandonar el país, escupirles la cara, abochornar a sus hijos, apalearlos calle arriba y calle abajo, acosarlos como bestias rabiosas en las madrigueras de sus casas y cortarles las tuberías de agua, las líneas de teléfono y los cables de luz. Había que parar en seco con barricadas de pueblo una fuga de compatriotas que parecían haber perdido el miedo al qué dirán y, también, a los tiburones del estrecho de la Florida.”

movement was soon crushed in the racial war of 1912. With the Revolution, institutionalised discrimination was eradicated, but the presence of non-whites in the higher positions of all spheres of Cuban life has still not been felt. The absence has been particularly conspicuous amidst the revolutionary leadership. The change in racial attitudes among the population has been extremely slow; no plans have been implemented nor measures taken to speed up the process, since, officially, racism does not exist. Rites, beliefs and myths of African origin, such as the ones portrayed and developed by Solás in *Cecilia*, were for a long time also officially objected to, since they were pejoratively considered folkloric primitive remains by a government with a clearly materialistic attitude that deemed any cult as antiproduktive and antisocial. The use of the African myths and rites (*santería*) by Solás was certainly daring in the early 1980s.

Paradoxically, however, Cuba has been constantly defined as *una nación mulata*. The African roots were in fact posited as one of the main justifications of Cuba's military involvement in Africa, first in Angola and later in Ethiopia. In fact, the Cuban troops sent to fight in the African continent were predominantly made up of coloured people. Uribe's words, "Tú eres nada más que un instrumento de ellos y, si el asunto se pone caliente de verdad, es a ti al que van a coger las balas. Es más, si sales vivo y las cosas triunfan, tú no tendrás voz ni voto", definitely touched a sore point.

Finally, the ending of the film differs greatly from the defiant resilience that *la mulata* Cecilia Valdés has shown in all previous re-creations. If we bear in mind that Cecilia Valdés has become a symbol of the Cuban nation, her suicide in Solás' film might be taken to imply the suicide of the Cuban nation. The film seems to postulate that Cecilia, Oshún's daughter, has been finally suffocated by a

rational, white, patriarchal, European rule. Hence, *Cecilia's* representation of Cuban society and history, with a highly controversial allegorical and pessimistic contemporary reading, definitely also helps to explain the rage contained in the virulent attack that the film had to endure. As Humberto Solás stated when explaining his filmic re-creation:

Cecilia Valdés es un clásico, sí, pero un clásico con el cual yo no me identifico a estas alturas del siglo, y lo remodelé a mi gusto. Fue un ejercicio de libertad muy fuerte que me costó muy caro, pero como posibilidad con antecedentes en el mundo entero, significó ejercer el derecho a la libertad creativa (Solás en Castillo 1994:51).

CONCLUSIONS

Since the birth of the motion picture in 1895, cinema and literature have been associated in practice and in the scholarly literature due to the narrative qualities of both art forms. The most obvious relationship between the two is the transposition of a literary text to the screen, or film adaptation. Much of the scholarly criticism on the issue, however, is permeated by a bias towards literature as a high art form due to the status that both media have traditionally enjoyed within academic circles: the old, respected and prestigious literature versus the new, commercial and popular cinema. Hence, when analysing the differences between the two texts many studies on adaptations have concentrated on the issue of the film's all-important fidelity to the original literary work and on the alleged deficiencies of the cinematic medium to convey certain features of literary narrative, such as past tense and first-person narration.

However, developments in the cinematic medium and in the scholarly literature on it, particularly since the rise of narratology and semiology, have provided a new understanding of what cinema entails which shows there are no longer any grounds for questioning its expressive capabilities, although some artists of course employ them more successfully than others, as is the case in any other art form. Furthermore, the criterion of fidelity can no longer be used as a measuring stick for evaluating the quality of a film based on a literary original, since every film is an autonomous work of art and many deliberately depart from its sources. Hence I argue that the issues to consider are how successful a director has been in accomplishing his/her aims and whether or not they have been achieved in a manner that is artistically satisfying. Within this context, a narrative

analysis of novel and film and their differences and similarities becomes relevant and also provides a better understanding of the narrative strategies of both art forms as developed in the particular works analysed.

Scholarly literature on adaptations has also canonised “the text”, either literary or filmic, as the only material worthy of investigation. However, I sustain that if we understand cinema and literature as socio-cultural systems of communication that are defined by the relations established among the internal elements of each system and of these with other systems, not only the text but also other components of both media should be taken into account when analysing a filmic re-creation. Accordingly, not only the literary and cinematic texts but also their conditions of production, distribution and reception should be considered. Hence, a more revealing and comprehensive understanding of the novel, the film and their relationship can be achieved. The analysis also contributes to a better understanding of cinema, literature and their role in society and their participation in the construction of different models of reality. This is the approach I have followed in my investigation of Cirilo Villaverde’s *Cecilia Valdés* (1882) and Humberto Solás’ *Cecilia* (1982), ultimately addressing the questions of why and how Solás has used Villaverde’s novel in his own work.

The analysis of the context of production and of the narrative features of Villaverde’s work allows us to conclude that *Cecilia Valdés* exemplifies the ideology of the reformist project expounded by Cuban intellectuals such as Saco and Del Monte in the 1830s. The novel is, in fact, the most accomplished text of the so-called anti-slavery novels, the literary genre to which Cuban reformers resorted in order to disseminate their programme once they were deprived by colonial rule of the usual outlets for their opinions. However, only in its last form,

which was published in 1882 in New York, can *Cecilia Valdés* be included in the group of the anti-slavery novels, most of which were written in the 1830s in Cuba. The spatial and temporal distance allows Villaverde a more comprehensive view of Cuban colonial society in the first half of the nineteenth century since he does not need to circumscribe the latent social tensions to the family unit in order to avoid censorship, as his 1830s contemporaries were forced to. Furthermore, since Villaverde writes most of his account in the late 1870s, when the first war of independence had already taken place, the text can be understood as a historical novel that contributes to the establishment of a past for the new nation that is fighting for its independence and its right to self-determination, in the same manner as Manzoni's and Scott's works in their European nations, both writers being the only influences that Villaverde acknowledges in his prologue to the novel.

The novel, however, exhibits a problematic representation of the new Cuban nation and a contradictory stance towards slavery due to the influence of the reformist ideology. Since the reformist project had already been surpassed when the novel was written and published, Villaverde's racial prejudice and pessimistic portrayal of the fledgling mulatto nation was soon denounced by the black and mulatto intelligentsia on the island, who were now fighting for the coloured people's equal right to citizenship. But the novel was also rapidly praised by the white intelligentsia and hailed as the great portrayal of nineteenth-century Cuban society. Hence, in spite of the controversial issues and problems that *Cecilia Valdés* presents, the novel has revealingly become a canonised text on the island, being traditionally regarded as *the* foundational text of Cuban literature.

The status of Villaverde's work within Cuban literature is also due to the deeply-rooted hold that its female protagonist, the *mulata* Cecilia Valdés, has exerted on Cuba's national imaginary for various reasons. Since the beginning of its ideological formulation in the early nineteenth century up to the revolutionary present, the Cuban nation has persistently been defined by its mixed-race condition. The different artistic forms on the island have helped to reinforce and disseminate *transculturation*, as explained by the ethnologist Fernando Ortiz, as the process on which *la cubanidad* rests. Within this discourse of *mestizaje* as it is represented in the arts, *la mulata* has frequently been proposed as the symbol of the Cuban nation. Among them, Villaverde's Cecilia Valdés, *la Virgencita de Bronce*, has become the symbol of *Cubanness* par excellence. The fact that Cecilia's predicament exemplified not only that of many other women on the island but also the situation of the coloured population as a whole and, metaphorically, that of the nation, helped to reinforce its mythical status. Also, she epitomises the traditional imagery associated with coloured females on the island, which has helped to consolidate the character's appeal. The numerous re-creations that the novel and its protagonist have generated in very different artistic media are proof of its relevance and powerful hold on the Cuban people. Importantly, though, they have not only reinforced its mythical qualities but also sometimes reformulated them.

Among its various re-creations, I sustain that the famous *zarzuela Cecilia Valdés*, composed by Gonzalo Roig in 1932, has become a key text in the consolidation of the myth. It has also frequently been the first contact with *Cecilia Valdés* for many Cubans. The pessimistic tone that impregnated Villaverde's novel is replaced here by a more celebratory and "tropical" representation of

Cuban society. A beautiful, happy and careless but revengeful Cecilia, who is desired by every man with an uncontrollable passion, is portrayed. Although abandoned by Leonardo, her strength and resources to carry on, in spite of any obstacles, helped to reinforce her identification with the Cuban nation. Significantly, the role was frequently played by the artist Rita Montaner, *La Única*, herself a proud symbol of *Cubanness*. Therefore, when in 1980 ICAIC entrusted the filmmaker Solás with the important enterprise of transposing to the screen Villaverde's canonised novel not only the original text but also its numerous artistic re-creations and the myth that its protagonist incarnated were part of the Cuban audience's previous knowledge about the work.

From the vantage standpoint that twentieth century scholarly literature offered him, Solás carries out in *Cecilia* a thorough historical analysis of the first half of the nineteenth century when Cuban consciousness was crystallising. This analysis allows him to symbolically show the remnants and similarities with Cuban society in the 1970s and early 1980s and to comment on his contemporary reality. Through the Marxist criticism of the family he rejects any dogmatic and rigid system that imposes certain behaviour on the individual and prevents his/her personal development. Thus, the censure of how communism was being constructed on the island cannot be more apparent. Solás' criticism of the modern era, as represented by the colonial European white, rational and patriarchal authority is also easily equated to the revolutionary leadership. Particularly, if we locate the film against the backdrop of the Mariel exodus and the traumatic *mítines de repudio* that took place on the island, the violence and destructiveness that Solás portrays as features of the colonial times are also easily applicable to Cuba's situation in the early 1980s. He also explicitly develops the issue of exile

by the inclusion of the poet Heredia in the film, which also allows him a reflection on the painful divergences between the historical role that one is sometimes forced to play and one's personal development on life.

Parallel to a criticism of the European heritage that contributes to Cuban identity, Solás appraises the contribution of African culture by framing the whole film within Cuban-Yoruba mythology: Cecilia becomes the *orisha* Oshún and Pimienta the *orisha* Shangó. However, the fight of the coloured people for their right to equality and for a better world is portrayed as futile, as exemplified by all main coloured characters and their final doomed existences. Society only allows them to progress when it is in the interest of whites, rapidly crushing their attempts to challenge the status quo. The fact that Cuba was at this stage involved in different controversial interventions in the African continent and that the majority of the troops were black has to be borne in mind here.

Even more importantly, the film carries out a deconstruction of the myth of *la mulata*, which the novel *Cecilia Valdés* and especially its subsequent recreations in other art forms have consolidated in Cuba's social imaginary. Cecilia is no longer the happy and revengeful woman who always survives. In Solás' work, she cannot escape her destiny as a white male's concubine, as in Villaverde's and Roig's texts, but significantly has to resort to suicide as the only way out of her oppressive surroundings and existence.

Solás, therefore, presents a deterministic conception of history. Like the *mulata* who cannot escape her frequently repeated destiny and, hence, heads for disaster, he proposes that the Cuban nation is submerged in historical circles in which the same negative constants appear: authoritarianism and abuse of power, violence, social divisions as represented by the experience of exile and the

internal fights for power, racial and sexual prejudices and patriarchy are all portrayed as constituent features of the Cuban nation which finally lead to its destruction as represented in Cecilia's suicide. At a more universal level, the film can also be understood as a critique of Modernity, in which the powerlessness and impossibility of the individual to fight against historical forces that determine their existence and are constantly repeated, is exemplified.

Solás' *Cecilia*, therefore, intentionally departs from Villaverde's literary original. The filmmaker wanted not only to offer a panoramic view of early nineteenth century Cuban society and to help to establish a distinctive past for the emerging nation, as Villaverde did, but also to analyse that key period in the history of the Cuban nation with the tools that twentieth century scholarly developments provided him. Hence, the racial and sexual prejudices that the novel both portrays and is imbued with are revealed in the film as economic and social constructs consciously defended and perpetuated in order to preserve the status quo. The conjuncture that characters experience and their destinies are portrayed as historically and socially determined rather than out of personal choice.

Furthermore, Solás' thorough analysis of history allows him to draw the parallels with his contemporary society. Here, the filmmaker's own agenda, quite different from Villaverde's, becomes apparent; and this is what ultimately determines the departures that he took from the literary original. Thus, the novel, imbued with the 1830s reformist ideology, is permeated by a very pessimistic tone due to the undeniable mulatto condition of the Cuban nation by the end of the nineteenth century. Hence, it leaves the project of consolidating a united Cuba devoid of major social tensions and with a prosperous future unrealised for the future generations. The film, although also very pessimistic, conversely celebrates

the contribution of black and mulatto cultures to Cuban identity and importantly poses white predominance and values and the whites' subjugation of coloured cultures and population as the true cause for a failed nation with a doomed future, exemplified with the contemporary echoes that the film easily raises. *Cecilia* and the 1830s, therefore, allow Solás to comment symbolically on revolutionary Cuba and to challenge the official version of both past and present history at a time that any criticism towards the way Cuban society was being managed and organised was quickly repressed. The pessimism in Solás' *Cecilia*, however, not only relates to the inability of the Cuban nation of harmonisation, but also to humankind in general as the failure of Modernity and reason has proved.

Both the novel and the film, therefore, and in spite of their numerous differences, are a contribution to the long on-going debate about Cuban identity and the Cuban nation, although they take divergent stances. In fact, Solás' work de-constructs the myth about Cuban identity as embodied in *la mulata* that Villaverde's novel embryocally started and was fully elaborated and consolidated by the novel's subsequent re-creations in many different art forms. In fact, this de-construction of the myth of *la mulata* is one of the factors that explain why Cuban audiences generally reacted negatively to the film, since it did not fulfil their expectations of a self-satisfying work along the lines of Roig's *zarzuela* and the officially accepted interpretation of Villaverde's novel. The public's reaction to *Cecilia* proves that myths and their component of how a society views itself are a difficult issue to challenge and that people generally prefer to remain in the more gratifying mythical realm rather than confront it and go beyond.

However, the debate that ensued after the film's release also has to be understood as an example of the controversy that frequently results from the

adaptation of a canonised literary work and of the endurance of certain misconceptions and prejudices towards cinema in general and its relations with literature in particular. It is here that the issue of fidelity, the reason subjacent in all the negative contemporary film reviews, has to be understood. Importantly, though, the virulent attack against *Cecilia* also has to be explained within the context of the on-going debate about art and its role in a communist society such as Cuba. The film and the internal dissensions that had originated gave the opportunity to the hard-liners of Cuban cultural institutions and establishment to attack once more the policies implemented and the art produced at ICAIC, generally regarded as “an island within the island” in terms of artistic freedom. Although ICAIC survived as an institution and its new head continued with the maxim of total artistic freedom, *Cecilia*, despite its being a good artwork in which a rigorous analysis of and commentary on Cuban past and present history is carried out and a detailed re-creation of a key period in the formation of the Cuban nation is impressively achieved, has been condemned to both national and international oblivion. As Solás has stated, he and his film paid a high price for exerting their right to artistic freedom.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: SEQUENCES IN *CECILIA VALDÉS*

Part 1

Chapter 1: November 1812

Small house at San Juan de Dios, Havana. Cecilia Valdés is born and taken to the *Casa Cuna* by Cándido Gamboa. Charito's illness

Chapter 2 – 3: 1824 (¿1825?)

Chapter 2: Cecilia visits the Gamboa family's house.

Chapter 3: Chepilla tells Cecilia the story of Narcisa and the devil.

These two chapters constituted the first version of *Cecilia Valdés*, the short story published in 1839 in *La Siempreviva*.

Chapter 4 – 6: late September 1830

Ferías del Ángel: baile de cuna at Mercedes Ayala's house.

Chapter 7 – 12: October 1830

The Gamboa family: different episodes portray the life at the Gamboa house (Chapter 7, 11-12) Chapter 12 includes the episode of the Genevan watch.

Chapter 8 – 9: Leonardo and his friends at the *Seminario San Carlos*

Story of the convicted woman Panchita Tapia.

Chapter 10: At the *Ferías del Ángel*: Leonardo – Isabel

Leonardo – Cecilia

Part 2

Chapter 1 – 9: Late October 1830

Preparations for the ball at the *Filarmónica*: Uribe and Pimienta at the tailor's shop (Chapter 1).

Chapter 3, 5: The ball at the *Filarmónica*: Isabel and Leonardo

Chapter 4: at Cecilia's house

Chapter 5-8: The slave trade: *El Veloz*

Chapter 9: María de Regla

Chapter 10 - 14: Mid-November 1830.

Chapter 10: Cándido talks to Chepilla at her house. She departs to visit her daughter Charito in the mental institution. Leonardo visits Cecilia.

Chapter 11: Chepilla returns and argues with Cecilia about Leonardo's visit. Story of Dolores Santa Cruz

Chapter 12: Chepilla visits Doctor Montes de Oca. Cecilia – Leonardo – Isabel in the street.

Chapter 13: Doña Rosa visits Doctor Montes de Oca.

Chapter 14: Argument between Rosa and Cándido. Chepilla becomes ill

Chapter 15 – 16: December

Chapter 15: Leonardo – Nemesia. Leonardo and Cecilia argue

Chapter 16: Cándido arranges a life pension for Cecilia. Cecilia and Leonardo argue again about his trip to the sugar plantation. Nemesia – Cecilia – Pimienta

Chapter 17: 23 December 1830

Formal ball held by the free people of colour: fight between Dionisio and Pimienta.

Part 3

Christmas 1830: Trip to the countryside

Chapter 1 – 2: Coffee plantation La Luz: The Ilincheta family.

Chapter 3: Trip to the sugar plantation La Tinaja.

Chapter 4 – 9: At the sugar plantation.

Part 4

Chapter 1 – 2: 23 December 1830 (It continues the events at Havana of Chapter 17, Part 2)

Chapter 1: Dionisio and Malanga

Chapter 2: Chepilla dies.

Chapter 3 - 6: Mid-January 1831.

Chapter 3: The Gamboa family are back at Havana. María de Regla.

Chapter 4: Reunion between Cecilia and Leonardo. Nemesia arrives. Nemesia – Pimienta.

Chapter 5: Cándido visits *Alcalde Mayor* Fernando O'Reilly. Cecilia is taken to the *Convento de las Recogidas*.

Chapter 6: inquiries by Leonardo to find Cecilia. María de Regla.

Chapter 7:

Rosa and Cándido agree on Leonardo's marriage. Rosa helps Leonardo to liberate Cecilia and take her to a house he has set up for her. Cecilia is pregnant

Late April 1831: Cecilia leaves the convent.

12 April 1831: Leonardo finishes his studies at the Seminario de San Carlos.

Late August 1831: Cecilia has a baby.

10 November 1831: Wedding Leonardo – Isabel. Pimienta stabs Leonardo.

Conclusion:

Cecilia is secluded in the *Hospital de Paula* for a year, where she meets her mother.

Isabel becomes a nun.

Rosa and Meneses get married and go to live in *La Luz*.

Dionisio is jailed for five years and then another ten years to do forced labour in Havana.

APPENDIX 2: SEQUENCES IN *CECILIA*

Television series and national version

Sequence 1 (credit sequence): Myth of formation of the Cuban nation.

Scene 1: Black people about to cross a passage.

Scene 2: Religious procession shows Cuba's syncretic identity.

Sequence 2: Grandmother explains myth of Oshún to the girl.

Sequence 3:

Various scenes: The girl escapes into the deserted streets, finds a young man in black. She follows him, he finally throws her out of the tower.

Sequence 4: Cecilia getting ready to go to a party. Presentation of her family.

Sequence 5: The *baile de cuna*.

Numerous scenes in which the different characters are presented (Uribe, Pimienta, Meneses, Leonardo, Mercedes Ayala, Cantalapiedra). The relationship between Cecilia and Leonardo starts.

Sequence 6: The Gamboa mansion.

Various scenes present the Gamboa family (Rosa, Cándido and Leonardo) and their relationship.

Sequence 7: The *Plaza de la Catedral*

Scene 1: The procession of the convicted woman that Leonardo is watching.

Scene 2: Leonardo is crying when he is approached by his friend Meneses.

Scene 3: Other friends arrive. They go to the Seminario de San Carlos.

Sequence 8: At Cecilia's house.

Different scenes that characterise Cecilia and her family. The pressures her mother and granny exert on her to become the lover of Don Cosme.

Sequence 9: The Genevan watch.

Scene 1: Doña Rosa and Leonardo talking. Leonardo asks for the Genevan watch.

Scene 2: Rosa sends an employee to buy the watch.

Scene 3: Incestuous desires by Rosa.

Sequence 10: Market in the Plaza de la Catedral. Leonardo and his friends reflect on the institution of slavery.

Sequence 11: At the tailor Uribe's shop.

Scene 1: Uribe and Pimienta talk about the conspiracy.

Scene 2: Cecilia arrives. Uribe goes to the next room. Relationship between Cecilia and Pimienta.

Scene 3: Leonardo arrives at the tailor and Cecilia departs.

Sequence 12: Leonardo follows Cecilia to the square.

Sequence 13: The formal dance at the *Filarmónica*.

Different scenes that show the world of the white elite. Episode of the slave trade. Presentation of Isabel Ilincheta.

Sequence 14: First encounter between Cecilia and Leonardo on their own on the outskirts of Havana.

Sequence 15: Leonardo rapes a young mulatto girl on his return to Havana.

Sequence 16: Leonardo takes confession.

Sequence 17: At Mercedes Ayala's house. Nemesia is possessed by a spirit (*bajársele un santo*).

Sequence 18: The poet Mariano and Jesús María: The conspiracy.

Scene 1: Cecilia is stopped by the poet Mariano and an unwell Jesús María, who ask her to take them to Pimienta's house

Scene 2: They seek refuge in Pimienta's house because they are being chased by the colonial authorities. Pimienta as one of the conspirators.

Sequence 19: Gambo and his associate go to see Captain-General Vives with regard to their captured vessel.

Sequence 20: At Isabel's house. A *tertulia* in which a young black violinist, whose freedom Isabel has bought, plays for them.

Sequence 21: A black seller in the street, María de Regla, foresees the future for Cecilia.

Sequence 22: Mariano, Cecilia and Pimienta. Mariano departs for Mexico. Cecilia and Pimienta have to look for a safe shelter for the badly injured Jesús María.

Sequence 23: At the tailor, Uribe's shop.

Scene 1: Pimienta and Cecilia ask Uribe to shelter Jesús María.

Scene 2: The superintendent Cantalapiedra arrives and threatens Uribe.

Scene 3: Cecilia thinks of a solution.

Sequence 24: Cecilia and Leonardo in a beautiful house that he has rented. She asks for his help with Jesús María and he accedes.

Sequence 25: Pimienta – Cecilia. She explains her plan to save Jesús María to him.

Sequence 26: Leonardo and Rosa. He asks for money in exchange for his acceptance to marry Isabel.

Sequence 27: Cecilia, Leonardo and Pimienta taking Jesús María to one of the Gamboa's warehouses, where he will be safe.

Sequence 28: Cecilia and Leonardo consummate their love.

Sequence 29: The journey and arrival at the *ingenio*.

Sequence 30: Leonardo and Isabel. They talk openly about their relationship.

Sequence 31: At Cecilia's house. They find out about Leonardo's wedding to Isabel.

Sequence 32: Leonardo takes Isabel for a walk around the plantation. The horrors of slavery.

Sequence 33: The Gamboa and their guests inspect the slaves. One of the *cimarrones* has been captured.

Sequence 34: At night in the plantation.

Scene 1: Candido rapes a young slave

Scene 2: Castration of one of the runaway slaves who have been captured.

Scene 3: Isabel's nightmare about a slave revolt.

Sequence 35: Breakfast at the plantation. The Gamboa and their guests talk about slavery and progress.

Sequence 36: Mercedes Ayala reads the cards for Cecilia and warns her about her future.

Sequence 37: Doña Rosa, Leonardo and Isabel inspecting the mansion in which the couple is going to live when they get married.

Scene 1: Rosa announces the news of the Earldom of Casa Gamboa.

Scene 2: Rosa and Leonardo.

Scene 3: Isabel and Leonardo.

Sequence 38: Rosa is informed by their *mayordomo* Reventos that Jesús María has been hiding in their warehouse because Leonardo took him there.

Sequence 39: Cecilia goes to see Pimienta.

Sequence 40: Rosa forces Leonardo to marry Isabel immediately and relinquish Jesús María.

Sequence 41: Cecilia and Leonardo argue. Final separation.

Sequence 42: The cock fight.

Sequence 43: At Cecilia's house. Ill, Cecilia is being advised by her family to accept Leonardo just as a lover. She leaves the house.

Sequence 44: The Conspiracy. It is about to start and roles and functions are divided.

Sequence 45: Cecilia and her grandmother go to a *santero* to regain Leonardo.

Sequence 46: Leonardo is walking around the market and sees the young girl that he has raped. He starts crying.

Sequence 47: Rosa visits Captain-General Vives and denounces the conspiracy.

Sequence 48: The 6 of January.

Various scenes are rendered in crosscutting. The celebrations in the streets by the coloured people. The arrest of the conspirators. Leonardo and Isabel's wedding. Pimienta's stabbing of Leonardo after the latter has got married. Cecilia-Oshún's suicide.

Cannes version

Sequence 9, 15, 16, 19, 25, 33, 35, 36 and 46 have been completely removed.

Sequences 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13, 14, 20, 21, 23, 26, 32, 47 and 48 have been shortened.

An extra sequence has been added between 31 and 32. In the plantation, the Gamboa and their guests are seen blessing the food they are going to have. This is in contrast to the life of the slaves and shows the hypocrisy and double standards of the white elite and of the Catholic church.

The order of sequences is altered from sequence 34. The order in this version is 34, 39, 37, 38, 41 and 40. From there, it continues in the same manner as in the other versions.

APPENDIX 3: CREDITS TO *CECILIA* (1982)

Director

Humberto Solás

Production Companies

ICAIC (Cuba) and Impala S.A. (Spain)

Producer

Humberto Hernández

Screenplay

Nelson Rodríguez, Norma Torrado, Jorge Ramos, Humberto Solás. Based on the novel *Cecilia Valdés* by Cirilo Villaverde.

Editor

Nelson Rodríguez

Director of Photography

Livio Delgado

Music

Leo Brouwer

Sound

Ricardo Istueta

Assistant Director

Mario Crespo

Production Designer

Pedro García Espinosa, Enrique Tamarit, Francisco Villa

Costume Designers

María Elena Molinet, Diana Fernández, Derubín Jacomé

Make-up

Magaly Pompa, Lisette Revuelta, Grisel Cordero, Nereyda Sánchez.

Hairstylist

Félix Márquez

Cast

Daisy Granados – *Cecilia*

Imanol Arias – *Leonardo Gamboa*

Raquel Revuelta – *Rosa Gamboa*

Gerardo Riverón – *Cándido Gamboa*

Eslinda Núñez – *Isabel Ilincheta*

Miguel Benavides – *José Dolores Pimienta*

José Antonio Rodríguez – *Uribe*

Alejandro Lugo – *Cantalapiedra*

Omara Portuondo – *Mercedes Ayala*

Linda Mirabal – *Nemesia*

Antonia Valdés – *Chepilla*

Alicia Bustamante – *Cecilia's mum*

César Évora – *The Poet (José María Heredia)*

Alfredo Mayo – *Captain-General Vives*

Elio Mesa – *Don Cosme*

Nelson Villagra
Enrique Almirante
Mayda Limonta
Angel Toraño
Hilda Oates
Evelio Taillacq

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