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TESIS DOCTORAL

**A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE WORKS OF  
FELIPE ALFAU WITHIN THE THEORETICAL  
FRAMEWORK OF SPACE AND PLACE**

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## Introduction

### 1 Exchanging Worlds

I can clearly remember the first time I stepped into Felipe Alfau's world of *locos*: his suicide-prescribing doctors, taxidermied *funcionarios* and spring-infatuated poets. My mind so quickly jumps back to those crucial moments because I too found myself in a situation similar to that of Alfau. A young immigrant, working at my first job outside of my home country, I sat on my bed, which practically consumed the entirety of my closet-sized room, listening to the sounds reverberating off the walls of the *patio de luz* and in through my window: voices of crying infants and soothing *abuelas*, bickering lovers and the sloppy clip-clap of children testing out their mother's *tacones*. The smells of *lagarto* soap and fried *chorizo*. There, alone in the dusty and shabby beauty of that aged apartment, my own living *chromo*, I felt an instant connection to this author who had somehow exchanged worlds with me almost a century ago. I found myself reading his expressions of bereavement toward Spain and his descriptions of a tentative inhabitation of New York City at the very moment in which I felt deeply my own loss of America as I took my first wobbly steps in the neighborhood of Chamberí in Madrid. I found myself enamored with Alfau much in the same way as Mary McCarthy, who described her own encounter with Alfau's work thus: "Alfau, or his book, was evidently my fatal type" (1988: 201).

Therefore, what began as a google search in order to broaden my own understanding of *La Generación 27*, quickly morphed into an obsession with this one particular author, Felipe Alfau. My interest in his work developed into much more than the visualization of my own reflection through the mirror of his novels, as I soon discovered that most of Alfau's work is dedicated to the exploration of hybridity as a way of reconciling two dramatically opposed cultures. Alfau, in a way, has opened my eyes to the entire postcolonial movement to which he forms a sort of

strange precursor. He has become my channel of access to authors such as Thomas Pynchon, Salman Rushdie and Junot Diaz, a rare example of the unknown leading the way to the renowned. Beyond the innovative themes found in the content of Alfau's work, the techniques he applied in the creation of his novels: satire, stereotyping and labyrinthine chaos, led me to believe that there was something of literary importance in this unknown author.

As I am sure anyone who finds him/herself<sup>1</sup> in love with a book can relate, I was thrilled to compare my own reactions to those who had also read Alfau. Soon I discovered a few fellow aficionados, mainly Ilan Stavans, Mary McCarthy and Carmen Martín Gaité, and read with eagerness their commentary on Alfau's work. One of my most exciting finds in those early days of research was the discovery of the script of the interview Stavans conducted with an aged Alfau: I remember laughing with delight upon hearing his own sarcastic and cynical voice, exactly as I had imagined it, and then reading with earnest shock his fascist pro-Franco statements, even noting the trace of racism behind his comments on immigration. As I worked my way through the list of publications on Alfau's work, a quick and easy endeavor, I was surprised at the lack of critical commentary on his novels. Today, I anxiously await the publication of Ilan Stavans' biography of Alfau, and wish that the publication could have come before I finished working on this thesis, so as to illuminate further the enigma of Felipe Alfau.

This disappointing lack of publications on Alfau's work led to my own questions as to Alfau's status of "unknown" within the literary world. Surely Alfau suffered from the same bad luck as other prodigious authors, who have come and gone before the world has caught up with their ideas and techniques. However, with the coming of age of Postcolonialism, one would think that now would be Alfau's moment. In fact, it seems it almost was, as he was a finalist for the National Book Award in 1990 for *Chromos*. Perhaps the problem, then, is not the quality or

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<sup>1</sup> From now on "he/she" "his/her" or "him/herself" will be referred to as simply "he," "his" or "himself".

the innovative nature of his work, but the very subject on which he is writing. After all, his novels do not fit within any trending category: he does not capture postcolonial India, he is neither African-American nor Hispanic and his work makes no reference to World War II. His subject matter is simply not popular, given the current mood.

Yet if we have truly decided, as postcolonial theory boasts, to discard the Western canon and its prejudices toward only preserving the work of writers on the straight and narrow path, then Alfau deserves more critical study of his novels, since he meets the criteria as an innovative writer creating a Third Space that is distinctly and uniquely his own, complete with its own language and cultural norms. As Susan Elizabeth Sweeny states about Alfau's work: "such polyglot writers challenge conventional notions of a literary canon organized according to national languages and literatures" (1993: 207). There exists a danger of the great ideals of the postcolonial movement giving way to creating a new standard, centered on a limited group of narrowly-defined authors. For if the current literary theorists wish to develop their own rubric as to which authors matter, based on technique, originality and style, Alfau clearly makes the cut. A few authors, such as Chandler Brossard, have recognized the caliber of Alfau's work, placing him at the top of their literary lists: "An almost totally unknown Spanish-American named Felipe Alfau, whose stories *Locos*, published thirty-odd years ago, are in a class by themselves" (1972: 110). The importance of creating a substantial critical response to Alfau's work is one of the motivating factors of this study, for, as Alfau's editor Steven Moore stated when Alfau was still alive: "We will lose Alfau one of these days, but we can't afford ever to lose his work again" (1993: 247).

## **2 Felipe Alfau: The Person and the Persona**

### **2.1 Fragments**

After having read Alfau's oeuvre as well as having researched the various fragments of versions of Alfau's life available to us today, it soon becomes clear that the characters, the plot and the very locations in the stories are inextricably tied to the life of the author. With Alfau's biography in mind, we see he appears time and again in his own writing, fragmented and distorted, but still Alfau. Therefore, the autobiographical information on Alfau becomes essential to understanding his work, as it not only sheds light on the author, his opinions and *modus operandi*, but also reveals the conflicting personas and identities that underlie his novels. As we shall see, this real historical person is converted by his own pen into a persona, a semi-fictional version of Alfau himself who intervenes in the novels.

### **2.2 A Brief Biography**

Born on August 24<sup>th</sup> in 1902, Felipe Alfau formed part of an upper class, educated family in the North of Spain. While he was born in Barcelona, the family soon moved to Guernica, the place Alfau would think of as his childhood home. His parents thrived on a life of adventure, later having moved both to the Philippines and the Caribbean (Martín Gaité 1993: 175-6). With the beginning of World War I in Europe, the Alfau family left the uncommitted but unstable atmosphere in Spain for New York City, a place, relatives told them, where there was employment and this would offer a better life (Stavans 1993a: 149). The move to the United States thus coincides with a greater shift in Spain at the time the Alfau family decided to leave:

The '98 disaster would leave Alfau's family, like many others, in a state of confusion, needing to adapt to the new industrial, political, and cultural landscape conditioned by the growth and restructuring of Spain in the first few years of the twentieth century. They had relatives abroad, contemplated the possibility of emigrating, and were told it was easy to get a job elsewhere. At the time of the First World War, the United States was perceived as the Promised Land for those willing to take a risk, to find a better life (Martín Gaité 1993: 175).

The profession of writing seemed to be in Felipe Alfau's blood, since his father found work as a journalist in the United States and his sister, Jususa Alfau de Solalinde, became the wife of a philologist and wrote her first novel at the age of nineteen (Stavans 1993b: 143).

Not surprisingly for a Spaniard at the turn of the twentieth century, Alfau was a committed Catholic, but it seems that his religious beliefs went deeper than the mere cultural traditions so common to Spanish life. Though years later, after he was "rediscovered," he explains himself by saying: "As for me, I am a skeptic, as you said. I cannot but have doubts regarding the afterlife. What if there is a God? What if all our uncertainties are a children's game? What if we are punished for our sins?" When Ilan Stavans replies lightheartedly to these questions, Alfau retorts: "I sure wish I was sure it was all a joke" (Stavans 1993a: 148) (*ibid.*). Alfau even gives his religion as the reason for not committing suicide after having resigned himself to a life of solitude. Therefore, Alfau's comments on religion reveal a man who has delved deeper into his own concerns and doubts than a nominal Catholic would have ventured, but he also seems to stand at the edge of belief, non-committal to either atheism or faith.

Following the move to New York and upon finishing high school, Alfau studied for one year at Columbia University, where he was able to polish his writing in English. Having only spent one year at the university, Alfau proudly described himself as "a self-educated man," and even wrote *Chromos* in between translations at his job (Stavans 1993a: 149). He worked from 1923-1926 writing music reviews at *La Prensa*, a Spanish-language newspaper in New York City. In 1927, having married Estelle Goodman, with whom he had one daughter, Chiquita, he found himself in need of a job, which was the reason why he wrote both *Old Tales from Spain*, a collection of children's stories published in 1929, and *Locos: A Comedy of Gestures*, his first novel, which he finished in 1928 (Hammond 1990). His relationship with his first wife was not

an easy one, as his friend Chandler Brossard explains, “he had first married a Jew, which I think upset him very much, and I think this is one of the reasons he quit writing for a very long time: she was a real sergeant, always driving him to write, and he finally just couldn’t stand it” (1993: 194). Brossard paints a rather grim picture of the two, and the couple did divorce in 1929.

When Alfau got a job as a translator at a bank in 1928, he stopped being concerned about the publication of his novel, having found a way to provide for himself and his family. He would stay at that job until 1964, when he retired. In 1936, Alfau found a publisher for *Locos*, who paid him \$250 for the manuscript and it formed part of a series called “Discoverers” for up-and-coming authors (Stavans 1989: 173). The book was well received by critics, but it never really reached the public, only being available by special order. He remarried in 1946: the father of the new wife, Rosemary Clark, had forced the marriage upon him. This marriage also failed, and again Alfau’s friend Brossard gives an interesting portrayal of their relationship: “To be honest, you couldn’t quite believe these two together— a circus act: there was this Moorish-looking guy, really elegant, with great style: and there was this balloon from Brooklyn, a messenger at the bank where he worked” (1993: 194-5). It seems that this second wife did not match his lifestyle or his intelligence, and the marriage also ended in divorce.

Alfau continued on, mostly alone, with a small circle of friends who visited him and welcomed him into their homes. Those who were included in this small inner circle soon discovered in Alfau a rare and peculiar individual, so much so that one of them, Charles Simmons, who used Alfau as the basis for a character in his novel, *Jose Llanos*: “In his early middle age, when I knew him, he had everything needed for a fictional character and in the colloquial sense, a character— luminous intelligence, outrageous perversity of opinion, and a straight-faced delivery of genius” (Simmons 1993). His second novel, *Chromos*, remained in a

dresser drawer, never presented to a publisher after his frustrating experience with *Locos*. While Alfau would later deny the fact that his lack of success had a negative impact on him, those closest to him seemed aware that he did take the matter personally, as Brossard states: “Felipe would feel very humiliated by these rejections” (1993: 196). However, many critics during the rediscovery of Alfau’s work would hypothesize that this lack of success could be credited to the innovative nature of his work, incomprehensible and definitely not in fashion in the 1920s and 30s (Coates 1990) (Shapiro, A. 1993: 203).

The next significant event in Alfau’s life would be his return to Spain in 1959. Having been convinced to visit friends of his, the Talbots, who were from New York and living near Málaga for one year, Alfau made his homecoming to Guernica and then went on to visit his friends. During conversations with Alfau prior to the trip, Toby Talbot notes that “he evinced no nostalgia, no desire to make an actual trip, disillusioned as he was with the Civil War, which had divided his family, and reluctant it seemed to confront the landscape of his childhood and youth.” (1993: 184). After all, Spain had changed drastically while Alfau was away, and he now felt an outsider, although he had become a strong Franquista and was presumably welcome in Franco’s Spain. Upon returning home to Guernica, the city bombed by the Nazis, Alfau had to find a way to reconcile his pro-Franco beliefs with the devastation he was now seeing before his own eyes. Talbot describes the scene as follows:

He’d rambled through the village, getting his bearings, confirming how primitive things really were and how Spain was living in another century. Felipe never found any link between that presumed condition and Franco’s regime: for him it had more to do with some inherent Spanish fate (1993: 184).

Alfau’s chosen response was to deny that Franco had bombed the city at all, saying that it “was in fine condition.” (Talbot 1993: 185). Perhaps the disconnection from his homeland, evident in moments such as these, played an important role in developing Alfau’s postmodern perspective:

wavering between two cultures and not fully identifying himself with either. As he left to return to New York, he called out to his hosts the Talbots, “See you back home,” as if Spain no longer held sentimental value for him; but according to his friends, it seems that the trip was not that black and white. Chandler Brossard recalls that Alfau suffered a sort of breakdown during his time in Spain and Doris Shapiro informs us that Alfau “met not one person or turned one remembered corner from his beloved childhood” (Brossard 1993: 195) (Shapiro, D. 1993: 198). On his rediscovery, he would even state in an interview that, “Todo había cambiado. Me sentí muy solo<sup>2</sup>” (Stavans 1992b: 611). He faced the problem that immigrants often encounter upon a return home: that life has simply gone on and changed without him.

Moving ahead to the year 1987, Alfau was living in a housing project in Queens, alone and waiting for old age to take him away. Out of the blue, Steven Moore contacted him to ask if he could republish *Locos*. Moore recalls his interactions with Alfau by saying, “In this and all other matters, Alfau was very cooperative, giving us complete freedom and responsibility for copy-editing, proofreading, and design, not so much because he trusted us than because he didn’t want to bother with any of it” (1993: 246-7). It would appear that Alfau was no longer interested in becoming a literary success, as he would state on numerous occasions: “All of this has come too late. Truly, I don’t care anymore” (Stavans 1993a: 151).

However, his emerging public would not let him escape so easily, and the man who had arguably the most contact with Alfau, Ilan Stavans, only gained the privilege of meeting him after countless persistent attempts to contact him, receiving responses such as the following:

Someone with a peculiar, matured voice responded. Alfau was out of the country, he claimed, perhaps in Europe. He had sublet his apartment and was not expected back for several months. The man said *su apellido*, his own last name, was García, by profession a taxidermist. The joke was clear (1993b: 144).

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<sup>2</sup> Everything had changed. I felt very alone. [My translation.]

Finally giving in to Stavans's persistence, most of what we know of Alfau in his own words comes from the interviews Stavans conducted. In one segment, he rants: "it was better when nobody cared. Some people think I am a celebrity, but I don't even understand what that means. Better to be all alone, alone and silent" (1993a: 153). Unfortunately, without meeting Alfau, it is difficult to know from his interviews if he was sincerely apathetic to his success or if he possessed that Spanish quality of understating his own accomplishments, either as a defense mechanism, or as not wanting to appear proud (Martín Gaité 1993: 174). Doris Shapiro, a long-time friend of Alfau's, in telling the story of when she brought him one of the first reviews, remembers that "[she] could tell he was pleased. They understood what he had done and were saying he had predicted the discoveries of the great magic realists and also linking him to Nabokov" (1993: 201). Perhaps then, the façade of pessimism is more the Catalan characteristically dry exterior than an actual resentment of the success that had finally come his way.

In 1989, Alfau moved to a retirement home in Rego Park, Queens, where he lived until his death on February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1999. Having allowed Steven Moore access to *Locos*, Alfau showed him his manuscript for *Chromos*, and upon publication in 1990, the novel was one of five books nominated for the National Book Award that same year. *Chromos*, however, would not win the prize, with some of the judges claiming that the voting was politically driven, and that *Chromos* should have been the rightful winner (West 1993). Alfau's relationship with Stavans would also lead to the publication of his poetry in a bilingual edition called *La poesía cursi* (1992), with Alfau even entrusting the English translation to Stavans. Alfau later provided Stavans with a draft of the speech he had prepared in case he won the National Book Award. The speech

reveals a bit more of his personality and dry sense of humor, offering a final picture of Alfau at the time he was rediscovered:

When the publishers told me they were submitting my book for this award I thought they were carried away by blind optimism, but when the book was accepted I thought: who am I to disagree with such distinguished experts? And concluded that my work must possess virtues which eluded my inferior powers of observation.  
Anyway only a fool would question his good fortune.

(Included in Stavans 1993a: 155)

### **2.3 Eccentricities Abound**

Describing Felipe Alfau without discussing his political views would be an injustice to him, but for the researcher, it is tempting to paint him as a frail eccentric man, senile and therefore unaware of what he was saying. However, this does not seem to be the case with Alfau, who stood by his Franquista beliefs for as long as anyone who knew him can remember. Indeed, his right-wing politics have led other researchers to even connect his work to Wyndham Lewis (Scott 2005: 52). This may be too strong a comparison, but to give the reader a glimpse of his famously politically incorrect ideals, here is a quotation from Ilan Stavans' interview with him:

I think democracy is a disgrace. Machiavelli was absolutely right: the difference between tyranny and democracy is that in tyranny you need to serve only one master, whereas in a pluralistic society you have to obey many. I always thought Generalísimo Francisco Franco was a trustworthy ruler of Spain, and thus supported him. Since his death, the Iberian peninsula is in complete chaos. In fact, at the time of the Spanish Civil War, I championed Franco's cause in this country as much as I could (1993a: 148).

As stated earlier, even on his visit to Guernica, his childhood home, Alfau stood by his belief that nothing had happened to the town and that all of the uproar had been communist propaganda. He stood by this even when he could not find his own sister's tomb as a result of the devastation (Brossard 1993: 196). There is simply no disguising Alfau's political beliefs, which he made clear to almost everyone he met.

Beyond his Franquista leanings, his other beliefs seem to be even more uncomfortable in today's society. In the same interview, Stavans addresses some accusations made toward Alfau regarding his views on race:

IS: Do you think whites are superior?

FA: I trust Western civilization to be built upon the wisdom of the Greek and Roman empires. Purity is fundamental if continuity is to be achieved. Take New York City as an example. In the fifties this was a safe place to live, but now so many immigrants have invaded its streets and neighborhoods, making it a violent jungle (1993a: 152).

This segment from the interview is fascinating since Alfau, himself an immigrant, does not even consider that he too would belong to the group of invaders he describes. More accusations have been made toward Alfau about his tendency toward Anti-Semitism, only this particular charge he would vehemently deny, stating that he had several Jewish friends, indeed, he had married a Jewess. However, when attacked for his other offensive beliefs, Alfau remained adamant: "My ideas are wrong in today's cultural climate, but they are mine" (1993a: 152). Not one to back down, and known for being a strong debater, Alfau went to his grave still clinging to his beliefs.

Thus concludes the image of Alfau that has been created for us by his friends and those who had the chance to meet him. The critical work on Alfau is composed of a series of reviews following the publication of *Chromos*, mostly short descriptions of the work as well as a general sentiment that Alfau was an author "ahead of his time." The *Review of Contemporary Fiction* dedicated its Spring edition in 1993 to Alfau and Luigi Pirandello, creating the most complete critical perspective on Alfau to date. The prefaces and afterwords of the works themselves also offer glimpses of the areas of investigation yet to be explored. Finally, one Master's thesis by Joseph Scott entitled, "'Thundering out of the Shadow': Modernism and Identity in the Novels of Felipe Alfau," offers an additional perspective, one which I will necessarily reference throughout this thesis, since I disagree with the majority of the conclusions Scott draws from Alfau's work. Clearly, there is much left to be said on Alfau's work, as Anna Shapiro explains: "such is the

familiar and much romanticized fate of the artist of ‘advanced’ ideas, whose art is ‘before its time’” (1993: 203). In fact, perhaps in the case of Felipe Alfau, we have been lucky, for he was not able to slip away before telling us some of the story of his life and work.

### **3. The Corpus**

#### **3.1 *Old Tales from Spain***

Alfau’s first published work was *Old Tales from Spain*, a collection of short stories written for children. If nothing else, these stories, an entirely different genre from his two novels, point to the varied attempts Alfau made at entering the literary publishing scene. The stories in this collection are set in several different locations all within the country of Spain, be it Seville, islands in the Mediterranean, or even the Alhambra. Carmen Martín Gaité, the writer who introduces these tales in the present-day Spanish edition, has noted that most of the stories contain a young male protagonist, strong and independent. Martín Gaité links this protagonist to the author himself, the young Felipe Alfau, revealing underlying autobiographical tendencies in the text (1998: xxiii). The majority of the stories found within the pages of *Old Tales from Spain* also show an unrelenting pull toward the Romantic, especially when Alfau chooses to incorporate legends or when he invokes scenes that remind the reader of Washington Irving’s *Tales of the Alhambra* (1832)<sup>3</sup>. Alfau also spends considerable time developing stories around the origins of inventions, from pigeon carriers to sailboats or even the rainbow. However, in some of the stories, especially in “El gusano de oro” or “La leyenda de las abejas<sup>4</sup>,” political undertones create a strong double meaning, belying an author with depth and potential for writing much more than children’s stories. While Alfau’s technique in relaying his political

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this thesis, works referenced in general will include the original date of publication, with the more recent edition cited in the bibliography. However, when referencing specific pages within a work, the first such reference will include the original date of publication in brackets as well as the date of the edition used. After that initial reference, only the more recent date will be included in the parenthetical citation.

<sup>4</sup> “The Golden Worm,” “The Legend of the Bees”

leanings in these stories is less skillfully crafted than in his following novels, these particular stories do foreshadow the flourishing novelist to come.

### ***3.2 Locos: A Comedy of Gestures***

Anna Shapiro has defined this novel as a detective story of identity (Shapiro, A. 1993: 203), in which the characters, the author and even the reader must search for identity in the labyrinthine pages of a novel in the form of related stories. There exists a categorical shift from Alfau's first published work, *Old Tales from Spain*, to this second work, *Locos*, which is surprising when one considers that Alfau finished *Locos* in 1928, one year prior to the publication of his short stories. In *Locos*, Alfau insists upon laying bare the device, beginning from the opening pages of his own prologue, in which he begs the reader to throw off the conventions of reading the stories in chronological order and implores him to withhold from searching for greater meaning. Soon the reader discovers that the narrator himself is "Alfau," whom we are supposed to believe is the author, but in reality is an additional character of the novel. Therefore, from this point onward in this thesis, the narrator will be referred to as "Alfau," and the author himself as simply Alfau. Turning to the short stories of which the novel is composed, one finds that the characters themselves refuse to remain in their prescribed roles, blurring the lines between reality and fiction. They interrupt the narrator, take control of the plot and even experience their own existential crises. While this aspect alone would be enough to consider the novel innovative for its time, Alfau also uses his carefully-crafted stereotypical characters to create an original version of criticism of Spanish society. The actual themes of this critique are not original to Alfau, but come from a tendency typical of the generation of writers following the Spanish-American War of 1898. These authors, known as *La generación del 98*, would take issue with Spanish society: more specifically the religious fanaticism, the lack of drive in industry and the political

corruption of both the liberals and the conservatives. However, Alfau's originality in this critique comes when he abstains from expressing the usual desperate longing for a solution to these issues; instead, he playfully presents these stereotypes and then allows for the reader to simply relish in the chaotic lack of resolve. This makes Alfau's work all the more unprecedented, since this pushes him past the endless modernist searching and into the postmodern, all in the year 1928.

### **3.3 *Chromos***

The publication of Alfau's second novel is the story of a lost treasure, written in the year 1948 and only rediscovered in 1990. The contrast between how *Locos* was received in the 1930s and *Chromos*' success in 1990 is yet another testament to Alfau's ingenuity: it took the literary world sixty years to catch up with Alfau's technique, style and content. Indeed, the themes Alfau had developed in the novel were now in fashion in the 1990s, since it discusses a Third Space existing in New York City. The novel includes its own hybrid characters, the "Americaniards," as he calls them, a diverse group of Spaniards who immigrated to the United States and who search for an in-between that is neither forced assimilation nor reclusive isolation. The novel also abounds in a postmodern flair for laying bare the device, achieved through the use of frame narrators and manuscript fragments, as well as the same chaotic playfulness Alfau employed in *Locos*. The narrator is again the mysterious "Alfau," who, in this novel, is an immigrant writer in New York City, trying to navigate the publishing scene of this new world. The perspective of "Alfau" is contrasted with that of Garcia, a fellow immigrant writer, who is irremediably caught up in *cursi* (corny) and stereotypical literature. The other two essential characters are Dr. de los Rios—who, like Garcia, has been carried over from *Locos*—representing the liberal progressive Spain, and Don Pedro, who portrays the traditional and stagnant Spain. The novel therefore

pursues this glimpse into the process of adaptation as these diverse immigrants adjust to their new surroundings. However, the novel also takes on an innovative playfulness surrounding the themes of immigration and hybridity, creating a delightful and original intersecting of literature of the Third Space and the techniques of Postmodernism.

### **3.4 *La poesía cursi***

Alfau's final published work is one that encompasses the entirety of his adult life, since this book is a compilation of his poetry, with some poems dating back as far as the early 1920s, before he wrote *Old Tales from Spain*, to the late 1980s when he was rediscovered. While this sampling of poetry would have the potential of showing the literary development of the author himself, the poetry does not reveal any such tendency, since we can see from the dates of the poetry that Alfau continued writing some purely Romantic poems throughout his entire career. The poems also vary greatly from Alfau's novels in that they are generally formal both in structure and technique, lacking Alfau's characteristic experimentations, and instead adhering to rhyme schemes and even appropriate Romantic themes. While this is generally true of Alfau's poetry, it is also incontestable that there are, intermingled with these Romantic poems, a few examples of the picaresque Alfau from his novels, offering glimpses of mockery behind the Romanticism and even a few shocking moments, as in the case of the poem "Evocación afro-ideal<sup>5</sup>."

Therefore, in many ways, Alfau's poetry reveals a Romantic side to the author, since, as Alfau himself has explained, poetry was a more closely personal form of writing for him than the novels or the short stories, a difference evident in the fact that this is his only work originally written in Spanish (Stavans 1993a: 149). This Romantic poetry reveals an additional aspect to the person of Alfau, which can perhaps be attributed to the nostalgia of being a displaced

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<sup>5</sup> "Afro- Ideal Evocation"

immigrant, serving an additional purpose of keeping us from the temptation of allowing him to be singularly defined.

## **4 The Theoretical Frameworks**

### **4.1 The Third Space**

The theory of the Third Space quickly became the cornerstone for the creation of this thesis since both the author and his work are closely tied to the theme of hybridity. Behind the hybridized content of the novels emerges an author who is himself attempting to inhabit a Third Space, evident in his varied attempts at writing in different genres and even different languages.

Moreover, there is a need for a theoretical framework that speaks to the vast amounts of hybrid language in the novels, especially in *Chromos*. Therefore, the depictions of the Americaniards in *Chromos*, the satirical representation of Spanish stereotypes in *Locos* and the themes of nostalgia and loss in both *Old Tales from Spain* and *La poesía cursi* made the theory of the Third Space an essential framework from which to begin working.

The discussion of the theory of the Third Space in this thesis will begin with an explanation of what is meant by the First Space, that is “the Nation” to which one originally belongs; followed by an explanation of the Second Space, being the binary opposite “Other”; and finally, this ambiguous space between, the Third Space, the attempt to find a place of hybridity. I will review the characteristics of this Third Space and its variations, especially focusing on those most relevant to the creation of the sub-genre of literature explained by this theory. The exposition of the theory will be based on the ideas of the scholars Benedict Anderson and Homi Bhabha, making special reference to their respective works, *Imagined Communities* (1983) and *The Location of Culture* (1994), for while these scholars wrote their canonical works some years ago, they are still respected as the foundational authors for the theory of the Third Space. Like

any literary movement, others have come after them to discount, alter or revise their work, however, while some would, as a result, deem authors such as Bhabha and Anderson irrelevant or outdated, I contend that the subsequent authors have only added to Third Space theory, but there has not been any alteration grave enough to warrant the excommunication of these quintessential authors. I considered other authors on space and place, such as Bachelard and his *The Poetics of Space* (1994), Massey's *Space, Place, and Gender* (1994), and some of Foucault's ideas, but they were not applicable to Alfau, since his depictions of space do not enter the specific in terms of gender or the utopian. By basing my description of the framework of the Third Space on foundational scholars such as Bhabha and Anderson, I can then allow for more recent writers to voice their additional discoveries as the movement continues to grow and mature, if and when relevant. Edward Soja's theory of "Thirdspace," for example, contains a relevant perspective, and I will discuss the pertinent insights of his work to my discussion of Third Space further in the next chapter.

## **4.2 Stereotypes**

While the overarching theory driving this study will be the Third Space, particular attention must also be paid to a literary use of stereotypes, especially since Alfau relies heavily on this technique in his novel *Locos*. In order to avoid any premature assumptions as to Alfau's use of stereotypes, I will begin the discussion with a brief description of the differing forms of stereotypes found in literature. From this basis, I will then proceed to explore the potential reasons for using stereotypes as a technique. Finally, I will consider the use of stereotypes as critique, especially emphasizing how the postmodern can be present in this approach. Upon completing this more general overview of stereotypes in literature, I will turn to the specific use of stereotypes as part of the criticism of Spanish society in literature, since this is a technique

used and written about by other Spanish authors, the most predominant being Ramón del Valle-Inclán and Julio Caro Baroja. This sub-theory does not remain entirely isolated from the theory of the Third Space, since Alfau's exaggerated depiction of stereotypes reveals his criticism of fixed identity, just as the Third Space emphasizes the importance of difference instead of binary oppositions, especially in the area of identity.

#### **4.3 Modernism/Postmodernism**

While Alfau's work is located, chronologically speaking, within the period of Literary Modernism, the form and technique of his novels tend to align themselves better with Postmodernism. The issue with discussing these movements that are so recent, or even perhaps still persisting in the present day, is the inability to view them more distantly and objectively. Therefore, before I discuss the form of the two novels, I will discuss the characteristics of Modernism and Postmodernism with the hopes of clarifying what has become an increasingly messy transition between these two particular literary movements. Indeed, focusing on the borderlines separating Modernism and Postmodernism proves a challenging task, considering the fact that the differentiations scholars have made between the two frameworks are still tentative and incomplete. After having discussed the defining characteristics of both movements to the best of our knowledge today, I will then turn to defining the form in Alfau's two novels within this framework. There are several scholars who have claimed that Alfau's work is predominantly modernist, one of them being Mary McCarthy, who has stated that *Locos* is a "modernist detective story" (1988: 205), another being Joseph Scott, who claims that both *Locos* and *Chromos* are modernist (2005: 1), and finally Joseph Coates who has identified *Locos* as modern and *Chromos* as postmodern (1990), I will defend, as Susan Elizabeth Sweeny has already hypothesized, that Alfau's work can better be defined as a precursor to Postmodernism

(1993: 207), for although he was writing during the modernist period, the style, technique and themes of his writing better correspond to Postmodernism, and as we saw, he was not hailed as a great writer at the time as his technique was too innovative to be appreciated.

## **5. Method and Approach**

This thesis will argue that Alfau's most prodigious work is his novel *Chromos*, in both form and content, and that the themes in the novel, written in the 1940s, fit into the theory of the Third Space, which has come to gain recognition only in the 1980s. Therefore, the first chapter of the thesis will be devoted to a thorough exploration of the theory of the Third Space, since this will become the foundation for the discussion of Alfau's life and work. Having defined the Third Space, the second chapter will move directly to *Chromos*, even though it is Alfau's last published novel, because it gives the clearest example of Alfau's writing in and about the Third Space. Following this discussion, the next chapter will continue to consider Alfau's Third Space literature, but this time through the more specific lens of stereotypes and Alfau's use of such in the satire found in his novel *Locos*. The fourth chapter will discuss the form of the novels, especially emphasizing the postmodern nature of both. The fifth and final chapter will consider Alfau's short stories, *Old Tales from Spain* and his poetry, *La poesía cursi*. These two works could be considered Alfau's minor works, though they are still helpful in understanding this Third Space author, especially through the themes of nostalgia and Romanticism present in both. By organizing the thesis in this fashion, I am able to address Alfau's most representative novel first, giving it the importance it deserves, while as the thesis progresses, I will take the opportunity to add supplementary frameworks that provide complementary perspectives from which to view Alfau's work, adding to our understanding of this complex and unique author.

## **6 Welcome to the Madhouse**

Through this in-depth study into the life and works of Felipe Alfau, the goal in mind is not only to define the narratives within the theory of the Third Space, Modernism or Postmodernism, but to examine what kind of fictional world Alfau develops within the frameworks of these theories. Through careful attention to the literary techniques and themes, it becomes clear that Alfau describes a Third Space of tension and nostalgic longing, a chaotic, apathetic and yet playful postmodern existence. Therefore, the innovation of Alfau's work is not simply the way in which it incorporates literary movements that had yet to come into existence, but more how the use of these techniques communicates a unique and particular perspective on attempting to exist in a hybrid state.

## **Chapter 1: The Third Space**

Within the theory of postcolonial literature, several topics and sub-themes have been created in an attempt to explain the varied ramifications of the end of Colonialism. What began as a theory describing the literature emerging from countries that had directly overthrown the rule of the colonizer, suddenly had several other types of literature knocking at the back door.

Literature pouring out of immigration, exile, or those writing from the borderlines required that postcolonial literature either stretch and grow in order to accommodate a variety of situations, or put firm boundaries that would resist other infiltrating forms of writing. Today there are some theorists who have agreed to accept these outlying forms, while others maintain that postcolonial literature must be limited to strictly postcolonial situations. One of the theories that has gained popularity within this movement is the Third Space, because it can be applied to the traditional postcolonial situation as well as to immigration, migration, cosmopolitanism, borderlines, or exile. The theory of the Third Space seeks to explain the “in-between” nature of Postcolonialism and in doing so, breaks down the center authority in English literature, allowing each distinct voice to be discovered on an equal playing field.

### **1 The First Space**

As the name “The Third Space” implies, one must begin with an explanation of the First Space and the Second Space in order to arrive at an understanding of the Third Space. The First Space seems to clearly represent the home culture. However, what seems to be a simple beginning can also be deceptively deep and complex. Benedict Anderson, in his book *Imagined Communities* (1983), provides insight into the Third Space by deepening our understanding of the First Space, otherwise known as the nation.

## 1.1 The Nation: Characteristics of an Imagined Community

Anderson begins his theory on the creation of the nation by defining what it is and is not: “it is an imagined political community— and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” ([1983] 2006: 6). In order for a true community to exist, the members must know one another. Of course, in a nation, it is impossible for each member to meet all the other members; therefore, an authentic community does not exist. This impossibility, however, does not stop the group from experiencing community, as Anderson explains: “It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (2006: 6, emphasis in the text). In fact, this “communion” has reached such a level that men have gone to war for their unknown compatriots, have risked their lives to help one another, and have sent their money as aid to weaker members (Harris 2009: 3). Beyond that, members of the community have faith in one another’s abilities, more so than in those of members of other nations (Anderson 2006: 26-7). This sort of nationalism exists because of the “imagined communities” the members of the nation have built up in their minds.

Another key point that Anderson makes about these “imagined communities” is that one never has the conscious choice to become a member. In order to clarify this idea, Anderson compares the nation to the family (2006: 143). In the same way that it is impossible to choose one’s family, upon one’s birth, one certainly does not have the capacity or the ability to choose one’s nation. Also, it would be rare indeed to find a person that does not have a nation, just as it is surprising to find someone who does not belong to a family. Anderson makes a similar comparison by relating nationality to gender, because both are inherent and essential parts of one’s identity, practically impossible, or rather today, very difficult to change or abandon (2006:

3). While choice is not involved in nationality, this almost seems to strengthen the power of the connection, as Anderson explains:

Something of the nature of this political love can be deciphered from the ways in which languages describe its object: either in the vocabulary of kinship (motherland, *Vaterland*, *patria*) or that of home (*heimat* or *tanah air* [earth and water, the phrase for the Indonesians' native archipelago]). Both idioms denote something to which one is naturally tied. As we have seen earlier, in everything "natural" there is always something unchosen (2006: 143).

One might assume that some would hold resentment toward their countries since nationality is a choice made for them at birth, however, it seems that the opposite is true, as people come to associate nation with the "natural" aspects of life, a key part of their identity, and come to love their home nation. One's nation is therefore far more than an obligation, as Bo Strath explains: "homeland is a value-loaded as well as historically contested concept connoting belonging and identity, and thus is a concept replete with poetic and imaginative force" (2008: 26). Ideas such as "belonging" and "identity" already link the creative process to the idea of nation.

A further essential characteristic of the nation is that it is limited (Anderson 2006: 7). With the goal of understanding the Third Space, this is perhaps the most important aspect of Anderson's theory of the imagined community. After all, a nation exists because of its boundaries. Those boundaries can be physical, linguistic, and/or cultural. From this perspective, we can see that the nation defines itself in the ways in which it is differentiated from other nations. Anderson explains this concept by comparing the nation to religion:

The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind. The most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation in the way that it was possible, in certain epochs, for, say, Christians to dream of a wholly Christian planet (2006: 7, emphasis in the text).

The idea of the nation is not to share and expand in membership or its benefits outwardly (although this has been done in the past), but to increase the standard of living and protection for

those within the nation. The requirements for receiving these benefits are not solely to be located within the country's physical boundaries, but one must actually be considered a member of the nation. The act of creating an "in-group"/ "out-group" mentality creates security for those within the nation, as Roger Bromley states: "Nation-states need borders, boundaries, walls and fences for geopolitical reasons but also for the purposes of *inscription*: 'writing in' a people as pure, unified and coherent, and 'writing out' the excluded, the disparate and the incoherent" (2012: 345-346, emphasis in the text). By limiting the nation, those on the inside feel united and distinct from those outside.

One of the deepest connections that allows for the invention of a nation is that of language. Anderson explains that in early nations, language was even something sacred to the community, showing how deeply interwoven space and language are (2006: 15). Stavans argues that language is indeed connected to space when he says, "Place or locus, of course also includes language; after all, one is born into a tongue" (1996b: 155). Building on the idea of being born into a language, Anderson also agrees that language is essential to human experience:

What the eye is to the lover— that particular ordinary eye he or she is born with – language – whatever language history has made his or her mother-tongue – is to the patriot. Through that language, encountered at mother's knee and parted with only at the grave, pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures dreamed (2006: 154).

The language given at birth is innately that person's possession for the rest of his life. Clearly, the nation is united by the use of the same language, and this unity is prolonged as children are born into the same language and find their identity in their language and therefore in their nation. While language is often considered a natural part of life, it is important to consider that it is also an important political tool, as David Gunning states, "The national language works simultaneously to reflect and enforce the political boundaries of the nation" (2011: 141).

Therefore, language naturally encourages “imagined communities” because it is an irrevocable bond, but it is also a tool in the hands of the nation in forming firm and unmovable boundaries.

The final link that unites the nation is the creation of comradeship, in which exists a depth of connection between the members of a nation that continues to astound theorists. Anderson summarizes this profound feeling of loyalty among citizens as he explains:

Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings (2006: 7, emphasis in the text).

This connection somehow surpasses the idea of linguistic or cultural background. Indeed, the fraternity that emerges out of nationalism is said to be one of the strongest in existence. Nara Araújo explains this phenomenon by focusing on the emotional side of nationalism: “Nation, then, as space and time, is linked to personal, intimate and affective experiences” (1999: 99). As Vincent P. Pecora states in his work on nations, while the community may be imagined, the consequences of such a community are not imagined (2001: 2). They have been spelled out in wars, commerce, and immigration. While this nationalism is definitely an essential factor in uniting nations, it is difficult to know with certainty whether this is an a-priori characteristic of a nation, or if it is a politically manufactured one.

## **1.2 A Few Stipulations**

Anderson’s theory that the nation is in fact an “imagined community” may seem to imply that there is no real connection between its members. While it remains true that the members of a nation do not know one another, there are certain elements that members tend to share; this is why Stuart Murray states, “Nations are not fictions, though they contain elements which are clearly fictional” (1997: 14). However, in an attempt to define the non-fictional elements of the nation, a closer evaluation reveals the depth to which the political plays a role in the creation of

the nation, since even these supposedly authentic and uniting characteristics contain elements of fiction. One of these factors that seems inherent to the nation is culture. As one scholar puts it, “Nationalism is the process whereby a culture is endowed with a political roof” (Pratt 2003: 4). Therefore, culture already unites the members, and the political takes advantage of that unity. At the same time, many postcolonial scholars, including Anderson, will warn the reader that the term “culture” is dangerously ambiguous because the word itself has become the root of many generalizations and stereotypes, which can become political maneuvers for creating unity. Another of these elements in the creation of the nation that is more fact than fiction is language. However, one must keep in mind the existence of dialects or even different languages within one country. Indeed, the idea of a language-defined nation must be maintained with a sense of caution since researchers have found that the “linking of language to nation is an economic, political and social phenomenon, and not a linguistic one *per se*” (Clark 2013: 42). We can see the complications of separating “real” and “fiction” in regards to the creation of a nation since even such basic elements as culture and language are politically manipulated to create unity. Still, we cannot altogether disregard their validity. This is what Bo Strath states when he explains that “the use of a vocabulary of ‘construction’ and ‘invention’ in this context does not mean that ties of solidarity and community are created entirely independently, but rather *emerge* in a complex interaction marked by historical and cultural conditions” (2008: 21, emphasis in the text). Therefore language, culture and nation are not entirely independent, but are intricately intertwined.

A further stipulation on this theory of the nation is that while Anderson creates the concept of the “imagined community,” it is important to note that he does think that true community can exist. However, that community would look entirely different from most

communities of which individuals claim to be members. Anderson lays out the boundaries of what a community is by stating that, “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (2006: 6). The true community, according to Anderson, would look much more like a family or a circle of friends than an actual nation or even city. Homi Bhabha also builds on this concept of true community as it relates to narrative. He states that the literature emerging out of a true community will “disrupt” the narrative of the nation, creating an increasing number of disturbances until the grand narrative begins to fall apart ([1994] 2004: 330). This idea will become more important in the section on the Third Space because it is one of the reasons why postcolonial literature has broken down the linearity of the English narrative, as each individual voice is given more room to be heard.

As stated in the Introduction, scholars have since furthered Anderson’s idea of the nation as an “imagined community,” especially by examining the political schemes behind the formation of these communities. Euan Hague has already stated this weakness in Anderson’s work, in that he fails to discuss the implications of the nation and power:

Anderson’s proposal, therefore, is constrained by its narrowness. What does it matter that a nation is an imagined community? The issue must be to show the work needed to produce and maintain that imagination, how this impacts on people’s lives, and how power to enforce the national community that is imagined shapes behaviours across time and space (2004: 23).

Others have expanded upon this area that is lacking in Anderson’s theory, one of whom being Jim Mac Laughlin, who states that there is indeed more at stake in the “imagined community” than culture, as he explains: “The modern ‘imagined community’ of the nation was not just a cultural construct, which is what cultural nationalists insist. It was a scientific construct” (2000: 228). By scientific, he means the exact calculations through economic and political studies to

attain a specific goal that benefits the leaders of said country. It becomes clear that nationalism has far greater implications than what may appear at first glance: “Out of the hands of poets and admirers of local customs, however, and in the hands of political leaders, nationalism becomes a much-used strategy for the attainment and preservation of political legitimacy” (Harris 2009: 5). Even more so, these scientific manipulations can lead to grand political conquests, as Harris goes on to explain: “throughout history some of the most reprehensible politics have been justified by appeals to national interest— the prefix ‘national’ is the great justifier of human wrongs— and hence— nationalism’s bad name” (Harris 2009: 6). One need go no further than the lessons learned during the Nazi period to know the power of nationalism taken to extreme for the manipulation of the masses.

### **1.3 The Need for a Narrative**

If we accept that nations are actually “imagined communities,” it follows that a narrative is needed to explain the history of these imagined nations. In this way, separate and perhaps even unrelated events become the backbone of the nation, reconstituted as important occasions that will be celebrated and remembered by all its members. Anderson first explains that creating narratives is a common human reaction to growing and changing, as he describes that, “in the same way as we emerge out of childhood and slowly disconnect ourselves from who we were when we were children, so nations look back and in a way create a narrative about what cannot be remembered” (2006: 204). Narrative is especially useful in connecting these occurrences into a formal national history, as Bill Ashcroft explains: “One of the great illusions of narrativity is the assumption that the narrative doesn’t simply tell a story but reflects the continuity of events” (2001b 86). This helps to foment emotions and security as the citizens are provided with a coherent and conclusive view of their history.

Next, in order to further that unity, one version of the narrative must be recognized as the true narrative so as to create feelings of nationalism. In reality, the history of a nation could be told in countless different ways, because each person's perspective would be different, but in order to create a sense of unity within the nation, the national narrative is born. This is usually accomplished through the repetition of one particular version (Ahluwalia 2002: 199). In fact, the growth in nationalism during the modern period has been associated to the use of print language, since the use of print allowed ideas to travel faster and farther than before (Reicher and Hopkins 2001: 14). Within print language, fiction has come to be an especially helpful tool in creating "commonality" among citizens (Wexler 2002: 141). This concept, from the perspective of the literary world, has led to the creation of "The Great Books" or the canon of English Literature, according to Edward Said:

The modern history of literary study has been bound up with the development of cultural nationalism, whose aim was first to distinguish the national canon, then to maintain its eminence, authority, and aesthetic autonomy. Even in discussions concerning culture in general that seemed to rise above national differences in deference to a universal sphere, hierarchies and ethnic preferences (as between European and non-European) were held to (1994: 382).

In this way, literary studies has fed into the idea of national narratives, creating the principal literature that reaffirms the different historical moments lived in supposed unity. However, as Said also explains, there are pieces of literature that express perspectives from outside the confines of the national narrative and are therefore seen as threats to national unity. Said states that in order to preserve the unity that is so important to nationalism, these narratives are often incorporated into the canon when they gain popularity (1994: 4). *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) from the pre-Civil War era in the United States might be considered one such narrative, where it could be said to be written from the margins of society, but it was quickly included as part of the canon in order to preserve unity.

If the nation is an “imagined community,” these national narratives must be written in a way that encourages the members of the nation to see themselves as a part of the nation’s history. This is the way in which the historical legacy can continue on through generations: “Talk of history is crucial for the construction of an enduring ‘national’ ‘we’ which spans historical time” (Reicher and Hopkins 2001: 150). This participation that national narratives inspire also creates a way of manipulating the masses, for when controversial decisions are made by the state, rebellion is averted when the decision made by “them” transforms into a decision made by “us.” This reminds us of John F. Kennedy’s Inauguration Address in 1961 in which he proclaims, “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” Suddenly it is the community that acts instead of just a few leaders making a decision for the masses. Edward Said also makes the point that the more varied or complicated the creation of the nation is, the greater the chance for rebellion or disunity. Therefore, these complex nations, in order to survive, must place more emphasis on the narrative, so as to create more unity, as in the example of the United States:

Paradoxically, the United States, as an immigrant society composed of many cultures, has a public discourse more policed, more anxious to depict the country as free from taint, more unified around one iron-clad major narrative of innocent triumph. This effort to keep things simple and good disaffiliates the country from its relationship with other societies and peoples, thereby reinforcing its remoteness and insularity (1994: 381).

As a result, the stronger the emphasis on the nation, the more that nation isolates itself from others on the basis that it is special, different or even superior. Furthermore, this “transmission of culture” through narrative not only supports the existence of the nation, but even more so “its spatial, social and political primacy” (Schönpflug 2009: 9) (Pitt 2010: 8). Hence the citizens of the nation become increasingly convinced of their superiority, which will create a resistance against “the Other.”

## **2 The Second Space: Defining “the Other”**

As previously stated when describing the concept of nation, a nation is not an open community accepting anyone as a member. A nation is separated from other nations by boundaries, not only physical borders but deeper limits that are perhaps not as easily recognized. This is why immigrants, when physically entering another country are still not members of that new community. Even upon receiving citizenship, the formal sign of belonging to a nation, a separation can still exist. Boundaries such as language are so deep, that no matter how advanced the level of communication an immigrant may acquire, a slight accent could keep him outside of the new nation’s cultural boundaries. Culture as well springs up in surprising situations, driving outsiders well beyond the boundaries once again. In some nations, these boundaries can reach a sort of extremism where the in-group and out-group are definitively and firmly established:

In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates “us” from “them”, almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we can see in recent “returns” to culture and tradition. These “returns” accompany rigorous codes of intellectual and moral behaviour that are opposed to the permissiveness associated with such relatively liberal philosophies as multiculturalism and hybridity. (Said 1994: xiv)

The creation of this strong nationalism leaves all others on the outside both looking in and being observed by those inside. Indeed, these “borders” separating the nation from “the Other” are socially constructed, created and sustained for the benefit of those in power (Caruso 2013: 5).

The more these “Others,” who cannot form part of the in-group, are observed, the more the nation begins to identify itself as opposed to the outsiders. As Homi Bhabha states, one’s identity is constantly caught up in the identity of others: “It is constituted through the locus of the Other which suggests both that the object of identification is never pure or holistic but always constituted in a process of substitution, displacement or projection” (2004: 233). Some would even go so far as to state that identity is in fact dependent on a representation of “the Other,” as

Samuel P. Huntington explains: “To define themselves, people need an other” (2004: 24). This manner of forming identity not only changes the way of seeing oneself, but as a logical consequence changes the way in which one sees others. This distancing between the nation and “the Other” can become so implanted in the culture that it starts to form part of the very narrative of the nation itself (Brinker-Gabler and Smith 1997: 7). In the “othering” of groups within a nation, the groups often lose their individual characteristics until they are lumped together under a single identity, whether it is accurate or not (Wodak 2008: 57). Difference, therefore, moves quickly from an individual recognition of such, to being attributed to a cultural level of difference, and finally becoming a complete division and opposition of the two groups.

The more the division between the nation and “the Other” takes hold, a binary opposition forms between the two groups, attributing specific and opposite qualities to the two sides. One side becomes good, moral and friendly, while the other becomes bad, immoral and the enemy. As the binary opposition gains momentum, it becomes a form of public knowledge and soon the polarization is complete and finalized (Ahmed 2008: 104). This concept is usually explained within a colonial context:

In order to maintain authority over the Other in a colonial situation, imperial discourse strives to delineate the Other as radically different from the self, yet at the same time it must maintain sufficient identity with the Other to valorize control over it. The Other can, of course, only be constructed out of the archive of “the self”, yet the self must also articulate the Other as inescapably different (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin [1989] 2002: 102).

This expresses the alienation that occurs within a colonial situation as a way of preserving identity. However, these are not simply two opposing groups, as both are assigned a value by society, the first always given priority over the second (Theo and Quayson 2002: xii). Therefore, the “Other” cannot operate on equal ground, since it is always placed in a subservient position.

Although one would assume that this sort of power relationship would dissolve with the end of Colonialism, a sense of alienation has also been felt within postcolonial situations, in which apparently this polarization continues to exist:

Although this is pragmatically demonstrable from a wide range of texts, it is difficult to account for by theories which see this social and linguistic alienation as resulting only from overtly oppressive forms of colonization such as slavery or conquest. An adequate account of this practice must go beyond the usual categories of social alienation such as master/slave; free/bonded; ruler/ruled, however important and widespread these may be in post-colonial cultures. After all, why should the free settler, formally unconstrained, and theoretically free to continue in the possession and practice of “Englishness”, also show clear signs of alienation even within the first generation of settlement, and manifest a tendency to seek an alternative, differentiated identity? (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2002: 9).

The fact that this sort of alienation still occurs even without the “oppression” of a colonial environment, shows that the very concept of “Other” runs deeper than political rule. Bill Ashcroft speaks about what drives this “othering” as he explains: “The desire to speak *for, of or even about* others is always shadowed— and perhaps even overdetermined— by a secretly or latently authoritarian aspiration” (2001a: 146, emphasis in the text). Therefore, “othering” is not necessarily bound to the constraints of colonial rule. The creation of “the Other” can become so innate within the nation that both the “natives” and “the Other” subconsciously continue to accept the roles assigned to them by society (JanMohamed 1990: 104,115). In fact, as the situation progresses to future generations, conflict may arise as the nation continues to see the immigrants as “the Other” while “the Other” no longer feels like an outsider.

This alienation is also present within the realm of language, creating a tension between the native language and the language of “the Other.” Among those labeled “the Other,” the mother tongue continues to be a unifying factor for those who speak the same language. This was true in Ilan Stavans’ case when moving to New York City, as he felt a deep desire to preserve his native language as a part of his identity (1996b: 19). Beyond this pull to remain true to one’s mother tongue, most immigrants recognize quickly that to gain access to the new

culture, they will need to acquire the new language in order to communicate. In *The Empire Writes Back*, this necessity to learn a new language is described as, “To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. The Antilles Negro who wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that language is” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2002: 25). The idea of language as a tool used to assimilate into a new culture is a helpful image as long as one keeps in mind how essential language is to the nation, so it is not just one of many cultural tools, it is *the* cultural tool. However, as most immigrants soon discover, even their most earnest attempts to learn this new language often fall short in the eyes of the natives due to an inevitable lingering accent, grammatical errors, or word usage. Even more so, the conscientiously aware “Other” will wonder what this new language means in the position of “the Other” in the new nation:

What could a person who was not born speaking one of the privileged languages and who was not educated in privileged institutions do? Either accept his or her inferiority or make an effort to demonstrate that he or she was a human being equal to those who placed him or her as second class. That is, two of the choices are to accept the humiliation of being inferior to those who decided that you are inferior, or to assimilate. And to assimilate means that you accept your inferiority and resign yourself to play the game that is not yours but that has been imposed upon you. (Mignolo 2011: 275)

This reminds the reader of the famous statement that “the Sub-altern cannot speak” originally stated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, meaning not that the subaltern lacks a voice, but that the voice available to the subaltern is subjected to either inferiority or obscurity (1995: 28).

The difficulties of language for “the Other” multiply when “the Other” takes on the task of writing literature. By theorizing “the Other,” one can almost forget the resistance or the discord that often emerge from this situation: “Given such a historically sustained negation of minority voices, we must realize that minority discourse is, in the first instance, the product of damage— damage more or less systematically inflicted on cultures produced as minorities by the dominant culture” (JanMohamed and Lloyd 1990: 4). As a result of these strong feelings

associated with their own alienation, most authors who have written from the perspective of “the Other” have experienced an inability to feel comfortable with their choices of language for writing. Choosing the new language feels as if they are agreeing with the system of “otherness” to which this language has subjected them. Continuing to write in the old language is agreeing to their own alienation. There seems to be no in-between:

The relation between the people and the land is new, as is that between the imported language and the land. But the language itself already carries many associations with European experience and so can never be “innocent” in practice. Concomitantly, there is a perception that this new experience, if couched in the terms of the old, is somehow “falsified” –rendered inauthentic– at the same time as its value, judged within the Old World terms, is considered inferior (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2002: 134).

To choose either language is, in a way, to agree with their position as “the Other,” leaving no space for originality or difference. This sort of dilemma is something that those writing from the Third Space will try to resolve creatively.

A final aspect to consider about “the Other” is the fear felt toward “the Other” by the members of the nation. Ilan Stavans, writing from his own experience, explains that “I knew very well my way around any alien nation. I mistrusted the Other; and I was equally mistrusted as the Other” (1996b: 238). This gives an interesting twist to the idea of “the Other,” in that it is reciprocal. Just as the “native” distances himself from “the intruder”, so “the intruder” at the same time is creating an “Other” out of the new nation and its citizens. Beyond that, the further the two sides pull apart, the more of a lack of understanding there is between them. “The Other” becomes an easy political solution to the nation’s problems: “‘Citizens’ create the ‘foreigner within’ as a scapegoat for disaffection, instability, poverty— all that is wrong with the imagined community” (Brinker-Gabler and Smith 1997: 8). The surprising factor that theorists have found is that this has not improved as the world moves from the colonial to the postcolonial, instead, certain reactions to events as of late have prolonged and even encouraged it:

This is as true in the new post-colonial societies as it is in the West generally and the United States particularly. Thus to oppose the abnormality and extremism embedded in terrorism and fundamentalism— my example has only a small degree of parody— is also to uphold the moderation, rationality, executive centrality of a vaguely designated “Western” (or otherwise local and patriotically assumed) ethos. The irony is that far from endowing the Western ethos with confidence and secure “normality” we associate with privilege and rectitude, this dynamic imbues “us” with a righteous anger and defensiveness in which “others” are finally seen as enemies, bent on destroying our civilization and way of life (Said 1994: 376).

The stereotypes, polarization and fear culminate in the creation of not just the opposite, but the enemy. When the nation is in a moment of crisis, the immigrant, “the Other,” is often “demonized” as the nation seeks to preserve unity (Mullaney 2010: 30). Even further, this so-called enemy is not an external threat, but a threat from within, creating a vicious circle of distrust, generalizations and even hate.

### **3 The Third Space**

#### **3.1 Defining “Space”**

Having discussed the First Space, being the nation, and the Second Space, being “the Other”, we finally arrive at the idea of the Third Space. Logically, this space is dedicated to those who find themselves, or perhaps desire to find themselves, between the two original spaces. While with the concepts of “the nation” and “the Other,” the idea of space has seemed to be quite logically a physical space, when examining the Third Space it becomes more relevant to discuss what is meant by the word “space” and whether it is meant to be physical or psychological. The answer to this question is a puzzling “both.” As further exploration of this topic will explain, there are some theorists for whom the Third Space is purely psychological, while others have experienced it as a physical reality, and even more have found it to be a mix of both.

Anderson’s answer to the question of “what is space” is that purely objective “space” does not exist, but that in fact all space is relationally charged (2006: 204). This answer emerges from the foundation of the Heisenberg Principle: that everything one experiences in this world is

seen through perspective, therefore no one can have access to a purely objective reality.

Theorists then take this truth and apply it to the concept of the Third Space, since this hybrid space is created from particular perspectives (Hubbard, Kitchin and Valentine 2004: 5). In this way, the Third Space remains open to all realms of experience, be it mental, physical, or emotional:

In short, we face as a nation the deep, profoundly perturbed and perturbing question of our relationship to others— other cultures, states, histories, experiences, traditions, peoples, and destinies. There is no Archimedean point beyond the question from which to answer it; there is no vantage outside the actuality of relationships among cultures, among unequal imperial and non-imperial powers, among us and others; no one has the epistemological privilege of somehow judging, evaluating, and interpreting the world free from the encumbering interests and engagements of the ongoing relationships themselves. We are, so to speak, *of* the connections, not outside and beyond them. (Said 1994: 65, emphasis in the text)

Said reaffirms the idea of relational space by explaining that one can speak into the connections between these cultures, but it would be impossible to somehow obtain an objective statement about them because they are always viewed through experience. From yet another perspective, in *The Empire Writes Back*, both physical and emotional space are included in the creation of the Third Space through the example of diaspora: “Diaspora does not simply refer to geographical dispersal but also to the vexed questions of identity, memory and home which such displacement produces” (Ashcroft, Griffins, Tiffin 2002: 217-8). The Third Space grows to encompass the feelings associated with both the place left behind and the new place to be encountered. Space also takes on a new and bolder meaning when related to politics, as basic material space can be used to build meaning and movements:

Places are imbued with meaning as well as power, which is also of critical importance in contentious politics. Social movements often seek to strategically manipulate, subvert and resignify places that symbolize priorities and imaginaries they are contesting; to defend places that stand for their priorities and imaginaries; and to produce new spaces where such visions can be practiced, within that place and beyond (Leitner, Sheppard and Sziarto 2008: 162).

This fits well within the idea of the Third Space since some spaces clearly represent the nation, others represent “the Other” and yet others are located in a sort of in-between, a space that waits for a new vision.

Also, as already presented in the Introduction, Edward Soja’s work on “Thirdspace” must also be addressed when discussing Bhabha’s concept of the Third Space. Soja, born in the Bronx in 1940, was growing up in New York as Alfau was writing *Chromos* there. Drawing upon Henri Lefebvre’s work on spatiality, rather than history or temporality, as the main focus of capitalist development, he refined such thinking into the notion of a “trialectics of being,” that is, that an ontology of being can only be understood through the interdynamics of three concepts: spatiality, historicity and sociality. Later, he took most of his own material not from New York, but from Los Angeles, and indeed, his work comes a little late to be applied to Alfau, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* coming out in 1996. But whether we use Bhabha’s term Third Space or Soja’s Thirdspace, we recognize how right they are about the complex connotations of the space in which we live:

*Everything* comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and unconsciousness, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history (Soja 1996: 56-7 emphasis in the text).

### **3.2 Physical Third Spaces**

While space is definitely changed by the emotions associated with it, there are certain physical locations that have become literal representations of the Third Space. Actual places play an important role in the formation of identities, as Sallie Westwood explains: “Place [...] offers people a cartography of belonging” (2000: 29). The Third Space, however, is not coterminous to a ghetto, for a ghetto is a participation in the polarization of the new culture. The separation is too extreme, as Salman Rushdie explains:

Of all the many elephant traps lying ahead of us, the largest and most dangerous pitfall would be the adoption of a ghetto mentality. To forget that there is a world beyond the community to which we belong, to confine ourselves within narrowly defined cultural frontiers, would be, I believe, to go voluntarily into that form of internal exile which in South Africa is called the “homeland” (2010: 19).

To achieve a true Third Space would be to arrive at the in-between, never identifying oneself entirely with either culture, but testing the boundaries between the two. Ilan Stavans in his book, *The Hispanic Condition*, gives the example of Hispanics in New York City finding an in-between that is neither entirely American nor entirely Hispanic. To hear him describe the ambience is to gain a sense of the negotiation of cultures:

Faythe Turner has pointed out that while government-sponsored centers tried to attend to the community’s cultural needs, in the late 1970s intellectuals and artists found their own center in the Nuyorican Poets Café. Created by Algarín, an outgrowth of informal meetings held in his Lower East Side apartment where poets and prose writers read their work, the Nuyorican Poets Café set up in an empty storefront across the street. Audiences from middle- and working-class backgrounds showed up, turning the place into a hangout for blacks, Germans, Japanese, and Irish, as well as Puerto Ricans. They eventually branched out to include a radio station (1996b: 45).

These writers embody the Third Space because they have found a way to physically dwell in the in-between in New York City. They have not allowed themselves to be caught up in the ghetto mentality, but have allowed themselves to navigate and find a niche between the new culture and the old. This niche in itself may be multicultural, as in this case, as different “Others” bond together.

### **3.3 Psychological Third Spaces**

While some examples of the Third Space are physical locations, there are other examples in which the Third Space is entirely a psychological place. Occasionally this psychological place comes about because of the inability to reach an actual physical space, as sometimes these places no longer exist: “Home is also the imagined location that can be more readily fixed in a mental landscape than in actual geography” (George 1996: 11). Salman Rushdie, one such author that

finds himself living out a form of the Third Space, would agree with this idea of an “imagined location,” for, as he describes it: “I felt as if I were being claimed, or informed that the facts of my faraway life were illusions, and that this continuity was the reality” (2010: 9). His space is not an actual neighborhood or location; instead it is a space which only he can inhabit in his mind. The “continuity” he refers to is that state of in-between which is always in flux. While Ilan Stavans earlier offered an example of a physical Third Space, he also holds the idea that the Third Space is much deeper and more abstract than a simple borderline between two opposing cultures:

How then to understand the hyphen, the encounter between Anglos and Hispanics north of the Rio Grande, the mix between George Washington and Simón Bolívar? To what extent is the battle between two conflicting worldviews inside the Latino heart, one obsessed with immediate satisfaction and success, the other traumatized by a painful, unresolved past evident in our art and letters? (1996b: 208).

Stavans uses a more aggressive rhetoric when addressing the Third Space, where it is not simply a space for negotiating between the two cultures but it is more of a “battleground” where the two sides pull at the person trapped in the middle, not allowing him to rest in a new identity.

### **3.4 The Role of Language in Creating Space**

Another qualifier placed upon the idea of space is that it is constructed through language. A single place can exist and mean different things to different people until someone decides to define it through words. In that moment, a determined space is created. When constructing the Third Space, the use of language is not so simple since these Third Space inhabitants still have to struggle to find an appropriate and authentic voice (Ashcroft Griffiths and Tiffin 2002: 9).

However, the writing itself becomes the creation of the hybridized space: “Such writing is, in effect, an ethnography of the writer’s own culture. The post-colonial writer, whose gaze is turned in two directions, stands already in that position which will come to be occupied by an interpretation, for he/she is not the object of an interpretation, but the first interpreter” (Ashcroft,

Griffiths, Tiffin 2002: 60). Once again, the writer does not own the objective truth as to what the Third Space is, but the writer is allowed to interpret the space for himself.

These writers, therefore, must face a difficult decision of choosing a language in which to write. In the previous section on “the Other,” I discussed how both the native language and the new language are inadequate in expressing the plight of “the Other,” since both relegate the writer to alienation. For those attempting to inhabit a Third Space, this issue is exacerbated since choosing a language contradicts their search for an in-between as a way out of this alienation. An example of this tension can be found in many writers’ comments on their continuing uncomfortable relationship with English. Ilan Stavans explains his own hesitant relationship with English in his writing:

Of course it took me no time to recognize that standard English was the lingua franca of the middle and upper classes, but its domain was in question in the lower strata of the population. In that segment, I wasn’t able to recognize the English I expected to hear: monolithic, homogenous, single-minded. Instead, I constantly awakened to a polyphonic reality (2003: 4).

Clearly, English represents ties to a colonial scheme and some authors feel the irony of using English for resistance writing, as if they are continuing the authority of the colonizer when writing in English (Ahmed 2008: 80). However, it is also true that of all Third Space writers, those receiving recognition are in fact those writing in English (Lazarus 2011: 26). This reluctant relationship with English reveals the need for a third language to reflect the Third Space. This is what M.M. Bakhtin expresses when explaining the idea of needing to locate oneself amidst several languages:

Consciousness finds itself inevitably facing the necessity of *having to choose a language*. With each literary-verbal performance, consciousness must actively orient itself amidst heteroglossia, it must move in and occupy a position within it, it chooses, in other words, a “language” (1981: 295, emphasis in the text).

As Bakhtin explains, the Third Space proposes the existence of more than one way to write within a language, allowing for a third language to exist.

Therefore, it is up to these occupants of the Third Space to find a language in-between in order to write their experiences. Frequently, this comes from a mixing of the two languages into a language that better reflects who they are. Stavans explains his dilemma as an occupant of the Third Space, being a Hispanic in New York, through his wondering: “Spanish or English: Which is the true Latino mother tongue? They both are, plus a third option: Spanglish— a hybrid. We inhabit a linguistic abyss: between two mentalities and lost in translation” (1996b: 154).

Deciding not to choose either one of the languages allows the writer to express his situation exactly how he experiences it, in a mix of the two. Rushdie also takes a similar approach to his use of English as a language for writing:

One of the changes has to do with attitudes towards the use of English. Many have referred to the argument about the appropriateness of this language to Indian themes. And I hope all of us share the view that we can't simply use the language in the way the British did; that it needs remaking for our own purposes. Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free (2010: 17).

Rushdie admits the fact that he will continue to use English as his language for writing, but he does so with a certain hesitation. He insists that the language must change in order to reflect the Third Space; it cannot be “used” in the same way. Interestingly, Rushdie also speaks of conquering the language as a reflection of conquering other struggles of the Third Space. For those who have had to form their identity from nothing, each step of the way is something to fight through, and Rushdie's point is that the writing should reflect this struggle.

While these are two experiences from specific authors who have written from the Third Space, the theorists who write about language in the Third Space also support this new way of looking at language. English becomes a raw material ready to be manipulated into whatever is useful for the author as he expresses his perspective. This imagining creates world Englishes, or

englishes, that are not necessarily “broken” or filled with “errors,” but are new forms of using the language that reflect the writing of a Third Space inhabitant. As Chris Abani states, “There is, however, an incredible freedom in this, the sudden understanding that your language is fluid, must be, and that as a writer it is your duty to make this language even more plastic” (2011: 120). This statement reflects a new way of envisioning language: instead of a set of bound regulations and structures it becomes a mere building block adaptable to the desires and motives of the builder. Patricia Noxolo and Marika Preziuso share in this new way of looking at language when they claim, “Language is created in and through materiality, and often bound up with the performance and reinforcement of material divisions, but, largely because of this, language also contains the resources for negotiation of meaning across those same material divides” (2012: 133). Therefore, by creating hybrids through the languages available to Third Space writers, creativity and unique perspectives can be gained.

This emotional state of living in the Third Space allows for a sort of self-examination that can lead to profound reflective writing. In a way, inhabiting the Third Space is a stripping away of the old culture and the strong ties of identity connected to that culture. There is also the comparative to the new culture and the subsequent identity adjustments that take place. This point of frustration produces the creative energy that spurs Third Space occupants on to write about their experiences. Salman Rushdie comments on this same principle: “the migrant intellect roots itself in itself, in its own capacity for imagining and reimagining the world” (2010: 280). This “rooting itself in itself” is that same shift in identity that rejects both the old and the new and takes its foundation from an individualized experience, leaving room for new perceptions about the world. However, while Rushdie paints this “reimagining” in an optimistic light, an “inbetweenness” is sometimes not available in such a “liberal or productive” space,

hence the existence of resistance literature emerging from some Third Space writers (Arrowsmith 1999: 61).

#### **4 Those Occupying the Third Space**

While in previous sections the inhabitants of the Third Space have been mentioned, it remains important to specify which groups of people might be included in the Third Space and why.

Before considering the specific groups associated with the Third Space, it must be pointed out that a few authors have ventured to describe the group as a whole, summing up in broader terms their defining characteristics. Some have portrayed the group as encompassing all minorities (Eade 1997: 1). Ilan Stavans identifies the group with a more poetical perspective by claiming that “We’re unstable: *frágiles de espíritu*. We simultaneously incorporate clarity and confusion, unity and multiplicity” (1996b: 108). The useful part of looking at the group as a whole, as Stavans has done, is to notice that while the Third Space is mainly composed of three different groups, many individual and unique cases can belong in this group, which Edward Said also refers to when he states:

There are highly significant *deformations* within the new communities and states that now exist alongside and partially within the world-English group dominated by the United States, a group that includes the heterogeneous voices, various languages, hybrid forms that give Anglophonic writing its distinctive and still problematic identity (1994: 371, emphasis in the text).

The strongest and most accentuated word that Said uses is the word “deformations,” first because of the negative connotation of it, but also because it opens doors to whoever might not fit into the supposed mainstream voice of the nation.

##### **4.1 Immigrants**

One of the prominent groups that occupies the Third Space is immigrants either living in a different country or migrants who are constantly on the move. Even though the immigrant has chosen to abandon the old country and move to a new country, he still experiences the effects of

his decision perhaps more deeply than expected, especially in the area of identity. In a way, the immigrant paves his own road as he pioneers the differences between the new and old cultures.

Salman Rushdie explains this process by equating it to birth:

The notion of migration as a form of rebirth is one whose truths many migrants will recognize. Instantly recognizable, too, and often very moving, is the sense of a writer feeling obliged to bring his new world into being by an act of pure will, the sense that if the world is not described into existence in the most minute detail, then it won't be there. The immigrant must invent the earth beneath his feet (2010: 149).

Again, one can see how this process lends itself to writing, as Rushdie describes the immigrant writing his very own existence. Referencing more specifically the case of the migrant, who is constantly on the move and thereby continually shifting through different roles and spaces, this group is of special interest within the Third Space since they are often not just wrestling with the old and new spaces, but countless opposing spaces, making the creation of identity all the more fluid and unpredictable.

#### **4.2 Exiles**

Another separate group included in the Third Space is the exiled. While exiles have the same experience as immigrants of leaving one country for another, the emotions that accompany that voyage are vastly different from those of the immigrant. While both experience feelings of nostalgia when reflecting on their homes, the emotions felt by the exile are generally expressed more deeply in terms of longing, loss, and rejection. Edward Said speaks about this loss felt specifically by those who are exiles:

Exile is predicated on the existence of, love for, and a real bond with one's native place; the universal truth of exile is not that one has lost that love or home, but that inherent in each is an unexpected, unwelcome loss. Regard experiences then *as if* they were about to disappear: what is it about them that anchors or roots them in reality? What would you save of them, what would you give up, what would you recover? To answer such questions you must have the independence and detachment of someone whose homeland is "sweet", but whose actual condition makes it impossible to recapture that sweetness, and even less possible to derive satisfaction from substitutes furnished by illusion or dogma, whether deriving from pride in one's heritage or from certainty about who "we" are (1994: 407, emphasis in the text).

For the exiled, therefore, this exaggerated sense of nostalgia exists because of what has been taken away permanently and simply cannot be regained. There is also an added sense of violence when the occupant of the Third Space is writing from exile, if for no other reason than the very forceful action of removing that person from their home. Homi Bhabha looks at the violent nature of certain Third Space situations when he states: “Increasingly, the issue of cultural difference emerges at points of social crises, and the questions of identity that it raises are agonistic” (2004: 254). This form of occupying the Third Space is not so much of an exploration of that space and its significance, but a pushing and pulling of a gravitational center. Roger Bromley uses the word “unsettler” when referring to refugees, which brings to light the way in which exile stirs up questions about identity and borders in general, offering a unique perspective within the Third Space (2012: 345). As a result of this struggle, one can expect the literature emerging out of a position of exile to be more frequently marked by themes of resistance.

### **4.3 Borderlines**

The third category is less concretely defined than the previous two as it relates to those who are marginalized in society for a variety of reasons. Second generation immigrants, refugees, minorities that are unaccepted by society at large, those who have physical or mental disabilities or even those who have lost their homes could be included. Many of the researchers in the area of the Third Space have made reference to this third and purposefully ambiguous group. Stavans refers to these borderlines as “a never-never land near the rim and ragged edge we call frontier, an uncertain, indeterminate, adjacent area that everybody can recognize and that, more than ever before, many call our home— has been adapted, reformulated, and reconsidered” (1996b: 14). The reference to never-never land is of particular interest since the borders that define this group

could emerge from countless unique situations, not necessarily at the border separating two countries. Salman Rushdie also approaches the idea that the Third Space does not only relate to those beginning a life in a new country:

Migration across national frontiers is by no means the only form of the phenomenon. In many ways, given the international and increasingly homogeneous nature of metropolitan culture, the journey from, for example, rural America to New York City is a more extreme act of migration than a move from, say, Bombay (2010: 278).

This search for identity among the displaced can also be found as members of a supposedly homogenous nation make dramatic changes in their location or even in their lifestyle. Borders, therefore, can exist both at the edges of a nation and even in the very center of a metropolis (Chekuri and Muppidi 2003: 56). Willy Maley echoes this thought when he states: “Sometimes crossing a border between two countries can present fewer difficulties than crossing a border within a country, an ‘internal border’” (1999: 32). Including these groups in the literature of the Third Space allows for the breakdown of the “imagined community” of the nation as the narratives demonstrate that a community formed out of shared experience does not exist for all its inhabitants.

## **5 Characteristics of Literature Written from the Third Space**

When considering the characteristics of literature from the Third Space, it is important to first recognize that within the literature there is a great variety of styles and techniques used. As Neil Lazarus explains, this opens up a new criterion for evaluating literature, being:

[T]he writer’s ability to show us what it feels like to live on a given ground— to show us how a certain socio-natural order is encountered, experienced, lived. The writer’s success or failure in this respect is not solely a function of “authenticity” at the level of content, but also of imagination, dexterity, and telling judgment in the selection and manipulation of the formal resources of fiction (2011: 142).

Therefore, while the following characteristics tend to be representative of literature from the Third Space, this by no means guarantees that all literature will contain all of these

characteristics, nor should it, as each author aims to be original in his writing. Some writers tend toward a more political reaction while others dwell more on the psychological aspect of identity.

### **5.1 Political**

One of the characteristics marking the literature from the Third Space is a political emphasis within the text. Since this literature is closely related to Postcolonialism, some authors use the concept of the Third Space in their politically-driven novels, stories, poems and plays that fight for the breaking down of the binary oppositions that existed in the colonial period. The Third Space is a useful strategy in this political aspect of postcolonial literature because it shows individual perspectives of hybridity. As Bhabha explains:

Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. For the colonial hybrid is the articulation of the ambivalent space where the rite of power is enacted on the site of desire, making its objects at once disciplinary and disseminatory— or, in my mixed metaphor, a negative transparency (2004: 160).

By creating narratives that are full of hybridity, these authors can turn this patronizing “gaze” back in the direction of the colonizer, upsetting the dominance that once favored the colonial scheme. Authors who take this political stance tend to feel strongly about their chosen style of writing, an example of which being Derek Walcott, who states, “Once the New World black had tried to prove he was as good as his master, when he should have proven not his equality but his difference. It was this stance that could command attention without pleading for respect” (1998: 9). This use of difference to prove a political point is common in resistance literature. Indeed, some of these more political scholars even claim that to speak only of the Third Space without mentioning the politics that created the need for it is to eliminate the oppressor and the oppressed from literature, in other words, to avoid the issue entirely (González and Fernandez 2003: 165). As is evident in these examples, those who write from a political perspective within the Third

Space take on the role of a passionate protestor that other authors who focus more on the topics of identity and belonging tend to lack.

While this is one approach many authors take when writing about the Third Space, Bhabha is still wary of the long-term effects of such a strategy, and he insists on the importance of “differences” and not returning to another “hierarchical or binary structure,” because to do so would reinstate the same system that these authors are trying to overthrow, only with the roles reversed (2004: 50). Instead, the goal is to create a new sort of political arena with a levelled playing field open to all perspectives. Other authors, such as David Theo and Ato Quayson, also express concern for this politically-driven literature:

However, always embedded in the destabilization of binaries is a particular assumption that provides the enabling pre-text of the destabilizing procedures in the first place. This pre-text is the idea that postcolonial criticism is itself an ethical enterprise, pressing its claims in ways that other theories such as those of postmodernism and poststructuralism do not (2002: xii).

Again, there is an ethical element to politically-driven texts that is absent or ambiguous in other movements in literature. It seems, in a way, still caught up in the colonial movement of revenge and righting wrongs. Where Postcolonialism and Postmodernism overlap in a text, which is very frequent, Postmodernism’s qualms about ethics tend to be silenced. The turn to ethics toward the end of the twentieth century also helped to overcome qualms about the presence of politics in literature.

A further concern about Third Space literature is that through this political approach authors may soon find themselves limited to a specific tone or literary style and therefore lose some of the creativity of true free expression. One such hybrid author, Salman Rushdie, discusses the fact that while Third Space literature is capable of changing the way history is told, it does not necessarily need to be politically driven:

I must make one thing plain: I am not saying that all literature must now be of this protesting, noisy type. Perish the thought; now that we are babies fresh from the womb, we must find it

possible to laugh and wonder as well as rage and weep. I have no wish to nail myself, let alone anyone else, to the tree of political literature for the rest of my writing life (2010: 100).

There is a sort of purist drive behind this comment: that the literature must continue to be a form of representing one's experience, and not solely a form of drawing attention to the marginalized. Interestingly, Edward Said's comment on this same idea of political writing shows a similar sentiment:

Second is the idea that resistance, far from being merely a reaction to imperialism, is an alternative way of conceiving human history. It is particularly important to see how much this alternative reconception is based on breaking down the barriers between cultures. Certainly, as the title of a fascinating book has it, *writing back* to the metropolitan cultures, disrupting the European narratives of the Orient and Africa, replacing them with either a more playful or a more powerful new narrative style is a major component in the process (1994: 260, emphasis in the text).

Said's comment perhaps is a more forceful stance as he uses the word "resistance" to refer to these Third Space writers. He still, however, allows for a variety of styles when he offers the choice between playful or powerful styles. The key is the very fact that these Third Space inhabitants are writing from their own original perspective, therefore the "how" can be as creative as they can imagine since the writing in itself is the catalyst.

In recent work in Postcolonialism, writing without a political aim has become a heated topic due to comments made by Fredric Jameson about the necessarily political nature of literature emerging from the Third World. Aijaz Ahmed's response, the first of many scholars to refute Jameson's approach, explains the importance of allowing literature from the Third World, and from the Third Space for that matter, to be apolitical. He states, "To say that all Third World texts are necessarily this or that is to say, in effect, that any text originating within that social space which is *not* this or that is not a 'true' narrative" (2008: 105, emphasis in the text). The emphasis is on freeing "the Other" from any expectations from the colonizer. Ahmed has since

been echoed by countless other scholars agreeing that this categorizing of literature created in the Third World is a return to a binary opposition. One such scholar, Julie McGonegal, claims that:

Literary critics positioned in the universities of the First World have been unrelenting in their insistence that all Third World texts are fundamentally preoccupied with the nation, and that their primary function, in turn, is to solicit, judge and generally critique what is usually called, for lack of a better word, “nationalism” (2005: 259).

Through the freedom of not necessarily needing to comment on “the nation,” Third Space authors go another step further in releasing themselves from a colonial grasp.

## **5.2 Versions and Memory**

Another characteristic of the literature emerging from the Third Space is the acceptance of the fact that each story could be told through a countless number of perspectives, leading to different versions of the same story. The unique part of the Third Space is that the writers recognize and emphasize the very fact that their perspective is limited (Dubow 2000: 92). Ilan Stavans, as an example, recounts his own background in his book *The Hispanic Condition: Reflections on Culture and Identity in America*, and then subsequently states: “So my view is neither disinterested nor free of prejudice” (1996b: 18). This is the focus of the Third Space: that by recognizing one’s own limitations, these authors expose the limits of the mainstream authors’ and historians’ perspectives as well. Even more so, some Third Space writers choose to exaggerate certain aspects in the telling of these “versions” through the narrator to accentuate the limits of perspective. Salmon Rushdie and many other authors who have played with the authority of the narrator would fit into this category. Finally, the versions exist because of a sort of search to find an appropriate “voice” (2010: 75). Authors must establish their own unique style and technique that separates themselves from both the new and the old cultures. Theorists have used a variety of verbs to represent this process, be it “experimenting” by Salmon Rushdie

or “negotiating” by Homi Bhabha, or even “dreaming” by Ilan Stavans (2010: 75) (2004: 284) (1996b: 245), each one referring to a form of creating or re-forming.

One additional reason for the emphasis on different versions in Third Space literature is the importance of memory. Since these authors are searching for their own identity, many focus on the recollection of past events. They seem to agree that these memories cannot be expected to be accurate since the mind can alter them as time passes (Baucom 1999: 5). Stavans relates his own experience in the changing of memories: “Where is Mexico, *my* Mexico, today? In the map of my mind, a fifth column in your becoming an American. I often travel the fragile line between memory and the past. Where do facts end and my deformed recollections of incidents begin?” (1996b: 244, emphasis in the text). As Stavans expresses it, eventually these memories that should be shared with fellow expatriates are so embedded in the individual perspective and experiences that in the end, the only person he can share them with is himself. This inability to bridge the gap between present and past through memory is sometimes portrayed through nostalgia, reliving what cannot be regained (Boisen 2010: 63). Rushdie also speaks of his frustration at the lack of ability to speak the whole truth about any of his experiences:

I was constantly plagued by this problem, until I felt obliged to face it in the text, to make clear that (in spite of my original and I suppose somewhat Proustian ambition to unlock the gates of lost time so that the past reappeared as it actually had been, unaffected by the distortions of memory) what I was actually doing was a novel of memory and about memory, so that my India was just that: “my” India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions (2010: 10).

This coming to terms with the limitations of memory allows for the plurality of versions that Postcolonialism bases itself on, no longer trusting the one authoritative version but listening to the multitudes as they remember.

Memory is also important on a larger scale in that it can propagate an individual perspective on events that have been nationalized. As previously stated, the purpose of a

national narrative is to create one version of the past. Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir relates these concepts of memory and national narrative by stating,

Remembering is not only a personal matter necessary for our sense of identity and mental well-being, it is also a very public matter, formed by social situations and often politically contentious. Our lives are intricately and sometimes drastically linked to and/or inseparable from what happens in the society we live in (2003: 45).

By individuals recalling “national” history through an individual lens, the seemingly objective history reveals its limitations, breaking down the national narrative. This also alludes to the close relationship between “remembering” and “representing,” which are indeed inseparable: “What is foregrounded by this juxtaposition is the nature of narrative ‘truth’, the role of memory in the construction and reading of narratives of the self, and in ways in which narrators and writers position themselves in relation to the personal and historical past” (King 2000: 8). Again, by allowing remembering to be expressed as representation, the voice of a singular and streamlined national narrative is revealed as limited and therefore can be questioned.

One further characteristic associated with the idea of versions is the fallible narrator. While the fallible narrator is commonly used in many different categories of literature, the fallible narrator of the Third Space is set apart mainly by its subtleness. This narrator is not so outrageous that one recognizes his flaws from the opening page. In contrast, this narrator is at first very reputable, since he is the only authority offered to the reader on his specific situation. However, as the story continues, usually the gaps in the narrator’s knowledge are exposed and the reader begins to notice more discrepancies. This sort of narrator is intentionally developed in this manner to show the importance of perspective and the limited vision of each person. Salmon Rushdie’s narrator in *Midnight’s Children* (1981) is an excellent example of this fallible narrator, since one begins the story with total trust in Saleem, since he is, after all, telling his own story, but as the narrative develops, the reader realizes he lacks historical knowledge and his

memory even fails him at times, furthermore, he has been deceived about his identity from birth (2010: 24). This fallible narrator mirrors the state of the occupants of the Third Space in that his story is his own, therefore he tells it from the only perspective he knows, regardless of whether it is “historically accurate” or not.

### **5.3 Labyrinths**

Another identifying characteristic is the use of the labyrinth, either mentioned in literature, or structured into the novel. Often in the novels from the Third Space, characters will describe themselves as being lost in a labyrinth, which usually refers back to the search for identity and feeling lost in the in-between. One such author who is often noted for his obsession with labyrinths is Gabriel García Márquez, the leading reference point for the Magic Realism movement. Stavans links García Márquez’s use of labyrinths to the Third Space since the central character of García Márquez’s novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), could in fact be an occupant of the Third Space as he seeks to leave his home country as an exile (1996b: 108). Therefore, within the text of the novel, the theme of the labyrinth is often expressed in the dialogue and thoughts of the characters searching for their hybrid identity.

While some authors have incorporated the theme of the labyrinth on this level of content in the plot, others have implemented the idea of labyrinth in the very structure of their work. The theme behind this technique is the same as previously stated, since the author expresses an endless search for identity and belonging. However, in this style, the experience is much more bewildering to the reader, as the author leads them deeper into the labyrinth itself and they too are included in the search for meaning. As Christopher Warnes explains, these labyrinths are more than just an image repeated in the text:

The notion of storytelling as a game takes on a different dimension in this episode, as language begins to break down under the pressure of dysfunctional communication acts. The narrator of the story ensnares his listeners in a labyrinth from which there is no escape because there is no

answer that can satisfy his hyper-literal imperative. The labyrinth, like the hall of mirrors, is a hallowed space for García Márquez: there the real, the literal, the rational become distorted and deviant (2009: 89).

With this explanation of why labyrinths are used in some texts, it becomes clear why this device would be useful for literature emerging from the Third Space, where there is already an emphasis on “distortion” and “deviation.” Stavans further associates labyrinths with Hispanics as a whole, when he describes them as “Compulsive soul-searchers and self-accusers, we Hispanics also have a constant love affair with mirrors, a passion for deciphering our labyrinthine collective self. Ours is an elusive identity- abstract, unreachable, obscure, a multifaceted monster” (1996b: 241). Felipe Alfau has also taken on this structure and, as Anna Shapiro describes his enterprise: “he leads the reader into a sort of metaphysical crime novel and the search is for identity” (1993: 203).

#### **5.4 Use of the Original Language**

While the issue of language and the use of English have been discussed in a previous section, it is still necessary to include the use of original languages in the characteristics of literature from the Third Space. Many Third Space novels include several words, phrases, or even paragraphs entirely written in a different language, which are usually left without translation into the English equivalent. This omission is intentional and forms part of the hybridity of the novel, for this sort of in-between language is the only accurate representation of their experience:

In the post-colonial text the absence of translation has a particular kind of interpretative function. Cultural difference is not inherent in the text but is inserted by such strategies. The post-colonial text, by developing specific ways of both constituting cultural distance and at the same time bridging it, indicates that it is the “gap” rather than the experience (or at least the *concept* of a gap between experiences) which is created by language. The absence of explanation is, therefore, first a sign of distinctiveness, though it merely makes explicit that alterity which is implicit in the gloss (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2002: 64, emphasis in the text).

This form of writing creates an “avant-garde” experience in how the reader relates to the narrative, since the inclusion of the original language immediately forms an inner circle of those

who know at the exclusion of those who do not. However, this actually serves the purpose of portraying an accurate Third Space encounter in which language, or even bilingualism, creates groups of inclusion and exclusion. Another reason for not including the translation is that sometimes it does not convey the specific emotions connected to each word, as Stavans explains in the case of Spanish: “To translate word by word, even to explain what is meant by love in our society, will not do” (1996b: 165). Even if leaving the word in the original language leaves some readers groping in the dark to understand its meaning, the author is allowed to express a perspective that is particular and unique, and the reader experiences the cacophony of languages that represents a third space (Higgins 2009: 7).

### **5.5 Use of Satire**

One more of the characteristics of this hybridized literature is a strategy often used in the breakdown of binary oppositions, and that is satire. While satire is a strategy that has been applied in countless movements in literature and for countless motives, the satire of the Third Space points toward a multidirectionality that differs from other forms of satire. As John Clement Ball states in his book *Satire and the Postcolonial Novel*: “By attending to a multidirectional thrust, this interpretive perspective is one way to construct a model of satirical resistance beyond a unidirectional oppositionality and simplistic politics of blame” (2003: 13). As he later goes on to state, the difficulty with this particular form of satire is that it deliberately refuses to follow any set of “rules” governing the satire, creating a style of writing that is purposefully resistant to any particular interpretation (Ball 2003: 21). This refers back to the idea of “difference” as opposed to binary oppositions.

## **6 Significance**

With a limited audience who would be able to appreciate Third Space literature, and the lack of “authority” in the sense of the traditional canon of Great Books, and without participation in a national literature, one would wonder why theorists have placed such great emphasis on literature from the Third Space. In spite of its unlikely mainstream popularity, postcolonial scholars argue that the future of literature and of recent history lies in the hands of such authors.

### **6.1 Who is the Audience?**

One of the concerns with the literature from the Third Space is the audience, for if each author shares an experience only known to very few people, one wonders who would then be interested in reading it. It would seem that first, readers would have to be interested in that particular experience or situation, then they would have to do some research in order to understand it, and then finally they would have to cope with the insider information shared throughout the literature that only those in the Third Space would fully understand. A further concern is one of language. Leaving words in the original language obviously reduces the audience because not every reader will want to tolerate that kind of ambiguity. Rushdie’s response to the tendency to search for an audience turns the focus to the principle of the entire basis of the writing:

This raises immediately the question of whom one is writing “for”. My own, short, answer is that I have never had a reader in mind. I have ideas, people events shapes and I write “for” those things, and hope that the completed work will be of interest to others. But which others? (2010: 19).

Rushdie, and perhaps other Third Space writers as well, are less concerned with the exact “who” will be reading their novels and more concerned with relaying their individual experiences. To be caught up in the “who” would be, in a way, returning to the center and looking for “approval” instead of casting off all the so-called requirements for acceptance (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 40).

## 6.2 Breakdown of Authority

Literature from the Third Space forces equality into the world of literature, and perhaps even beyond it into the realms of culture, politics, and history. By resisting the center's authority, the movement offers an opportunity for authors, whether they are found on the margins of society or in the center, to share their unique experiences and perspectives, as Bhabha explains:

Hybridity intervenes in the exercise of authority not merely to indicate the impossibility of its identity but to represent the unpredictability of its presence. The book retains its presence, but it is no longer a representation of an essence; it is now a partial presence, a (strategic) device in a specific colonial engagement, an appurtenance of authority (2004: 163).

Since each work can only claim "partial" truth, the idea of a central authority simply disappears. Speaking of the implications of such a change, Bhabha explains that these prior "authorities," when they are "deprived of their full presence, the knowledges of cultural authority may be articulated with forms of 'native' knowledges" (2004: 164). The authorities will remain authorities, but the difference is that they are no longer allowed the right of "representing" all literature; they can only represent their own individual experiences.

With the breakdown of the central authority, it follows that the binary division, which had built the walls around "the Other," isolating it and fixing it, would also begin to fall apart. The role of the stereotype in the creation of "the Other" has always been essential:

An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of "fixity" in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as a sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and demonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always "in place", already known and something that must be anxiously repeated [. . .] (Bhabha 2004: 94-95).

Bhabha here emphasizes the need for repetition of stereotypes in colonial discourse as if each repetition were another nail fastening fixity on "the Other". However, as each individual expresses his own experience, the stereotypes that held these identities in place are suddenly

broken down by the author's own retelling of his experience. Stavans offers the situation of the Hispanic population in the United States as an example:

Latinos appear to be a homogeneous minority, thinking and acting and speaking alike; but nothing is further from the truth. Diversity is their trademark. True, in one way or another, we are all children of lascivious Iberians and raped Indian and African maidens, and yet heterogeneity rules: Latinos are blacks, Spaniards, Indians, mulattos, and *mestizos* (1996b: 31).

Through the use of individual voices, a group once portrayed as homogeneous is suddenly fragmented into countless unique identities, each with its particular narratives and perspective. As human experiences emerge from the pages of each narrative, the binary opposition must break down as the reader begins to understand that the supposed "Other" is not so "opposite" as one once thought.

As the authority of the center breaks down, the supposed "Other" gains great freedom to explore and push the limits of narrative style. Before, the center held the authority of literary greatness, and could pick and choose who to include in that group, keeping in mind, of course, the authors' proximity to the center. Such has been the case, for example, in what would become the "Bible of Great Book literature," Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon* (1994), in which he literally lists the select few authors he believes worthy of "canonization." "The Other" has been subjected to the examination of the center's narrative style and techniques, the success of their writing dependent on their ability to write and live as the center demanded. When that authority breaks down, the supposed "Other" gains a sense of freedom to think, write and live in spontaneous movement, opening up the imaginative powers of the writers and allowing them to share their own experiences as each one individually sees fit. Said states:

Instead we begin to sense that old authority cannot simply be replaced by new authority, but that new alignments made across borders, types, nations, and essences are rapidly coming into view, and it is those new alignments that now provoke and challenge the fundamentally static notion of *identity* that has been the course of cultural thought during the era of imperialism (1994: xxviii, emphasis in the text).

This movement builds momentum as others read their work and sense their own freedom to express their identity, no longer restrained by what the center has claimed as acceptable techniques and styles, or even content. Timothy Bewes offers a similar perspective by placing emphasis on the fact that sometimes those writing from the Third Space show “discomfort” with structure and form because their experiences do not align with the limitations placed on writing (Bewes 2011: 19). Having been set free from the constraints of the center, the Third Space opens the way for a fresh wave of newly inventive literature. What has changed is that each method is accepted as “different” but not “compared” under strict criteria as it once was under the colonial period (Bhabha 2004: 50). The scales for comparing these different perspectives have been broken.

With the breakdown of the authority of the center, the center’s portrayal of history is also no longer valid as the sole narrative of the past. All versions of the past only show a slice of the “reality” that is always a subjective projection of one’s perspective. This breakdown of linear history allows for new voices to tell their version of the past. Bhabha describes the enormity of the impact this change is having and will have on the way one perceives history: “What is crucial to such a vision of the future is the belief that we must not merely change the *narratives* of our histories, but transform our sense of what it means to live, to be, in other times and different spaces, both human and historical” (2004: 367, emphasis in the text). The idea, therefore, is not to change old narratives for new ones, but to embrace the wide span of narratives available.

Rushdie also offers his response to this change in the way of viewing history:

Throughout human history, the apostles of purity, those who have claimed to possess a total explanation, have wrought havoc among mere mixed-up human beings. Like many millions of people, I am a bastard child of history. Perhaps we all are, black and brown and white, leaking into one another, as a character of mine once said, *like the flavours when you cook* (2010: 394, emphasis in the text).

Linear history has long stifled the perspectives of those who simply did not fit into the accepted progression, and allowing for a variety of perspectives gives a more complete picture of the past, even if achieving the complete picture might never be possible.

## **7 What the Future May Hold**

As this breakdown takes place, theorists have begun to wonder what the new world of literature will look like, as more of the focus moves away from the center and toward the fringes of society. Edward Said is one of the proponents of looking toward these borderlines as the future of literature:

If I have insisted on integration and connections between the past and the present, between imperializer and imperialized, between culture and imperialism, I have done so not to level or reduce difference, but rather to convey a more urgent sense of the interdependence between things. So vast and yet so detailed is imperialism as an experience with crucial cultural dimensions, that we must speak of overlapping territories, intertwined histories common to men and women, whites and non-whites, dwellers in the metropolis and on the peripheries, past as well as present and future; these territories and histories can only be seen from the perspective of the whole of secular human history (1994: 72).

The goal is no longer to focus on what divides cultures and separates nations, but to see the similarities, the “overlaps” and the uniting aspects of human experience. Bhabha has also contemplated what this change in mentality will produce in the world of literature:

Where, once, the transmission of national traditions was the major theme of a world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees— these border and frontier conditions— may be the terrains of world literature. The centre of such a study would neither be the “sovereignty” of national cultures, nor the universalism of human culture, but a focus on those “freak social and cultural displacements” that Morrison and Gordimer represent in their “unhomely” fictions. Which leads us to ask: can the perplexity of the unhomely, intrapersonal world lead to an international theme? (2004: 17)

Bhabha seems to recognize that there is always a tendency to create a center in any movement, and in postcolonial literature, the new center seems to be the previous borderlines.

One cannot help but wonder if this may be history repeating itself and if the marginalized will only become the center and the center may become the marginalized. Ania Loomba states this very issue of recreating what the movement was, in fact, trying to break down: “But now,

many critics are beginning to ask whether in the process of exposing the ideological and historical functioning of such binaries, we are in danger of reproducing them” (1998: 90). Other authors have gone so far as to say that the movement has gone “full circle” and that postcolonial literature is yet another colonizer, but this time those at the fringes of society find themselves at the center of literary framework (Maver 2006: 12) (Ball 2003: 35). If the goal is truly to “level the playing field,” the question then remains of how to evaluate literature at all, or if a canon can even exist. Even more so, as the movement has grown, it remains true that works written in English, or those directed toward a “European” audience, achieve the most success, leading scholars such as Dennis Walder to state, “The common objection is that here we have yet another universalizing, Eurocentric, authoritarian approach to the world” (1998: 189). These are the uncertainties that more recent theorists have used to critique the postcolonial movement, because this movement leaves the field with a puzzling future of an equality that simply cannot hold since, at a practical level, some novels and authors will always gain more renown than others. Postcolonialists seem to have reached an impasse in regard to dealing with success. Fame is a natural consequence of literary success, yet Salman Rushdie seems to have suffered ostracism from his fellow postcolonialists for, among other reasons, having gained literary renown. As lofty as Postcolonialism may be, it must find a way to incorporate its theories into the realities of a capitalist world.

Another issue related to this idea of reinstating a center in literature is the concern over a new kind of fetishization of the exotic. One of the secondary effects of the onslaught of literature coming from postcolonial settings is that the readers across the world have responded positively toward it. The Third Space is in danger of being fetishized once again, as postcolonial literature becomes a form of “exotic tourism with guilt” (Brouillette 2007: 17). Again

postcolonial literature finds itself with the dilemma of what to do with its own success, since achieving top places on bestseller lists, or winning Western prizes leaves it back where the movement started, as “Post-colonial literatures written in English today all over the world are becoming more and more aware of the trap of falling into best-selling exoticism and its discourse” (Maver 2006: 11). On another level, there is also a fetishization of breaking the norm, in which experimentation has become an expectation and even a criterion for evaluating literature: “Twentieth century novels of both the modern and post-modern variety experiment wildly with inherited notions of novelistic form and representational strategies. By doing so, they raise questions about the point at which the disruption of generic expectations can itself become paradoxically, a norm” (Ball 2003: 17). This has become so true of the movement that scholars are realizing some literature has been rejected simply on its conventional nature, stirring up debate as to whether this movement can actually boast of upholding its own ideals in practice (Sorensen 2010: 10, 19).

One further concern for postcolonial literature, and Third Space literature as a part of it, is the increasingly vague understanding of what it means for literature to be postcolonial. As more authors begin to write from a postcolonial perspective, it becomes clear that this label can be as elastic as scholars wish it to be. Constantina Papoulias has referenced this concern in her work on Bhabha, stating: “As geographers turn increasingly to the politics of experience, they castigate Bhabha’s use of hybridity as a catch-all category which, in their view, ignores the specificity and irreducibility of different experiences of marginalization” (2004: 74). This can be seen in the work by scholars who have defended literature from the United States as being postcolonial since the United States at one time was a colony, or because of the history of slavery in that country. Similar to this case, there are countless more examples of the label being

stretched to encompass even more writers. One such author who supports this expanding understanding of what it means to be postcolonial is Dawn Duncan, who bases her opinion on the lack of flexibility currently found in the movement: “While certainly the particular form of postcolonial cultures so indicated may represent the majority postcolonial condition, the definition fails to give voice to cultures that do not squarely fit the continental and color parameters” (2002: 321). While some scholars welcome this growth in the movement, others firmly reject works that do not come from a specific case of Postcolonialism. One such wary scholar is Ania Loomba, who explains that, “A too-quick enlargement of the term postcolonial can indeed paradoxically flatten both past and contemporary situations. All ‘subordinating’ discourses and practices are not the same either over time or across the globe” (1998: 17). Her stance is that if all different kinds of literature come to represent postcolonial literature, in the end, the label will have no actual meaning. At stake for literature from the Third Space is whether Third Space writers can continue to belong to the Postcolonial movement, since the very backbone of Third Space literature is the fact that practically anyone can write from a Third Space, even those who have never left their home country, albeit through the imagination.

It is also helpful to hear from the authors of the Third Space as they evaluate the future of literature. From Stavans, the reaction is on the level of politics, focusing on those who promote the “English Only” movement in the United States, whom he claims will find this breakdown to be “chaotic multiplicity” as each group is recognized as different instead of grouped together as “the Other.” (1996b: 179). Rushdie also responds to this idea, focusing more on this new generation of Third Space writers whom he claims are an entirely new species:

The creation of radically new types of human being: people who root themselves in ideas rather than places, in memories as much as material things; people who have been obliged to define themselves— because they are so defined by others— by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves. The migrant suspects reality: having experienced several ways of being, he

understands their illusory nature. To see things plainly, you have to cross a frontier (2010: 124-5).

“Suspecting” the idea of reality when it is presented as such is one of the direct consequences of the breakdown of binary oppositions. By understanding the many perspectives available, no longer will a reader, or the public at large, respect and trust one single reality. In this way, the role of the Third Space writer is, once again, the role of an artist, exposing the people to worlds beyond one’s own and pushing the limits of reality.

As more writers are added to this category of the Third Space, theorists are also listening curiously to the emerging voice of those writing from the Third Space for more philosophical reasons. After all, these authors find themselves stripped of almost all of the locators commonly used for forming identity. They have lost their homes, perhaps their families, their “nation” and their “culture.” Theorists look to these writers as a purer source in the search for meaning and identity since everything else has been taken away. Rushdie states:

It may be argued that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity. Which seems to me self-evidently true; but I suggest that the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being “elsewhere”. This may enable him to speak properly and concretely on a subject of universal significance and appeal (2010: 12).

If nothing else, these authors often share their experiences in the loss of home and the search for identity outside of the comfort of home. Another author states this same desire to look toward those who have had to rebuild their own identity as a source of philosophical insight: “As a reader and a writer, I am interested in loneliness and isolation, and I have found myself returning time and time again to consider those who have suddenly realized themselves marooned” (Phillips 2011: 190). This search for identity is a common theme throughout literature, and in the case of these occupants of the Third Space, that search becomes the focus of their writing; it even becomes a problem they creatively attempt to solve.

## **8 Conclusions**

This section has explored the concept of the Third Space and its implications for postcolonial literature. In order to gain a better understanding of the term the “Third Space,” the idea of the nation as an imagined community was presented as a form of “First Space,” and then the term “the Other” was elaborated upon in order to understand the binary opposition that propelled forward the colonial period, creating a vast separation between the colonizer and the colonized, purported by stereotypes and generalizations. With that background information in place, the focus turned to the Third Space and the idea of the space in itself; that space could be a physical, psychological or emotional state. After defining space, the occupants of the Third Space were defined as those living as immigrants, exiles or the marginalized. By focusing on these three groups and the literature that emerges from them, one can come to the conclusion that the literature from the Third Space is important because it helps to break down the linearity of history and reveal that there are many different perspectives from which to view it. It also breaks down the binary opposition of colonialism by allowing various perspectives to be heard and accepted as valid. Furthermore, it breaks down the authority of the center by distributing that authority to voices from all different points of view. Finally, language was defined as an essential part of the Third Space, and that in order for language to break free of the binary opposition, it must be recreated in a way that expresses the situation of the person writing.

## **Chapter 2: *Chromos* and the Third Space of New York City**

Having discussed the theory of the Third Space, its roots in postcolonial literature and its ability to encompass a great many texts from diverse authors and settings, I will now proceed to the task of analyzing Alfau's novel *Chromos* within the framework of this theory. This chapter will argue that Alfau's innovation in this novel is evident in the way in which he warps and manipulates the stereotypical immigrant novel into a fragmented and chaotic representation of the Third Space. This essentially makes Alfau a writer ahead of his time, since he was writing about hybridity and liminality in the year 1948, well before these themes would become widespread in literature and defined in literary theory. Alfau's achievement in the novel is also fundamentally based on the fact that describing the immigrant life as a Third Space in the year 1948 would have been drastically countercurrent to the general rhetoric surrounding immigration, consisting of Americanization and assimilation.

A liminal space is present in many different aspects of the novel. After a brief historical introduction to New York City as a Third Space, the first of these elements to be discussed in this chapter is the term coined by Alfau for certain Spaniards living in New York City: "Americaniards." This term in itself represents the hybrid moment of combining two different cultures. The second part of the chapter will take a closer look at the creation of these Third Space characters in the novel through the use of stereotypes, different forms of "othering" and moments of hybridity. Next, the chapter will turn from the characters to the notion of space, examining physical, abstract or emotional Third Spaces as depicted in the novel. Then, as a final step, the chapter will look more closely at the use of language, since those writing from a hybrid space pay close attention to language and often use creative measures to make the language their own.

## **1. Historical and Theoretical Background**

Before discussing the novel as it relates to the Third Space, there is yet another background area that must be clarified before beginning, that is, the historical events surrounding the writing of the novel *Chromos* and the events that would have shaped the life of the author, born in 1902 and moving to the United States in 1916. Therefore, this first section will be devoted to the changes in immigration in the United States during the first part of the twentieth century, and the second section will focus on the theory already developed on New York as a Third Space, again focusing specifically on the time period of the novel. Both of these sections are vital to understanding the novel since immigration was such a polemical issue at the turn of the century.

### **1.1 Historical Background: Immigration in America**

#### **1.1.1 Prior to 1900**

Important changes took place in the area of immigration in the United States just before the beginning of the twentieth century. The Industrial Revolution had created many jobs in places like New York City and there were many opportunities for workers who would come to the country without education or specific skills (Martin 2011: 133). This wave of immigration began in a relatively uncontrolled fashion, with little concern for the effects it would have on the culture at large, as Samuel L. Baily states: “Until the twentieth century, most Americans assumed that their society would automatically assimilate immigrants” (1999: 85). However, plans were soon put in place to control who was entering the country, one of the most famous being the filtering device of Ellis Island, opening in 1892. While the main focus was, supposedly, to guard against hazards to the health and welfare of the population at large, especially in cities such as New York, where an epidemic would be catastrophic, these changes brought about a shift in the relationship between the U.S. government and the immigrants

gathering at the shores of the country (Odem 2008: 363). This was perhaps the first instance in which the United States' reputation as a haven for immigrants could be called into question.

### **1.1.2 1900-1920**

Therefore, at the turn of the century, the United States was desperately trying to cope with this boom in immigration, and, at the same time, put in place regulations and order that would ensure the safety of all its citizens. One major shift that took place as the wave of immigration continued is that the immigrants arriving looking for jobs in the United States were no longer predominantly Western Europeans, now the majority were from Southern or Eastern Europe (Martin 2011: 105). This also increased the feelings of fear or uncertainty about the growing number of immigrants coming to the United States because these immigrants were not as quick to adapt to American culture and the “foreignness of these new immigrants was more evident” (Martin 2011: 106). Soon there were commissions put in place to see how these immigrants were adapting to American life and Americans at large began to agree that the ability to speak English was especially important since immigrants were coming from increasingly varied countries (Martin 2011: 116). The United States was becoming more and more concerned about the ever-increasing population of immigrants living in its cities and taking many of its jobs. The statistics gathered from this time period in New York City reflect the overwhelming changes taking place at the time: “Between 1880 and 1920, close to a million and a half immigrants arrived and settled in the city— so that by 1910 fully 41 percent of all New Yorkers were foreign born” (Foner 2000: 1). Understanding the massive growth in population gives better insight as to why the views of the public toward these immigrants began to change.

### **1.1.3 Post World War I**

If the situation was already complicating itself for the immigrants in the United States leading up to the 1920s, the First World War only magnified it further, bringing about more restrictions and less tolerance of these new arrivals to the United States. After the end of WWI, a momentary downturn in the economy around the year 1919 again brought about another upswing in the panic surrounding the issue of the ever-growing immigrant population (Abu-Lughod 2007: 17). As the economy recovered, the job situation would never return to how it was before the war, the difference being the types of jobs available, and fewer unskilled laborers were needed as job production methods became more advanced (Dinnerstein, Nichols and Reimers 2003: 187). Along with this moment of economic changes, public opinion on immigration was also taking a negative turn as the U.S. government began to control immigration based more on qualitative measures: “Those favoring restriction turned to quantitative restrictions as well as to shifts in the ethnic composition of immigration. The national origins quotas established in the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924 accomplished these aims” (Martin 2011: 133). The first of these laws, from 1921, “limited, for a one-year period, the number of entrants of each nationality to 3 percent of the foreign-born of that group in America based on the 1910 census” (Dinnerstein and Reimers 1988: 104). Therefore, by limiting those immigrants who were from less-developed countries, the laws began to turn from a policy of including to a policy of controlling who exactly was crossing the border into the United States.

A second issue that arose at this time was the ethnic classification that began to emerge as a social norm. There had been a long association between being able to speak certain languages or even being literate, and intelligence. As Susan F. Martin explains: “Language had been since the time of the Enlightenment a measure of racial and cultural hierarchy” (Martin 2011: 138).

This belief strengthened the argument of those who opposed immigration, demonstrating the inferiority of these immigrants and leading to the allowance or even the popularity of racism.

This was coupled with the growing sense of patriotism that had arisen at the time of the First World War and began to change the rhetoric on immigration:

This mobilization combined with the massive patriotic campaign to encourage the foreign born to put their native lands in the backs of their minds and cultivate an uncomplicated loyalty to America and its values. Since 1917, then, the country had been vigorously espousing an ideal of *unhyphenated Americanism* (Heinze 2003: 145, italics original to the text).

Therefore, this mentality not only reveals the fear on the part of the American citizens leading to the attempts to suppress, or at least disarm, any foreign element within the country, but it also shows the sentiment behind the idea of assimilation which would become the predominant theory used to “help” immigrants adapt to life in the United States. The surge in nationalism therefore made being an immigrant in the United States in the 1920s even more challenging.

#### **1.1.4 Post 1930**

In the years of the Great Depression, in which American citizens struggled to find work, the situation was even more dismal for immigrants. The lack of work caused the numbers of immigrants coming to the United States to decrease, as the word quickly circulated that there was no work to be found. Considering the amount of immigration that took place from the year 1910 to 1930, it is telling that the statistics show that in 1910 four out of ten workers were blue collar, whereas in 1930 only three out of ten were blue collar (Weil 2007: 209). Those who were unable to find work in the large cities that had before been the best place to begin a new life as an unskilled laborer, would slowly begin to scatter and move west in search of work or even just food. As WWII approached, immigration laws became increasingly strict with the resurgence of national patriotism, especially affecting the issue of citizenship. After WWII, the country would

shift its focus to the vast numbers of immigrants crossing the Mexican border, leading to several campaigns for the deportation of the illegal immigrants.

## **1.2 Theoretical Background: “The Other” in New York**

In turning from the historical background to the theoretical background of New York City as a Third Space, most of the research on this theory has come from recent years, but uses as support for its arguments the experiences of immigrants over the entire century, making this theoretical information applicable to an author such as Alfau, writing about the United States in the 1920s to the 1940s.

As seen when considering the theory of the Third Space, most countries have a national narrative that clearly defines who and what the nation is and, as a result, who and what the nation is not, known as “the Other.” Within the national narrative of the United States, it has become clear that there is, indeed, an “Other” written into the American culture, and that is the immigrant. Ali Behdad speaks about the immigrant’s role in fulfilling the need for an “Other” in society:

What we encounter in every anti-immigrant claim is a differential mode of national and cultural identification that posits a fundamental difference between the patriotic citizen and the menacing alien. The project of imagining a homogeneous nation is never complete. It requires the continual presence of the immigrant as other, through whom citizenship and cultural belonging are rearticulated (2005: 12).

Therefore, from Behdad’s perspective, the United States’ need for “the Other” holds the immigrant at a distance and does not let him advance to become part of the whole. Only if the immigrant assimilates or molds himself into the American model does the country allow for that individual to fulfill a different role in society: “Immigrants are useful to the political project of national identity, through an exclusionary logic that defines them as differential others and also through inclusive means of identification that recuperate them as figures of cultural conformism, exceptionalism, and regeneration” (Behdad 2005: 12). According to this theory, when the

immigrant manages to “rise above” the difficult circumstances and obtain American success, then he suddenly transmutes into a different character in the American narrative, the country of dreams and possibilities, where anyone can become anything.

Another way in which one can see the theory of “the Other” played out through the American immigrant is through the fear that has come to be associated with immigrants. This fear is a particularly dangerous one, since it teaches citizens to be afraid of their neighbors, shop keepers, or even the children at the local school, since the fear comes from a supposed threat within American borders (Portes and Rumbaut 2006: 118). Teresa McKenna even goes so far as to claim that there is a notion of fear in the national metaphors of the melting pot or the salad bowl, both focused on the separate elements mixing and congealing to create a pleasant whole, as these images become ways of controlling these foreign elements and reassuring oneself that they can be absorbed into the whole for the common good (1997: 128). Beyond the fear of violence or different customs taking hold in American culture, there is another more practical threat felt by those who oppose immigration in the United States, being the threat of the capitalistic foreigner, who tries to create a better life for his family, or himself, in his homeland by sending money back home: “Because the capitalist foreigner is depicted as someone who is interested only in material things, he or she quickly turns from someone who has something to offer us into someone who only wants to take things from us” (Honig 1998: 4). Therefore, part of the national narrative that sets the immigrant apart as “the Other” argues that the immigrant comes to take away what rightfully belongs to the citizens of the United States.

At first, this idea of the immigrant as “the Other” in American society is confusing because of the image the United States has always presented of itself as being an immigrant nation: “a haven for immigrants from all over the world who have left the hardships of their

home countries to start life anew in a land of opportunity and promise” (Odem 2008: 360). However, when one looks closer at the actions taken by the United States government in order to control and limit immigration, the truth that this narrative is actually a myth becomes clearer (Honig 1998: 2). As this brief summary of immigration at the turn of the century has shown, the United States became systematically less of an immigrant haven as time advanced. As their need for cheap, inexperienced labor decreased, so did their desire to take on more of these immigrants coming from Eastern and Southern Europe. These sentiments, combined with the events of World War I and the Great Depression, give the reader an idea of what the immigrants must have experienced on a daily basis. Surely there were some who were kind to them, others who would try to take advantage of their naivety and still more that would judge or look down on them in their situation. This mood of accumulating reproach against these immigrants is the very climate in which Alfau writes his novel *Chromos*.

### **1.2.1 Assimilation**

One of the main tools in the hands of the government and those working in immigration regulations was the theory of assimilation. The idea of assimilation was that over time and with the experience of living in the United States, immigrants would undergo a natural process of leaving behind their old country and culture and would identify themselves more fully with American customs. Still to this day, one can find scholarly articles that argue for assimilation as a positive way of adapting to American culture (Schmidt 2010: 5). However, the majority of scholars now find great discrepancies in this theory of assimilation and its impact on the immigrants themselves. Roger Waldinger points out one of these areas:

“Assimilation” is surely a peculiar scholarly concept, resonating with that normative vision of national life that prescribes a direct relationship between the individual and the nation, unmediated by ties of an ethnic type. Not surprisingly, it sets up an artificial contrast between immigrants depicted as distinctive from the start and a national self, imagined in homogeneous terms— that is, as mainstream— whereas in fact it is driven by all sorts of divisions. That

immigrants are surely different is beyond dispute, and yet the concept of assimilation hides the degree to which crucial differences are created through the process of migration and members of a host group (Waldinger 2001: 12).

Therefore, one of the problems with assimilation is the fact that it forces all areas of difference and variety to be reduced to one voice and one way of thinking, which is clearly inaccurate whether speaking about a nation in itself or especially when discussing how an immigrant would adapt to that new culture. Ali Behdad seconds this sentiment when he states: “Assimilation as a more subtle denial of difference has been integral to how the United States has imagined itself as an immigrant nation” (2005: 12). There exists, therefore, a strong relationship between the denial of difference and the myth of the immigrant nation in the United States, in that assimilation forces immigrants to mold themselves into a picture of immigration that fits in with the national narrative of the melting pot.

The effects of this concept of assimilation on the immigrants forced to live in a culture that promotes such an idea have begun to emerge through literature as immigrants themselves have gained a voice. As one author writing on immigration to the United States from Haiti explains: “Like most immigrants to the United States who either came voluntarily or were forced to emigrate, Haitians were expected to sever ties with their old society as they assimilated” (Pierre-Louis 2006: 5). This reveals that one of the consequences of this framework of assimilation is the intentional loss of ties to the homeland as immigrants are expected to lose that part of their identity in order to become American. This idea of losing one’s homeland in the process of assimilation we will return to later in the chapter when considering how Alfau responds to it within the novel *Chromos*. Another author, in considering the effects of assimilation on the immigrant has claimed that “Assimilation, however, does not lead to the complete restoration of identity, but to a different form of alienation” (Végső 2010: 26). This alienation is a deeper one yet, as it forces the immigrant to separate self from self, barring off

access to the self whose identity rests in the old country. Clearly, assimilation is a lofty theory that immigrants are incapable of grasping or attaining, as Végő states: “Immigrant literature could be said to have been concerned with the impossibility of assimilation” (2010: 26).

Therefore, the theory of assimilation also factors into the process of “othering” of immigrants in the United States.

### **1.2.2 The Experience of the Hispanics as an Example**

The grouping together of the Hispanics in New York City has been one of the clearest examples of “othering” to take place in United States history. While the novel *Chromos* deals mainly with Spaniards living in New York City, there is a lack of research about that minority group because they were not a prominent immigrant population at the turn of the century. Therefore, the example of the Hispanics is relevant and useful, especially since in the novel, Alfau includes several interactions between his Americaniards and the Hispanics, even having his characters be mistaken for Hispanic, allowing the reader to believe that this would not be all that uncommon in everyday life. In the example of the Hispanics, “the Other” has been created through the very label “Hispanic”: a foreign attempt to combine countless different countries and subcultures, including second generation, bi-racial or even further descendants with Hispanic roots, into one term (Zimmerman 1992: 12). As Suzanne Oboler explains, “In failing to do justice to the variety of backgrounds and conditions of the individuals to whom it has been applied, the term Hispanic can have the effect of denying their sense of self” (Oboler 2002: 77). By drawing attention to the variety and difference found under the label “Hispanic,” one can see that this category has been created to group together what is now the major foreign element in the United States. Another issue with the term comes when considering that several of the subgroups that have been forced together under the title “Hispanic” are actually quite hostile toward one another as a result of

“intergroup boundaries,” where second-generation immigrants feel rejected by first-generation and vice-versa, or even those who have intermarried feel a similar social rejection by their former peers (Jiménez 2010: 143).

### **1.2.3 Inequality among Immigrants**

Beyond the unrealistic grouping in cases such as the Hispanics, other issues related to immigration and “the Other” have been discovered as more research has been done on the topic within the context of the United States. Interestingly, the idea that not all immigrants are received with the same welcome was already visible at the turn of the century with the change in trends of immigration. For as we have previously discussed, when the majority of immigrants were no longer coming from Western Europe, the reaction of society changed. Since then, studies have been done verifying the fact that adaptation depends on several factors that are entirely removed from the individual immigrant’s control. Skin color, languages spoken, education, and even ethnic community in the new country all account for how each individual will be received by society (Foner 1987: 14-15) (Cutler, Glaeser and Vigdor 2008: 478). Some scholars have even ranked these factors impacting adaptation to American culture, with their results showing that, “In America, race is a paramount criterion of social acceptance that can overwhelm the influence of class background, religion, or language” (Portes and Rumbaut 2001: 47). Therefore, those with a skin color different from the majority will find it more difficult to adapt to American culture than those whose skin color resembles that of the majority. Finally, one further addition must be made as to individual preferences and personalities. This is perhaps the most important theoretical imperative emerging from the Third Space, to remember that no matter to what group or subgroup immigrants are assigned, they are after all, individuals, and should be allowed to respond to the act of immigration as they individually feel appropriate.

## **1.3 New York as a Third Space**

### **1.3.1 General Third Space Characteristics**

As previously explained, the immigrant in the United States has been created to be “the Other” in society and in the national narrative promoted by its citizens. However, immigrants have, since the turn of the century, been finding ways to create a Third Space either physically or in an abstract sense, especially in New York City where there is, and has been for some time, a strong immigrant presence. There is an overwhelming conglomeration of groups and cultures to be found there, creating a unique cosmopolitan city that was unfathomable at the beginning of the twentieth century. O. Henry once stated that “New York City is inhabited by 4,000,000 mysterious strangers” (O. Henry as cited in Weil 2007: 199). Indeed, the larger the city, the more it lends itself to what Mizruchi has called a “cosmopolitan consciousness,” as one learns to intermingle with countless other ethnic groups (Mizruchi 2008: 77). Nancy Foner has also described the ambiance of New York in that day as “extreme heterogeneity” or that the ethnic diversity was “both welcoming and confusing” (Foner 1987: 7). Another aspect of New York at the turn of the century was the close proximity in which all these different groups were living, especially on the Lower East Side; for even with the existence of ghettos and ethnic neighborhoods, intermixing with other groups was inevitable.

Additionally, in studying the commentary on New York City by more recent scholars, we find themes that remind us of the Third Space. One such case is Juan Flores, who states that “Even in such cases of cross-group identification, there always seems to be an important stake in upholding the specifics of one’s own nationality” (Flores 2000: 7). This statement clearly resists the rhetoric of Americanization. Other authors remark on the fact that even though there is this

tie back to the home country, “Immigrants may be deeply affected by and involved in life in New York” (Foner 1987: 9). Some immigrants feel loyalties both to the new country and to the old (Flores 2000: 200). This sort of both-and mentality sums up what it is to inhabit the Third Space. Still more American writers express the same hybridity with a greater sense of tension, stating, “The immigrant world has always been a difficult one, torn between old loyalties and new realities” (Portes and Rumbaut 2006: 120). Some express that this struggle to remember home and find belonging in the new one creates an internal conflict that leads to a resistance against dissolving entirely into the melting pot of the city (Foner 2005: 63) (Foner 1987: 11). Also, nostalgia has become a representative theme from the work of these immigrant authors writing from New York (Foner 1987: 11). All of these examples help to confirm that New York City is a “perfect storm” for creating writing from a Third Space. The abundance of immigrants and the mixed feelings toward assimilation and retaining some sense of home lead many immigrants to search for an in-between.

### **1.3.2 The Difficulties of this Liminal Space**

Having discussed the general theory of the Third Space in the previous chapter and having noted that its literature can take on a variety of styles and tones, it is important to note which tone the literature and theory emerging from New York City tend to follow. In the chapter on theory, two general trends in tone were specified, one of resistance and struggle and the other of discovery and freedom. As stated earlier, it is important to remember that neither one is better or more appropriate than the other, but in the case of New York City, especially at the turn of the century, it is true that most of the historical information taken from that time has revealed the bitter struggle for those immigrants inhabiting the Third Space, later leading to resistance literature. One reason for their struggle could have been the necessity to build a new life from nothing, no

matter who they were in their old country: “Regardless of their qualifications and experience, recent immigrants generally enter at the bottom of their respective occupational ladder” (Portes and Rumbaut 2006: 50). Another tell-tale sign of the struggles of these inhabitants of the Third Space comes from a statistic discovered by Portes and Rumbaut from suicide rates in the 1930s in Chicago, showing that the rate was higher for those who were foreign born (2006: 171). However, it is important to remember that while resistance literature best represents the harsh reality facing immigrants at that time, publishers were not interested in this type of literature, nor would it have sold many copies, since the most popular immigrant narratives published at the turn of the century were in praise of the new country and told stories of the self-made man, rising up out of his circumstances (Panunzio 1921: 108). Indeed, this fact reveals the colonial-like situation these immigrants were living in at the beginning of the twentieth century, without a true voice of their own.

### **1.3.3 Ethnic Neighborhoods**

One of the clearest areas in which the Third Space can be seen in New York City is through the ethnic neighborhoods that allow for a physical Third Space to exist. Authors have stated that these ethnic neighborhoods can be formed either out of constraint, that is to say, a lack of an alternative, or from preference, since many immigrants would prefer to live among others like themselves (Logan, Zhang and Alba 2002: 300). As stated in the previous chapter, the Third Space is distinct from a ghetto in that a ghetto intentionally isolates one ethnicity from the rest of society. Or, as alternatively defined: “Exclusion of certain groups from certain locations regardless of their personal resources and preferences” (Logan, Zhang and Alba 2002: 301). The ethnic community, in contrast, can be a much more positive tool since it is more often a source of community and support.

Therefore, many immigrants choose, and have chosen in the past, to live in these ethnic neighborhoods both out of necessity and out of a desire to maintain ties to their homeland. Being realistic about the transition from the home country to New York City, the drastic and confusing change could be a difficult and painful transition for newcomers (García, Evangelista, etc. 1988: 499). The benefits of these neighborhoods began with the very networking that enabled the new immigrants to adjust to their new surroundings: “Immigration is a network-driven phenomenon, with newcomers naturally attracted to the places where they have contacts and the buildup of contacts facilitating later moves to the key immigration centers” (Waldinger 2001: 2). Relatives or compatriots had already begun the process of adapting to the new culture, allowing the recently-arrived immigrants to base their experiences in New York City on explanations embedded in their old culture’s norms, a priceless tool only available through those from their own country (Foner 2000: 39). Some would even state that these relationships, instead of slowing the process of adaptation by being surrounded with the old instead of the new, actually has the opposite effect of speeding up the process since much information can be passed with ease and without language difficulties to the new immigrants (Kaya 2005: 434). Therefore, instead of a step backward toward their homeland, moving to an ethnic neighborhood could actually be a strategic move forward.

Another aspect often neglected when considering these ethnic neighborhoods is the fact that, at the time when Alfau was writing, it was very rare to find a neighborhood made up of immigrants from only one country. Even in the neighborhoods composed mainly of immigrants, there was a constant mixing of ethnicities that did not allow for a ghetto mentality to take hold.

Susan F. Martin explains the impact of these mixed communities:

Although most immigrants lived in concentrated communities, they were not necessarily segregated in ethnic ghettos. Many immigrants lived in pan-immigrant communities, in neighborhoods in which immigrants from different language origins lived in close proximity. In

these neighborhoods, English generally became the common language, necessitating the more rapid acquisition of the host language (Martin 2011: 118).

Surprisingly, the mix within these ethnic neighborhoods would create an even greater need for English, as immigrants would need to interact with speakers of other languages in their daily routines. Current day New York has seen more segregation of these ethnic neighborhoods along with the creation of Chinatown, Little Italy and countless others, but originally the organization was much more chaotic, perhaps to the benefit of those earlier immigrants (Dávila 2004: 33).

Another positive characteristic of the ethnic neighborhoods that is extremely relevant to the novel *Chromos* is the fact that these ethnic neighborhoods would become the engine for Third Space creativity. The neighborhood would create an audience for authors, script writers, musicians and actors that would otherwise have no place to perform. Since there was still only minute interest in “the Other” as a source of entertainment, there was little hope of gaining any fame outside the Third Space. However, several different areas of the city, be they the Puerto Rican neighborhood, “El Barrio,” East Harlem or the Lower East Side, all provided space for these artists to play, write and act (Dávila 2004: 86-7). Even more so, the mixing of cultures within these neighborhoods allowed for opportunities for these artists to mix, creating “multiracial, multicultural, multidiscipline artists” (Dávila 2004: 87). This would take place in several different ways, one of which being through societies formed for such purposes, which became especially popular at the turn of the twentieth century (Weil 2007: 167). Another form of creating and sharing was through the international cafés, for example, “The Nuyorican Poets Café” (Dávila 2004: 88). Therefore, as one author states, “Despite the problems of inner-city ethnic neighborhoods, they usually nourished a rich cultural life, generating exciting fusions of ethnic and American music, theater, literature, and art” (Bayor 1978: 143). This historical context is very helpful for understanding several scenes from the novel *Chromos*, where this

cultural exchange is taking place in bars and theaters. It also reflects, once again, these ethnic neighborhoods as the Third Space, as these creative projects were the beginning of forming a hybrid voice for those inhabiting the Third Space.

While there are many positive aspects of these ethnic neighborhoods, in order to give an accurate representation of life in these communities one must also address the negative. Therefore, while some would find the ethnic neighborhood further motivation to learn English, others state that the exact opposite would occur, in that the immigrants would only interact with those who could speak their native language (Dinnerstein and Reimers 2003: 73). Another negative aspect could also be that the creation of the Third Space would become so complete in its services and lifestyle, that the immigrant would create a new center within the Third Space and ignore customs and behaviors of the rest of the city: “Ethnic communities can also behave as corporate entities that protect their own and treat the outside world as morally irrelevant” (Bonacich 1987: 453). This is an interesting concern, since it allows for the reciprocating behavior that postcolonial scholars have feared the movement would recreate, making a new center where the margins used to be. Other issues include competition within the immigrant sector and even oppression from those who had gained more power in the immigrant world (Bonacich 1987: 453, 456, 460; Bayor 1978: 134). Therefore, the ethnic neighborhoods were a far cry from a utopian environment, with the struggles of overcrowding, competition and the dishonest opportunists looking to take advantage of new arrivals.

Another opinion on these neighborhoods worth considering is that of those whose job was to critique these spaces at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. If the nativists were afraid and taught others to fear the immigrant, then one can only imagine their reaction to the establishment of entire neighborhoods of immigrants, who would eventually gain power in social reform and

politics. Therefore, these neighborhoods were not without their enemies, a main one, of course, being the nativists (Pencak, Berrol and Miller 1991: 83). They feared, as stated earlier, that these communities would see no need to learn English, and would ruin the national unity achieved through a common language (Dinnerstein, Nichols and Reimers 2003: 83). One theorist described the sentiments of the outsiders toward these ethnic neighborhoods as one would behold the Trojan Horse: curious to see what lurks beneath, yet afraid of the destruction it would hold. Others would slowly become concerned over the living conditions, and would bring back reports of over twenty people living in the same one-bedroom apartment, or the lack of sanitary systems in place. Soon cause for concern would raise awareness of the need for government intervention (Plunz 1990: 210).

#### **1.3.3.1 Example of the Lower East Side**

Over the years when immigration was the strongest, several patterns and trends became evident as immigrants followed the same steps in adapting to their new lives in the United States. These trends are especially clear when considering cities such as New York, where immigrants tended to establish themselves. The first trend was a natural gathering of immigrants on the Lower East Side, close enough to the city for the laborers, yet where housing prices were low enough for the immigrants to afford (Abu-Lughod 2007: 135). Even though the Lower East Side could have been considered a ghetto, it was not isolated in the way one would think of when considering a ghetto. First, the inhabitants were extremely diverse: Ronald H. Bayor describes it as “The Lower East Side of New York City, the densest urban neighborhood of the world” (Bayor 1978: 142). The other reason why it could not be isolated was because it was necessarily tied to other parts of the city, requiring immigrants to leave the Lower East Side in search of work or other daily necessities (Margolies 2008: 35). This was also the specific location where the first

government-funded housing was constructed (Plunz 1990: 210). Thus it became infamous not only for the mixing of different immigrant groups within a relatively small area of New York, but also because of the bad living conditions associated with it (Foner 2000: 36). The lower housing prices meant little space left for parks or public places, and families, in an attempt to save money, would cram as many people as possible into the tiny apartments. Just as those who critiqued these ethnic neighborhoods had argued, the sanitary dangers were high, as many of the immigrants had come from villages or rural areas and were unaccustomed to city living. These conditions will be important to keep in mind since much of the novel *Chromos* takes place on the Lower East Side.

### **1.3.3.2 Example of Latinos**

As previously stated, one of the best examples when considering “the Other” in the United States is from the example of the Latinos. The Latinos’ reaction to this “othering” has become one of the most predominant attempts to create a Third Space in the United States. At first glance, there is already a sense of resistance, since society has given these people the name “Hispanics,” while they have chosen a different name for themselves: Latinos. Again, New York City is the perfect backdrop for discussing how this group has searched out a Third Space, since New York has been recognized as the most “pan-Latino city” in the United States (Flores 2000: 142). More Latino authors are speaking out about forging their own liminal identity: “The persistent expansion of the Latino social movements are most prominent as a cultural imaginary, a still emergent space or ‘community’ of memory and desire” (Flores 2000: 202). The word “imaginary” reminds us of the unnatural unity the United States has attempted to create out of this extremely varied population. At the same time, the perspective in this passage suggests that this group has yet to attain an authentic existence and a space to claim as their own. Another

author references the example of the famous Puerto Rican “El Barrio” in New York, yet even this space is created out of difference, as one author explains in his description of this particular neighborhood: “Assertions of identity, as the very junction of culture and space, are never free of contradictions” (Dávila 2004: 66). This new voice of the Latinos of New York reveals the tension and struggle of these spaces at the crossroads of different nations or identities.

### **1.3.4 Difference among Immigrants**

One final point that must be made in relating the New York immigrant experience to the Third Space is simply the difference found in experiences among immigrants to New York City.

While this point perhaps appears unnecessary at first glance, allowing for these differences and sharing the knowledge of them as actual differences that are not based on stereotypes, creates a Third Space. Objectively speaking, one of the differences has developed based on education, as Portes and Rumbaut have explained: “The more educated, proficient in English, and informed immigrants are, the more critical their views and the greater their perceptions of discrimination” (Portes and Rumbaut 2006: 169). Therefore, educated immigrants have the advantage of receiving more career opportunities, but they also perceive the process of “othering” more deeply, creating an internal struggle to which other immigrants are oblivious. On an emotional level as well, the Third Space allows immigrants to differ from one another, granting each one the right to see their individual circumstances and the situation around them through unique eyes. Something as basic as individual opinion has been lost when considering “the immigrant perspective,” forgetting that human experience is always unique and different. Edward Margolies uses an example of this from the context of New York City, as he explains:

Some loved the city’s vitality, some feared the anomie; many had mixed feelings and moved away. Each felt intensely. Nor were they so different from the Spanish poet Garcia Lorca or the Dutch artist Piet Mondrian. One trembled at the city’s menace, the other projected bright happy complex patterns he called *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (Margolies 2008: 5).

Another idea that has emerged in considering difference among immigrants has been the idea of “segmented assimilation,” meaning that immigrants consciously choose which areas of their lives to adapt to the new culture and which areas to preserve as they were in the old culture (Portes and Rumbaut 2001: 45). This again opens up the idea of the immigrant to personal preferences, personalities and difference, and the Third Space offers a way for the immigrant to have unique desires, questions, or feelings.

These varying experiences, or varying forms of experiencing immigration, allow for the creation of the Third Space, as long as they are permitted to remain differences and not reduced yet again to fixity and homogenous units. As Teresa McKenna states:

Yet a critical sensibility that deals with cultural hybridity as a resource puts into play other terms of analysis that point to the enabling complexities of our cultural multiplicities and reestablishes a self-critical moment in which we regain the richness and cultural resources that have been denied through the urge to reduce, to make common (1997: 130).

Another author, Ben Railton, emphasizes this same concept, stating that: “Cross-cultural transformation is always dynamic, always renders untenable any fixed, absolute sense of America’s culture or cultures as wholly distinct or static entities” (Railton 2011: 10). The importance again, is to allow the definitions of culture and society at large to remain elastic and malleable, never reduced to statutes or laws.

## **2 The Americaniard**

In turning from the historical and theoretical context of New York City during the first half of the twentieth century to the novel *Chromos* itself, the first concept to discuss is the Americaniard. As stated at the beginning of the chapter, Alfau portrays the Third Space through many different aspects of the narrative, including language, use of stereotypes, and space itself. Perhaps the most obvious of all of these areas is his creation of the word Americaniard, used to describe those Spaniards who find themselves living in the United States, and as he will clarify,

more specifically living in New York City. As a general rule, the descriptions in the novel of these characters are negative, focusing on the inadequacies and frailty of such individuals. The following section will first examine the description of the Americaniard as presented in the novel, then will follow with a few examples of characters spelled out in the text as being representative of these Americaniards.

## **2.1 Descriptions of the Americaniards**

The first of these passages describing the Americaniard focuses on his frailty. It is important to note that the idea of the Americaniard comes in the text through the character Don Pedro, more commonly referred to as the Moor, representing the conservative traditional Spain, in contrast with Dr. de los Rios. The latter, representing the liberal, progressive Spain, disdains Don Pedro's idea of the Americaniard. In the Americaniard's first appearance, Don Pedro impersonates his creation, as the narrator explains: "He held and shook before us like a marionette his straw man: the 'Americaniard'" (1990: 13). Clearly, several different references are at work through this portrayal. First, the Americaniard is a puppet, controlled by masters beyond his reach or intellect to usurp, the same position in which an immigrant finds himself upon arriving in a new country. He is also portrayed as being made of straw, as in lacking in strength and agility. This can easily be transferred to the position of the immigrant who may be lacking the skills, the education or even simply the know-how to progress in the new world.

The second passage concerning the Americaniard shows the narrator—the elusive "Alfau," neither embodying author nor solely narrator—explaining the implications of this invention from Don Pedro. He states: "It implied a certain attitude and behavior of the emigrant, incapable of standing up under the pressure of a majority, and referred more to physical and spiritual deportment than to a condition. Knowing the Moor as I imagined I did, I don't think

that it was flattering” (1990: 13). Therefore, while from the dialogue in the text one could assume that the references to weakness or frailty refer only to the physical condition of being new to a foreign land, this addition from the narrator takes the concept to a much more philosophical level, beginning with the use of the word “majority.” By including this word, the theory of the Third Space comes to the front of one’s mind, allowing one to see that this Americaniard is the individual that has been “othered” by the majority, in this case, the supposed “natives” of the new land. Also, referencing “physical and spiritual deportment” works well with the issue of identity within the Third Space since, as already seen in the previous chapter, immigration is not simply a “condition” but an actual altering of identity, uprooting the foundations most individuals take for granted in their formation, being the concepts of home, family, and nation. Therefore, the deportment is of the entire being, as the immigrant must reinvent his identity in the new land. Joseph Scott, in his discussion of the Americaniards, fails to recognize the hybridity that is central to these characters; instead, he sees them as resisting any sort of adaptation to the new land, as he states: “Alfau’s characters attempt to maintain their own Spanish identity, which they characterize as racially separate from that of Anglo-Americans” (2005: 44). Indeed, to view the Americaniards in this fashion is to miss the hybridity so central to the argument of the novel that it defines the very name of its protagonists.

The critique of the Americaniard continues as Don Pedro’s description expands to other areas, including that of assimilation. He goes on to state: “He is a queer bird, the Americaniard; yes sir, very queer— while adaptability was a natural virtue, he overdoes it to the point of being chameleonic, but the expert eye can detect— and what an ape” (1990: 13). Here the polemical issue of adaptation is addressed head on. In fact, it is not only addressed, but challenged, stating that it is justifiable to adapt to one’s surrounding, but that the Americaniards take the idea too far,

only to make a fool of themselves. This is an interesting reflection on the ideas of assimilation previously discussed, as if to say that assimilation is possible, but those who undergo such dramatic changes in order to assimilate resemble an ape mimicking the actions of a human with the hope of being rewarded for good behavior. When seen in that light, this is the first in a series of critiques on American immigration policies; only in this case, the purpose is not to change the powers that created these trends, but to shame those Americaniards who have succumbed so easily to manipulation.

As an extension of this definition of the Americaniard, Don Pedro then turns to the concept of superiority. He paints a picture of an individual who has lost all clout and position of respect, having been reduced to the lowest rung on the ladder in his new land. He states:

He is a beaten individual with delusions of mediocrity whose defeat has gone to his head and he has no match when playing the ingratiating role of repentant foreigner- He is unique, this Americaniard. He learns to be good-naturedly patronizing toward animals, minorities and foreigners in general, provided they are not his countrymen; speaks of cooperation, and dispensing advice freely to anyone who wants it or not fills him with overflowing well-being and kindly superiority (1990: 13).

The immigrant tries to regain any ounce of self-respect by “patronizing” those who he finds still, perhaps, below him. This attitude reflects the positive and negative aspects previously mentioned when considering ethnic neighborhoods. The positive tone of the passage reflects the desire to be in a position of authority and actually help someone “lower” than oneself, creating the system of support that is an asset to these ethnic neighborhoods, however, at the same time, the competition this sort of attitude creates is one of the negative aspects of these ethnic neighborhoods, hinted at in the text through the exaggeration of the positive attributes as well as the irony of such phrases as “kindly superiority.”

As one final perspective on this description of the Americaniard, Alfau intentionally includes several images that have become representative of important literary movements. The

first comes soon after the reference to superiority: “I tell you— the Pharisee. Trying to run away from himself, he is always running into mirrors and endeavoring to make the best of his imagined prison. Doesn’t know what it’s all about—” (1990: 14). First, Alfau uses the image of the mirror, which would become representative of several different literary movements, some of which include Valle-Inclán’s *esperpento* literature, Magic Realism or even Postmodernism. The second image of the prison could perhaps be associated with Modernism, fitting well with the search for an exit to impossible situations. Fascinatingly, this prison in which the Americaniards are trapped is described as imagined, reminding us of Anderson’s theory of the nation as an imagined community. In the next passage, closely following the one just mentioned, the images continue:

But is this the new conquest of the Americas, by the Americas and for the Americas? This mutual transcontinental, translinguistic, transracial osmosis? If so, it is a far cry from the conquistadores to these frightened hybrids, from those who knocked down the door of a new world, to those who knock at the door of a richer world, and the majority of which are lost in a subterranean labyrinth, like slaves in a mine, to trade their machete for a dishrag, or if more fortunate, though less radical, to transform and adjust their guitar and castanets asymptotically to the afrodisiac rattle of the maracas. It is a far, heartrending cry from those Spaniards to these Americaniards (1990: 16).

Again, the reader is confronted with an onslaught of words that would become representative of several different literary movements, only Alfau was writing before any of this came to pass: to separate them into categories one would chronologically begin with postcolonial, with words like “transcontinental,” “translinguistic,” and “transracial,” only to be followed with perhaps the most typified word of the movement, “hybrid.” After these references, he then continues with the mention of “conquest,” “slavery,” or the “new world,” reminding one of Colonialism.

As for references to other movements, the word “labyrinth” is one of the key words for both Magic Realism and Postmodernism. Indeed, Gregory Rabassa has already compared Alfau to Gabriel García Márquez, the cornerstone of Magic Realism, especially in reference to his use

of language (1993: 224). Yet another reviewer, Jack Shreve, seconds this opinion by claiming that Alfau “anticipates the magic realism of modern Latin American fiction” (1990: 81).

Therefore, there is more behind the claim that Alfau’s work contains Magic Realist tendencies than a simple “stereotypical cultural assumption,” as Joseph Scott has claimed, ironically concluding, “(all writers who are native Spanish-speakers write magic realism, don’t they?)” (2005: 12), since the labyrinth becomes a recurring theme throughout Alfau’s work, as well as other key elements that point to Magic Realism which will be discussed later. On the whole, these references to different literary theories are important to note, as they help us locate Alfau within the literary world, reaffirming that he was, indeed, addressing themes in literature that his contemporaries had not yet considered. Even the invention of the word “Americaniard” goes against the trends of immigration literature at the time, not only recognizing the state of in-between, but searching for an identity that represents hybridity as well.

### **3 Examples of Americaniards**

#### **3.1 Characters out of Stereotypes**

Through the use of a metanarrative structure framing the novel, the author emphasizes that these characters, the Americaniards, are types being played out to the extreme. Alfau even wanted to add “A parody” as a subtitle to *Chromos*, again accentuating this intentional use of stereotypes.

Joseph Coates has also referenced his purposeful exaggeration of type characters: “Alfau’s characters, I contend, are in fact largely a bundle of *assumed* or put-on characteristics” (1998: 279, emphasis in the text). In the novel, Alfau communicates this to the reader through the image of chromos, taken from an old Spanish calendar:

Some of the old calendar chromos still clung to them: one showing a man with calañes and a short jacket serenading a young lady with high comb and very black, mournful eyes at a window with bars and profusely surrounded by flowers; another was a chapel with a recumbent bullfighter dying on a couch with a beshawled woman, her head buried in his bloody chest and all around the austere, stoic, classical countenances of the loyal members of his cuadrilla and a tearful old lady

staring her reproach at the altar and the eternal old priest withholding discreetly his understanding and faith and soothing blessing, but attentive to the duties of his office in performing the last rites; chromos that had once been brilliantly bursting with color and drama, but were now faded and desecrated by fly stains; chromos in disrepute (1990: 21).

Through these images, the reader receives two separate messages: the first is a description of traditional Spanish characters, intentionally melodramatic, or, as Alfau will call it, *cursi*. The second message comes in the last part of the passage, focusing on the weather-worn condition of these images, “chromos in disrepute,” a reflection of the Americaniard condition in which the traditional Spaniard in each one of the characters has become warped and faded, lacking in color and not well preserved. As the scene continues, the description of these chromos takes on an aspect of the grotesque as insects come out of the chromos:

They ran up the walls, over and under the chromos which in the uncertain light of the match seemed to oscillate painfully, to grow dolefully animated and gather the deceptive depth of a reverie, reaching for the cracks, the shadows in the walls as if to pull them like a shroud over their shame, to resume their disturbed sleep, and as the walls seemed to recede, the shadows running through them like waves, merged with the pictures to form a confused tapestry depicting people and scenes that came to life, but more like things remembered or imagined, because the walls were no longer there (1990: 22).

Again, the last part of the text puts emphasis on the fact that these traditional characters from Spain no longer exist, and they are now only nostalgic or even grotesque versions of what once was. The insects themselves remind the reader of the Americaniards living in the shadows, shamed and dreaming away their lives.

The idea of type characters re-emerges later in the narrative as “Alfau” edits Garcia’s manuscripts. While there is a heavy use of irony in these passages, they reveal some of the author’s technique in writing about these Americaniards. The first mention of type characters comes as “Alfau” critiques a section of the manuscript: “It was a standard description that could have fitted any other contemporary youths. I told Garcia this but he stated that generalization of characters, making them universal, was one of the acknowledged virtues of great literature” (1990: 205). This passage could be read as Alfau the author defending his own work in *Chromos*,

for he himself uses an array of type-cast characters which could be interpreted as repetitive generalizations; thus his use of satire in this section on Garcia's characters forces the reader to interpret Alfau's typed characters as ironic. The same critique of Garcia's work continues as "Alfau" reads his manuscripts in fragments throughout the narrative, critiquing as he goes, as in this instance: "This has been done by masters of the trade and Garcia had taken in every stock situation with amazing powers of retention, but he had not put things together right and had used extraordinary discernment in not adding one single touch of originality" (1990: 228). The mention of originality could be Alfau indirectly creating a defense of his own work by contrast, since the premise of his work in *Chromos* is to take stereotypical characters and warp them in order to achieve an original criticism of the Americaniards.

Finally, at the end of the novel, as the metanarrative enfolds itself around the plot, the chromos come back to the foreground. Alfau uses the same marker of the dimmed light, this time by candle and not by a match, and the scene returns to the same images:

Sitting there next to Dr. de los Rios, I felt confidently safe and looked at the surroundings in the candlelight and, considering the other things I had seen from the heights in the light of day and in the lights of night and the other things I had remembered or imagined in the depths by the light of a match turned into an Aladdin's lamp, decided that I could do nothing about it. I had seen only a kaleidoscope of fancies materialized by forgotten chromos, dirty, discolored chromos. This is what the possible visions of greatness suggested by the conquistadores had finally come to: rhapsodic, nomadic incidents with hanging tarnished threads of past splendor out of time and out of place. *Chromos in disrepute* (1990: 348).

This time the chromos are not simply described as they were before. As if Alfau were creating the thesis statement for his novel, coming back around to it at the conclusion, this time he states more clearly what his purpose has been in his representation of these Americaniards, these "chromos in disrepute": to show the true condition of the Spanish immigrant, focusing much more on his inward condition than the simple physical changes. The final remarks of the

narrative focus on the very question of purpose and meaning behind his critique of these individuals:

But were those things from other times and other places really as great as they seemed now? Contrary to space, time increases the proportions of such events, but like the enlargement of a picture, what they gain in size, they lose in sharpness until they are so vague as to seem boundless. In either case it was for someone else to bring back their true colors, to integrate and then exhibit them in the primitive and complete equation of their significance, a job for a pen much better than mine, which is rusty, not so much for lack of use but because it is no feather from a soaring wing, work for a pen mightier than the swords of those same conquerors, to span the years and distances, to elucidate the vaster meaning of these things and in the longer view of history, from the heights of the present, to decide whether my ancestors were but immigrants disguised as conquerors, or whether all other aliens are but conquerors disguised as immigrants (1990: 348).

The first part of the passage reflects the nostalgia often associated with the Third Space, connecting itself to the inaccuracy of memory, of being incapable of retrieving events or places as they actually were, without the interference of time and space. The second part of the passage refers to a desire for restoration for these immigrants, who have lost the fundamental pillars of their identity. Alfau here seems to suggest that the best way for these Americaniards to regain identity would be to return to a primitive state, a theory popular among some postcolonial authors who believe that going back to the version of “self” before colonization cleanses oneself of its negative effects (Boehmer 2005: 121). In the final section of the passage the author contemplates the significance of these immigrants and their lost lives, coming to the conclusion that they could indeed be unlikely “conquerors,” an idea which aligns with Third Space theory since some scholars believe that those inhabiting the Third Space offer invaluable insight into identity and meaning. To offer a different perspective, Joseph Scott has claimed that Alfau’s work opposes the individual identity to a collective identity, thereby revealing that his work aligns itself with Modernism; however, I would claim that Alfau’s intentions are to break down the idea of a fixed identity entirely, whether it be individual or collective, and he achieves this through his hybridity seeking Americaniards (2005: 14).

## 3.2 Painting a Picture of Americaniards through Stereotypes

### 3.2.1 Playful Stereotyping

Moving from the metanarrative to the actual plot of the novel, Alfau presents the reader with several type characters in various scenes as representations of these Americaniards. Before moving to the three main characters in the novel that he chooses to represent these immigrants, first there are several smaller stereotypical moments that need to be addressed. In keeping with the postmodern, chaotic style of the text, many of the stereotypes portrayed as representing Spain are arbitrary equivocated statements that could either be true of all humankind, or have no significance whatsoever. This is even stated explicitly in the text, as Don Pedro and Dr. de los Rios argue:

Don Pedro stopped eating just long enough to say: "If you continue along that line, you will soon be talking like the green man. Look, you have only been a few months in this country. You still don't speak or understand the language and cannot even read the newspapers, but already you know what is wrong and what is right with the whole country. A lifetime is not enough to understand a country, or anything for that matter." He spoke to de los Rios: "I tell you, these Spaniards are ineffable. One glance at a situation and they know all about it." Dr. de los Rios was temporizing as usual: "That is not an exclusive Spanish trait. You can hear most people, when they are in the mood, not only finding what's right or wrong with a country, but with life itself" (1990: 137).

By having one of the characters be conscious of this tendency to stereotype, yet surrounding this character with a narrative abounding in generalizations, Alfau provides yet another clue indicating that these invented stereotypes are intentional and even more so, essential to the satirical style of the novel. An example of exaggerated and unrealistic stereotyping emerges when discussing habits and the American culture: "we commented on how in Spain we are never as conscious of Saturdays as they are in this country, but we did not go into the reasons for that" (1990: 50). There is a possibility that this statement could be true, in reference to the work ethic associated with New York City, the multi-cultural religious differences in the city, or the

importance of sporting events, but it seems more likely that this is a comment on generalizations themselves than on American culture. Another such statement comes from “Alfau” upon reading Garcia’s manuscript; as he is disgusted by the low-brow *cursi* style, he states, “Only a Spaniard could have written that” (1990: 300). It seems that amidst Alfau’s representation of several Spanish stereotypes in the text, he enjoys throwing in a few irrelevant generalizations to keep the tone light and to keep the reader aware of his purposeful use of generalizations to critique the concept of stereotyping as a whole. I would even say that these irrelevant stereotypes further what María DeGuzmán has claimed about Alfau’s critique of generalizations: “Central to this concept of hybridity are mimicry, mockery, or parodic replication of the structures and discourses of power” (2005: 284). Through his pasquinade on stereotypes, Alfau reveals the fallacies of such statements.

The next category of stereotypes moves closer to Alfau’s critique of the Americaniard, but still has a playful touch, since these stereotypes seem more realistic and even might have some truth to them, but they are equally as irrelevant as the prior group. For example, in one scene “Alfau” describes Garcia at work at his manuscript: “I handed him his drink and he took a sip absently, set it down on the desk and promptly forgot all about it. This was the old Garcia. He was drinking again like a Spaniard” (1990: 199). The comment has no weight or ulterior motive behind it, but rings true of Spanish culture and the protocol of *sobremesa*, after-dinner conversation. Another playful stereotype comes during the musical performance at *El Telescopio*, as Don Pedro reprimands:

“Go back to your chores.” Don Pedro commanded. “And don’t interrupt the dramatic moment. Don’t you know yet that Spaniards cannot get together without a tragic, heart-rending situation appearing like a rabbit out of a hat? Leave them alone, let the scene play itself. This is typical” (1990: 327).

Again, the stereotype being presented is not one that creates a critique of society, yet it could be representative of Spanish culture, portraying the exaggerated drama associated with Spanish performing arts.

Another lighter and less direct form of representing the stereotypes of Americaniards is through the descriptions of Spanish music, which Alfau portrays as representations of the culture itself. This use of music as a symbol of something much deeper seems very appropriate since Alfau was a musician and an aficionado of music in general, even, as previously mentioned, writing music reviews at one point. The first text referencing music as being transcendent comes from inside Garcia's manuscript:

The gay, mocking music had all the vim and spark of Spanish roguery. It moved at a quick pace, it glorified the Ratas, the pickpockets of Madrid who guide all laws and amuse the public. In that dance of the pickpockets lived the ever-seditious Spanish race. It was broad, fast, accurate, fearless, bold, indifferent, but underneath it concealed a torrent of melancholy, of cynical bitterness. It brought back the tradition of Gines de Pasamonte, scoffing Don Quixote's ideals; of Rinconete and Cortadillo aging prematurely in the poisoned shadow of the Patio de Monipodio; of the Lazarillo de Tormes, born with a wisdom which defies life and outwits age and experience. Listening to the "Jota de los Ratas," pompous and sad, brilliant, shady, straightforward and crooked, one could see the magnificent gallery of Spanish rogues parade in all its glory, pass by in all its wretchedness and fade away in all its sinful earnestness into that ever-thirsty, inevitable maelstrom of forgetfulness that keeps on swallowing every typical and worthwhile manifestation of Spanish life (1990: 59-60).

The first important stipulation is the fact that this text, while fitting with the narrative in general, is embedded in Garcia's manuscript, since Alfau uses this manuscript repeatedly in the novel to express ideas that he wishes to distance himself from, or perhaps more extravagant ideas that he purposefully exaggerates. In this passage, music conjures up images of literature, culture, and finally of "Spanish life" itself. Therefore, music is portrayed as a way of being transported from one country to another. As the novel progresses, more moments depict music as a representation of society, and toward the end of the novel, in this case, outside of the manuscript, this idea is purported:

It is for this reason very likely that a Spaniard, no matter how musical, cannot listen to his music critically and consider it simply as music. With him it is involved with traditional recollections which transcend the individual and constitute an inherited memory, creating a response which, more than personal, is racial and atavistic (1990: 312).

Again, music is a representation of life, and is closely tied to memory, not just of the music itself, but of the culture associated with that music. Alfau also seems to be stating that music makes up part of the national narrative, especially when he states that the “traditional recollections which transcend the individual” create a group collective memory of the events of its culture.

One final lighter representation through stereotypes that exists throughout the narrative is the idea of public image, in Spanish known as “el qué dirán,” in English, “what will they say?” a way of expressing concern about one’s reputation. This idea has been a traditional Spanish characteristic portrayed in literature from Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1605) to the present. The first time it appears in this novel is through the character Garcia as he confronts the death of his mistress with his Spanish friends at the scene:

Garcia stood like a swaying stone pillar. Here was the woman of whom he had been ashamed and there probably was a futile and sad attempt to control his emotions. I am sure that if he had been alone with the two men, it would have been easier for him, but we were there, his friends, Spanish, creating a self-imposed conflict of loyalties and inevitable embarrassment (1990: 121).

The idea that Garcia would wish to remain intact and in control in front of his friends but not in front of strangers reflects this idea of maintaining public appearances. The words “self-imposed conflict” expresses that this idea of public image was something that Garcia carried inside of him, as part of the make-up of his character.

A further example of this importance of public appearance for the Americaniard comes from the story of Don Hilarión, who, both in life and death, wished to be known as a respectable man even though he was an immigrant. Interestingly, this story is supposedly narrated by “Alfau” and not by Garcia, removing the distance from the ideas expressed. Throughout the beginning of the story, the narrator repetitively uses the word “important” in relation to Don

Hilarión's job, status, and family. Being unemployed, his daily activities still reflect this appearance of importance: "He had set up one of his rooms as an office, with all his law books, solid cabinets, large imposing desk and heavy chairs [...] and Don Hilarión sat there all day, reading newspapers from Spain, and it made him feel like a very busy man" (1990: 174). Even such small details as the furniture in the room is described as important and weighted. After his death, the story takes a turn to the grotesque as the family tries to maintain his public appearance of importance by having him stuffed by an undertaker: "Don Hilarión was sitting at this desk, in typical pose, pen in hand resting on a sheet of foolscap, his gold-rimmed spectacles balanced on his nose. There was even a frown clouding his noble brow as if it were laden with the problems and responsibilities of justice" (1990: 185). The novel portrays this stereotype of "el qué dirán" in such a way that it reveals the criticism toward this aspect of Spanish society, both through humor and the grotesque, putting emphasis on the need of feeling important as a particularly Spanish characteristic, and showing the repercussions of continuing to cling to this idea when immigrating to the United States.

### **3.2.2 Americaniardi Typed Characters**

While there are countless elements of stereotyping throughout the novel, the three main characters that are "types" in the novel are Garcia, Don Pedro and Dr. de los Rios. The first one to be addressed here will be Garcia, simply because in this novel he does not play as predominant a role as the other two characters, which thus require a deeper analysis. Garcia's role in this novel portrays the Americaniardi artist, struggling to embark on a career, but finding himself cut off at every side. When he attempts to publish, the American publishers always reject him, and he must turn to the Latin American publishers in order to earn a living. He is always on the brink of destitution, revealed in the plot as he constantly asks for favors: "During

his absences from the landlady, he stayed either with Dr. de los Rios or Don Pedro Guzman in brilliant and luxurious surroundings, or with me who only disposed of a room with an extra cot” (1990: 73). Garcia also experiences many of the struggles associated with writers from the Third Space who must decide what language to write in, who their audience might be, or even which country to write about. Garcia’s friends laugh at his endeavors, as his projects are always futile and lacking in any realistic hope of being published. Therefore, while this is not the same Garcia found in *Locos*, in which Garcia embodied one of the two Spains, in this novel he represents the struggling immigrant artist. His literary attempts are constantly contrasted with those of “Alfau,” yet another immigrant author, however “Alfau’s” more realist and satirical perspective is always given the upper hand, while the romantic Garcia is consistently treated with condescension. The autobiographical ties evident in Garcia and “Alfau” must also be addressed, since Alfau found himself in the same predicament, struggling to write as an immigrant in New York City and with little success. So there exists the possibility that the conversations between “Alfau” and Garcia reveal the sort of dialogue one could imagine as being an internal dialogue as the author Alfau confronts both his satirical and romantic sides while he strives for literary success in a new world.

The other two characters, Don Pedro and Dr. de los Rios, are the strongest-typed characters in the narrative, each one representing one of the two Spains. Don Pedro is original to the novel *Chromos*, as Alfau has apparently exchanged Garcia from the novel *Locos* for Don Pedro in *Chromos* as representing the traditional Spain. This is a fascinating change, since the first novel was written prior to the Spanish Civil War, and the second was written in the 1940s, almost a decade after it ended. The drastic differences between the character Garcia from *Locos* and Don Pedro from *Chromos* deserve further discussion. In *Locos*, Garcia represents the

delusional dreamer, obsessed with Romanticism and especially spring, who dedicates himself to working as little as possible. Alfau portrays Don Pedro in quite a different light, as he is even called the devil at several different points in the novel, and his powers of manipulation are uncanny. He is still associated with literature, but in driving people to write when perhaps they could devote themselves to loftier projects, as if writing were a negative thing. This drastic change in characters could be related to Alfau's own political leanings, since he was blatantly fascist before, during and long after the Civil War. Perhaps Alfau felt that this traditional, less-educated and more sentimental side of Spain had brought on something as irrational as a Civil War, wreaking mayhem on the nation itself and therefore deserving a character more capable of the destruction brought about by the Civil War. If this rejection of the traditional Spain by Alfau through the novel is accurate, this creates some confusion as to Alfau's beliefs, since he was pro-Franco for his entire adult life. One can only assume that the distanced and removed Alfau did not associate Franco with this traditional and sentimental side of the two Spains, since he would be of the belief, as a conservative, that Franco represented for Spain advancement and modernity, though perhaps not so early as the 1940s.

In *Locos*, Alfau separates the two characters that represent the two Spains in the text and describes them independently. However, this all changes in the novel *Chromos*, in which most of the references to these two characters come from the sparring that takes place between the two, perhaps another indirect reference to the Spanish Civil War. At the beginning of the novel, having first introduced the plot, the narrator pauses to explain to the reader what exactly the two characters represent:

They were very different, these two men, and they represented two fundamental types of Spaniards. It has been said many times that Cervantes portrayed the two main types of Spaniards with Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, but speaking in the manner of de los Rios, one ventures to believe that this is somewhat specious because one can find two such main types in any other country and they really divide humanity into two classes, which fact possibly constitutes their

greatness, but in the case of these two contemporary men, the division was part of the national history and structure. It was ethnological and racial within the same country, one showing the Visigoth and the other Moorish influences (1990: 11).

This being the text that leads off to all the interactions between Don Pedro and Dr. de los Rios, the first conclusion one can draw is that Alfau was perfectly aware of the literary tradition he was following, going all the way back to Cervantes, and that he was doing so with the intent of critique, especially of the traditional Spain. Also, by referencing “national history and structure” he seems to be referencing the subjection of the traditional Spain, in other words, the Sancho Panzas of the country, to the secular and educated of the progressive Spain, and in doing so, as is made clear by further comparisons of the two, he seems to support this subjection as a form of natural structure to society. Understanding that Alfau was an adamant fascist all his life makes this political leaning apparent in the text all the more relevant to the critique Alfau is formulating of Spain.

An original aspect of Alfau’s work within this frame of the two Spains comes from the fact that he has uprooted these two characters from their original Spanish context and has recreated them as immigrants to the United States. When seen from this perspective, one wonders at the obscurity of both of these characters, for although Dr. de los Rios is a well-known doctor, he still spends most of his time in the Lower East Side, likewise Don Pedro is not portrayed as being particularly famous outside of his circle of friends. This could possibly be a commentary on the situation of world politics at the time when Alfau was writing, since Spain’s Civil War was given little coverage as the world’s attention shifted towards Germany and Hitler’s advances. The dramatic division of Spain and even its most prominent figures slip into the background forgotten, much in the same way Dr. de los Rios and Don Pedro remain anonymous to those outside the Americanian community.

In the text, there are several passages that describe and critique Don Pedro, giving him qualities and characteristics generally related to the devil. First, his last names are an entire mix of three different cultures, the first Castilian, the next Irish and the last Moorish. This reference to Moorish roots led Joseph Coates to compare Don Pedro to el Cid, the protagonist of *Cantar de Mio Cid* (c. 1200), however, since el Cid was not Moorish himself but conquered the Moors (though he did ally with them), I find that such a parallel is not warranted (1998: vi). The narrator claims that this mixing of blood in Don Pedro “made him the most castizo Spaniard” (1990: 9), as if to say that the majority of Spaniards reflect this muddling of origins. After this initial description, Don Pedro is vilified throughout the rest of the novel:

No sooner was he gone than the dark sleeve of the Moor closed over my shoulders like the cloak of Satan, propelling me along to my doom, and he renewed his assault. I was endeavoring to think up objections and I knew there were plenty, but I was confused. Vaguely I thought that the task he proposed was well beyond my ability, that to choose representative characters from the imposing array of what he called the Americaniards and to put them on paper was as much above my head and meager stock of diligence as the building toward which we were walking, but I'd swear that the sly Moor was reading my mind. The master promoter of intellectual pranks was in full command (1990: 17-18).

The references to Satan abound in the passage, as well as the image of a manipulator or even a mind reader. In other segments, the image becomes even stronger as the narrator references Mephistopheles and Dracula (1990: 9). However, keeping in mind Alfau's ironic style, the aim of this personified devil is to make “Alfau” write about the Americaniards, and the idea of the Americaniard itself is, in fact, Don Pedro's idea. Therefore, he seems to be the villain of all things irrational and unlikely to bring about any success, yet emotionally relevant, while Dr. de los Rios is much more rational and successful. As a result, while Don Pedro is one of the central Americaniards in the novel, I cannot claim, as María DeGuzmán has done, that he is the central Americaniard, since Garcia, Dr. de los Rios and “Alfau” himself provide contrasting representations that together create a more complete picture of the hybrids (2005: 284-286).

In perfect contrast to Don Pedro, Dr. de los Rios represents all things light and wise and also religious in a sincere, not hypocritical way. This again reveals Alfau's political leanings, as he paints the liberal advancing Spain in a much better light, yet curiously he does not dissociate religious imagery from this modern Spain, perhaps again revealing his own religious and political ideals he hoped to see fulfilled in Spanish politics through Franco's regime. The images are the exact opposite of those used to describe Don Pedro, beginning with the nickname Don Pedro has given him, "Jesucristo" (1990: 14). As Dr. de los Rios urges "Alfau" to avoid writing about the Americaniards, the tone is once again religious:

Dr. de los Rios stopped short: "Let's not and stop importuning this fellow. First you frighten him with your ghosts of complications that beset us in an English-speaking environment and now..." he turned to me: "Don't sell your soul to this devil. There is still time. Don't follow him." He saw me weaker, waver, ready to succumb under the hypnotic spell of the Moor who stood there shamelessly making passes, exorcisms and incantations, right in front of the library, and then Dr. de los Rios was magnanimous: "All right; go and sin no more. But I will not sanction this with my presence. In fact, since we left that bench I have been debating whether to go in there and look up one or two things, which I have been intending to do for some time." He turned suddenly and went up the steps of the library with extraordinary lightness and agility (1990: 17).

The religious language abounds in the text, as Dr. de los Rios takes on the role of priest, convincing "Alfau" to resist temptation. Even the adjectives given to describe Dr. de los Rios show his angelic characteristics, filled with "extraordinary lightness and agility." Joseph Coates has also claimed that the character of Dr. de los Rios also contains an intertextual reference to Greek mythology: "It is Dr. de los Rios, guardian of the Styx—the river between the real world and the underworld," especially since he does, at times, prescribe death (1998: xii). It is also worth noting that Dr. de los Rios is on his way to the library, once more representing intellectual advancement. This image of Dr. de los Rios as an academic makes up an important part of him representing this educated and innovative side of Spain:

Dr. de los Rios was an old friend. I had known him since Spain where he had gained good fame as a general physician. Then he had begun to specialize in things of the nerves and the mind; he published several technical books that were very successful outside Spain; he lectured in various countries and was at present one of the leading neurologists in the world. It was such that he had

come to this country where we had resumed a friendship which to me, considering his eminent position in the world of science, was a source of great pride and an honor as undeserved as unquestioned. Through him I had met Don Pedro here, but the two of them seemed to have known each other for centuries (1990: 8-9).

This quote adds Dr. de los Rios' defining characteristics as the progressive Spain, noting his intellectual pursuits as well as his international renown, both traits traditionally associated with this progressive Spain. However, one must remember that the character Dr. de los Rios also contains a reference to Don Quixote, perhaps evident in this passage through the mention of Dr. de los Rios' studies in neurology. Therefore, as Dr. de los Rios' own absurdity and illogicality will reveal, these two characters will come to be valuable to the discussion of the postmodern in Alfau's version of the two Spains.

Moving ahead in the novel, another comparison between these two characters furthers this representation of the two Spains by accentuating once again their defining characteristics. The comparison comes when "Alfau" and Dr. de los Rios are discussing Garcia and his relationship with his mistress, and "Alfau" reflects on Dr. de los Rios' manner:

I was thinking that he was understanding. He may not have been sympathetic but he was understanding and tolerant. This was one of his marked characteristics differentiating him from Don Pedro. With the Moor one could discuss personal emotions and find him sympathetic and ready to generalize them into racial or national traits and even encourage and champion them, but one felt that acting these emotions, showing them to him, would have been a waste of time; they would have gone unheeded in his mad plunge after the explanatory and esoteric formula that would bring them into line within the vaster domain of philosophical generalization. He gave the impression of being personally not above or below emotion but outside of it. With Dr. de los Rios, one was aware of the Spanish characteristic which precludes intimate personal discussions, to which he seemed unresponsive, indifferent, distracted, and he even discouraged and shrugged away any rhetorical confessions or sentimental theorizing, but one felt that one could break down before him and give way to one's feelings as one would in the embrace of a father. With the Moor, one could discuss oneself [sic]. With Dr. de los Rios, one could be oneself; but thinking it over, I am not certain which one of them was understanding and which one sympathetic. I know that neither one was both (1990: 122-123).

In this passage the narrator reveals an irrevocable personal affiliation to both of these representations of "the Two Spains." While he exalts the "new" Spain of intellectual advancement and investigation, he does not entirely disown or demonize the "old" Spain as he

sees that the sentimental or intuitive side of life is still relevant. Alfau's metaphorical intentions in passages such as this one become exceedingly clear, since both Spains are inadequate in themselves yet they are incapable of working together, just as the events of the Spanish Civil War had shown.

### **3.2.3 The Green Man**

Among the "type" characters presented in the novel, there is one character in particular that fits in the group of the Americaniards yet refuses to belong. The characters set him apart from the rest and label him "The Green Man." This character is a representation of the ideas of Americanization and assimilation that were popular at the time, as María DeGuzmán explains: "The double cast on the existence of a fixed, unitary, and distinctive Spanish identity ultimately functions to subvert sacrosanct and chauvinist notions of 'American' identity" (2005: 279). Therefore, although we have discussed how Don Pedro demeans the Americaniards and their varying degrees of nostalgia and ineptitude, the true ridicule of the text is aimed at the Green Man. Alfau's portrayal of this character is strictly negative, as he is mocked by all his peers:

"The green man. Look at him there, acting his part. There is no one like him. Don't you know him, fellows? Why he is the one who could stand nothing Spanish since he took out his first papers, and now he is back for more. Why, more American than the Americans. He was living in blissful confusion, like so many others" (1990: 131).

This total renunciation of all things Spanish coupled with the acceptance of all things American to the point of exaggeration, is the exact reaction the nativists were hoping most immigrants would have in assimilating to the United States' lifestyle. However, the novel represents the Green Man as a fake, even more confused than the rest of the Americaniards, who were hoping to obtain some kind of hybridity. This compliance with the expectations of the nativists even comes across in the dialogue, as Don Pedro continues: "He has learned everything since he left Spain and now he is properly ashamed of his past ignorance and doing his best to live it down—

the perfect example of the repentant foreigner” (1990: 132). Again, the group continues to ridicule with bitter irony this Americaniard who has bought into the ideas of assimilation.

Perhaps even more convicting are the speeches that the Green Man makes in the presence of his friends, revealing that he has been convinced by the idea that life really is better, even more advanced, when lived according to American customs. He defends himself by saying: ““No. I ate already. I believe in eating at a civilized hour and in the middle of the day only a light lunch. I, for one, watch my figure’” (1990: 134). The added adjective of “civilized” to describe American habits again reinforces the idea that this Americaniard believes that the American lifestyle is truly superior. He also leaves the group, refusing the request from the women to stay, “if only for the company,” disdaining even the community that a group like the Americaniards could offer. At the end of the novel he reappears, again trying his best to distance himself from the unassimilated Americaniards:

The green man was doing his level best to appear as if he did not belong there, which he did not. It was not that he was speaking English with the two ladies, because possibly they did not speak Spanish, but his manner, or rather, mannerisms and implied condescension and shamefaced acknowledgment of his familiarity with the atmosphere as something remembered from an assumed oppressed past and wretched childhood, intended to convey very plainly that he was slumming among reminiscences that were sweetly revolting (1990: 245).

The narrator again portrays the Green Man’s condescending manner and rejection of what was once his own culture in a negative light, allowing the reader to come to the conclusion that for Alfau, to be an Americaniard is a humbling and difficult situation, but to become a Green Man is far worse. Through the example of the Green Man, therefore, Alfau reveals that these ideas of assimilation and Americanization were indeed prevalent and popular at the time he was writing. The satire and the critique of this character, the Green Man, show an author that is not only sharing his experiences of hybridity with his audience, but who is actively participating in

resistance writing, straining against the majority's opinion of who he is and how he should write, a stance that was highly unusual at the time he was writing.

### **3.3 Comparisons to Latin Americans**

Within these descriptions of Americaniards throughout the novel, there are several comments comparing the Americaniards to immigrants coming from Latin America. From these moments in the novel, it seems that the confusion of who came from Spain and who came from Latin America could have been typical, especially since, as previously stated, historically Spaniards were often included as Hispanics in New York. The novel states that certain behaviors, such as writing literature, are typically Latin American: "Garcia's persistent enthusiasm about belles lettres is more that of a Latin American than a Spaniard" (1990: 23). Perhaps this is in reference to the surge of Latin American authors at the time Alfau was writing, however, this is most likely yet another example of his purposeful yet ironic use of stereotypes. By associating such personal and individualistic characteristics to ethnicity, Alfau is once again raising suspicions about the generalizations he makes, forcing the reader into awareness of how irrational generalizations can be and therefore raising the action of stereotyping to a conscious level.

Another comparison between Americaniards and Latin Americans is the exoticism associated with being Spanish in New York City as opposed to being Latin American. At several moments in the narrative the Spaniards question one another's true identity:

It seems that to be from Spain is quite a claim, but to come from Madrid is unbelievable. I have been doubted so much that now I say that I am a Latin American and save myself a good deal of trouble. This is something that we frequently do when abroad, so that one has the strange situation of two Spaniards posing before each other as Latin Americans and both being surprised at their accent and suspecting that after all the parents of both were gallegos. I think this is very foolish and take this opportunity to advise all my countrymen who read this to carry their passports with them at all times and thus squelch any doubts as to their nationality and if they come from Madrid, to run to the nearest consulate and there have the fact stated in bold type (1990: 10-11).

The idea of being a minority within the Spanish speakers in New York reveals another level of Third Space as the Americaniards seek to find their own identity among the Latin Americans. On a certain level, the importance of being able to claim Spanish citizenship, or even to be from Madrid, sounds similar to the competition and ranking in the immigrant world previously mentioned. To be from Spain was to be from Europe and therefore gain another level of respect from those around them. Alfau's irony also surfaces, for exactly at the moment when one would expect him to disdain this coping mechanism of claiming to be Latin American, he instead moves in the direction of the ironic, playing in the absurdity of it all by urging Americaniards to carry their passports at all times. Later in the novel, the same sentiment returns as the characters question one another's identity: "but I thought perhaps Latin American. Your accent, you know? But real Spanish, you say? Well, well; you wouldn't recognize the place anymore. So many years in this country! Practically a lifetime. Must be quite an American by now" (1990: 309). Again, the Spaniard is a minority within a minority, and perhaps even the Spanish accent has dissipated from over-interaction with Latin Americans. The passage also speaks of the loss of country, which is perhaps a subtle reference to the Spanish Civil War, or a further comment on distance and hybridity since the person claiming to be Spanish no longer even represents Spain in the way he speaks.

#### **4 "The Other" in the Novel *Chromos***

##### **4.1 The Americaniards as "the Other" in New York City**

At various moments in the novel, the Americaniards comment on the feelings of being "othered" by society. These experiences of "othering" emerge from various situations. For example, one of them comes with Garcia's attempts to be published in the United States:

His attempts at extracting a living from writing in this country, battling the set ideas, preferences and patterns of the literary world, had left him as frustrated as a woodpecker in a petrified forest. But still he wrote most of the time and occasionally sold to lesser Latin American reviews an

article invariably about New York, a short story invariably about Spain, or a poem invariably about himself (1990: 72).

The lack of success in the United States, therefore, is not because of his lack of skill as an author, but because of his status as “the Other,” apparent even in his literary style. His only success comes from “othered” groups, forming a sort of immigrant literary circle. Also of interest is the scale of personal investment involved in the three genres described: the most distant, the article, reserved for New York City, the more personal and more creative short story, for Spain, and finally, the most intimate, the poetry, about himself. Another moment reveals the Americaniards as “the Other” in New York City when a native New Yorker excitedly exclaims at the café: ““That must be a Spanish gesture. Is it a Spanish gesture? I have seen him do it all the time and have also seen other Spaniards do it. I’ll bet it is a Spanish gesture”” (1990: 316). Associating behavior with a group and stating that the behavior must necessarily be culturally based is usually a sign that the “natives” expect this group to act in a set way. The group has lost the freedom to respond as individuals.

In an interesting twist to the “othering” of the Americaniards in the novel, Don Pedro insists that the situation of the Spaniard is special, given the history of the United States:

But what makes the case of the Spaniard especially sad and poignant is the obvious historical associations. I feel that this case must be considered very specially and that it has undeniable priority because after all they were the discoverers of this new world. This is what makes the irony so blatant and leads one to think even more soberly and with more melancholy, that one could have begun all this by parodying a famous speech by a famous North American, something like this: “Twenty-score and many years ago, my forefathers came to the Americas...,” but the rest would be very different and I invite the reader to collaborate, to frame in his mind and consider carefully what might follow; the motives and the ends; one springing from idealism, risking- and perhaps succumbing to-disillusionment: “... whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure”- the other running from fate or destiny and doomed to bitter realization (1990: 16-17).

This reflection on the loss of the colonies reminds the reader of *La generación del 98*, whose writing often contained the themes of loss and nostalgia for the times when Spain was a world leader. These Spaniards living in New York City can see themselves as exiles in a land that

perhaps could have been theirs but now they are subjected to being the immigrants living in it, according to someone else's rules. From this perspective, it is as if Alfau searches out colonial terms in which to express this conflict of identities, writing the Spaniards into the story as usurped natives.

#### **4.2 The "Othering" is Reciprocated**

As seen in the theory of the Third Space, the process of "othering" often becomes reciprocated as the foreigners in turn fixate and fear the natives, expecting and only allowing them to act in a specific way. This type of behavior is seen in the novel as the Americanians respond to their "Other" when they interact with Americans in New York City. One of the best examples of this is when Garcia encounters the Spanish beggar and "Alfau" is surprised both by Garcia's faith in the beggar and how the beggar does actually return with his money: "'Of course, I knew all the time that he would return. Never doubted it a moment. Once a Spaniard...'" (1990: 108).

Again, trusting one's own group and distrusting "the Other" is a telltale sign that the cycle of "othering" has been reciprocated. There are also passages throughout the novel providing stereotypes not just of these Americanians, but of their "Other," as the Americanians reduce American life to maxims and generalizations. One such statement comes from Garcia's manuscript, as God reminds the Spanish character: "'Remember that you are now outside of Spain and everybody insists on fairness'" (1990: 302). While irony is present in the statement, it still claims a generalization about American culture. Other comments on the society at large also confirm this "othering" as the Americanians fixate certain ideas about these Americans:

In fact, Spaniards always find in this country a lack of space and a lack of time. One can obtain any number of gadgets which was the privilege of the very rich to have in Spain, such as automobiles, cameras, vacuum cleaners, etc., but no space or time, which is what one has plenty of in Spain (1990: 124).

These examples show that not only is this group of the Americaniards experiencing the position of “the Other” in society, but they have in turn “othered” the majority.

More examples of this reciprocated “othering” come from the character of the Green Man as the Americaniards respond to his drastic behavior. They make it clear that they find the American ideas of health and hygiene equally as appalling as the Americans find their Spanish customs:

“What living are you talking about? Man, you are killing yourself with all this fresh air, cold baths, exercise and dieting, and growing more spherical every day. A man’s mode of living is determined by his race and not the medium where he finds himself-with certain exceptions, you know? One must not be too radical- but simply because a cat has kittens in the oven, one cannot call them muffins. Why, man, everybody knows that garlic is the best thing for anyone, including a Spaniard. It lowers arterial pressure, promotes longevity—” (1990: 133-134).

The list of areas in which the Americans are wrong does not emerge until provoked by the Green Man, but the sentiments are present, a form of resistance against this mainstream way of living by which they are surrounded. Just in case there is some doubt as to whether or not they are promoting an equal-leveled hybridity between the two, the radicalism of their thoughts becomes clear as Don Pedro responds: ““The moment you left Spain is when you were plunged in total darkness and you don’t know what it’s all about”” (1990: 134). The extreme nature of this statement reflects Don Pedro’s spontaneous and direct character as well as the irony ever present in the novel, but it also creates a firm stance against the Americanization the Green Man is proposing.

A final moment in the reversing of the “othering” suffered by these Americaniards offers a glimmer of hope in a movement toward hybridity. In explaining the culture to a new arrival, the Americaniards openly speak of their own moments of hybridity:

Everybody began to talk, mainly on the subject of this country. It is the usual thing in front of new arrivals from one’s land. It is the necessity of explaining a different people and its different habits and sense of values and also of explaining one’s own minor concessions and surrenders, almost like giving them a new tariff on life. The bullfighter, however, was not listening. He was

telling and seemed well satisfied with his rash appraisal of the country which he was almost explaining to all the others with that authority which comes from lack of familiarity with a subject. Without hesitation, he listed what was wrong with the country, what was right, and what was fantastic, insane and incomprehensible to any person with common sense (1990: 135-6).

This passage portrays the rash attitude of “othering” from the new arrival as naivety, evident in how Alfau describes the bullfighter’s opinions as ignorance and arrogance, while the veteran Americaniards serve as a contrast, having gained more wisdom from their experiences in American culture, quietly encouraging the importance of finding a place of in-between, admitting moments of compromise with the majority along the way. This perspective from Alfau offers the hope of hybridity by showing that perhaps “othering” is only an initial stage of generalizations and reactions. However, the Americaniards push for a place of in-between, not the blatant and outright assimilation the nativists envisioned.

### **4.3 Hybridity**

Amidst all this “othering,” there are a few moments of hybridity that stand out in the text, although they are not always moments of peaceful mediation between two cultures, but are more often moments of tension. The majority of these liminal situations come from the paella scene. First, Lunarito is still at home as the matriarch, preparing the food, welcoming guests and cooking, but the moment that Don Pedro complains, her response differs from the traditional gender role: “This precipitated a violent argument between Lunarito and the Moor, Lunarito swearing that she would not lift a finger and he could do everything by himself, including the unpleasant attending chores of washing and peeling this and that” (1990: 125). Perhaps one could interpret this moment as the progression of the Women’s movement across all borders, but Don Pedro’s following comment defines the moment as one of hybridity, as he tells her, “Don’t go foreign and independent on me” (1990: 126). Again, while this is classifiably a hybrid

moment, and a stereotypical one at that, it comes in the form of an argument, making it one of tension and testing out new in-betweens never before explored.

The hybridity continues as the group discusses the paella cooking process, since this is not simply a traditional paella, but an adaptation of the paella to Lunarito's New York life of gadgets and shortcuts. Again Don Pedro expounds upon this paella, raising it far above the literal to the metaphorical:

“Paella Newyorkina— I tell you, these Spaniards—” He took a good swallow of his vermouth: “I need the stimulant, but as I was saying: they were living in Spain, in primitive bliss, with those things which could not possibly be improved because they were born perfect, and when they leave Spain, they begin to think. They try to simplify and that's when the complications begin, because they lose track of the original plan. It's hopeless. They join all the foreigners in that absolute incapacity to understand the obvious, they become reasonable, traitors and forsaken by God” (1990: 126).

Again, this passage reflects Don Pedro's melodramatic character and most of this statement is meant to be taken facetiously, however, the reference to adapting the traditional dish of paella to a new style and calling it “Paella Newyorkina” shows an arrival at a certain level of hybridity. However, according to Don Pedro, this newfound hybridity is not necessarily positive, as Alfau again references the “primitive bliss” of singular identity as opposed to a confused muddling of clashing cultures.

This hybridity expands beyond the scene of the paella, finding its way into other areas of the novel. One such example comes from Don Pedro as he changes his own name to adapt to American culture: “[...] with blissful disregard for Castilian dignity, had shortened his name to Pete Guz, which had stuck and as such he was known to the American public and there was nothing anyone could do about it” (1990: 10). A name is perhaps the most basic form of identity, and to alter one's name to a hybrid between the Spanish and the English is representative of the transformation of one's identity to an in-between state. Another instance of liminality comes from the one case of second-generation immigrants in the novel, as Don

Hilarión's children rebel against the Spanish wisdom of their mother: "'But Mama, you know they won't understand all that.' They appeared to have given up melancholic displays as useless" (1990: 177). Some parts of the culture they had inherited from their parents are untranslatable in their new surroundings, reminding the reader of the concept of segmented assimilation. Another hybridity moment comes from the final flamenco scene since the dancers have changed the traditional ending for something that is more marketable:

"Did you notice that final step? That was telling the world how it is done; that when they want to, they can be as chulos if not more so than the next one. That was real and cañí. It was the desideratum in alpargatas, but all in all, too artificial and stylized. Even for the modern school, they have gone too far— Wonderful but less and less of Spain, until like the smile of the Cheshire cat—" (1990: 310).

Here the speaker Don Pedro asserts a sense of pride about the traditional Spanish art form, but he also notes that this hybrid form is no longer Spanish, but a distortion. So it is with the Americaniards, since the supposed icons of Spanish culture remain present in them, but the actual Spaniard behind the iconic foods or dance slowly morphs.

One more depiction of hybridity from the novel is perhaps the most negative one of all, being the demise of Don Hilarión. Having already seen the stereotype of "el qué dirán" exhibited in the character of Don Hilarión, the attempt at hybridity comes when Don Hilarión realizes his insignificance. Incapable of arriving at this new hybrid self, in which his professional dignity is no longer relevant, he falls apart:

Don Hilarión staggered and, holding on to the arms of his chair, he slid down into his seat slowly, dejectedly, like one crushed to dust that settles gradually. Another silence followed, a longer one, like the kind that comes after an explosion (1990: 181).

This is yet another situation in which reaching a level of hybridity, instead of only occupying the role of "Other" in the new society, is deemed to be impossible and the character meets his demise:

For a few dollars anybody could be a notario!

He felt an uncontrollable desire to tear those volumes from the shelves where they reposed, to trample them, to smash them. He made an effort to rise and something snapped inside of him sending a sharp pain from his chest along his arms. Everything reeled, everything went dark: “Dolores—Dolores—!” he cried with despair (1990: 182).

This example from the narrative mirrors the claims of Third Space theorists who have stated that the more educated and affluent immigrants would encounter more challenges when adapting to a new culture. The anger at the inability to maintain his prior position of wealth and prestige emerges as Don Hilarión finally confronts his new role in society, and he literally finds himself incapable of rising to this level of hybridity. While even his death is depicted with humor, calling after his wife, literally named “pains,” he represents the shaken confidence of the educated immigrant, an Americaniard who is incapable of accepting a new hybridized identity.

## **5 The Third Space in the Novel *Chromos***

### **5.1 An Actual Location**

As stated in the chapter on the theory of the Third Space, one such potential space is an actual physical one. In the novel *Chromos*, while there are many abstract Third Spaces represented, physical space is still important to the plot, since most of the narrative takes place in what could be considered physical Third Spaces. The discussion of physical space even emerges in the very dialogue of the narrative, in a conversation between “Alfau” and Garcia about one of his stories, when Garcia states: “It could only have happened in Spain,” to which “Alfau” ponders: “I thought that many people are always saying that a thing could only happen in a certain place. Why? and I told him so” (1990: 23). The conversation reveals an intentional emphasis placed on physical space in the text, with the narrator even questioning the validity of objectivity when considering space, breaking down even the most basic assumptions.

The first of the three physical Third Spaces presented in the narrative, being New York City, is the most vague and vast of all three. Surely there are sections of New York that

represent the hybridity more than others, but as Garcia and “Alfau” take their early evening walks along the avenues of New York, they claim that area as a Third Space. As one reviewer describes it, their perspective creates an “otherworldly Manhattan” (Crispin 1991: 673). One passage, in which “Alfau” and the Moor encounter Dr. de los Rios, speaks of this tension between the newcomers and the city: “‘Oh, amiable youths—’ he recited. ‘Walking on Fifth Avenue like the elegants— That’s the Spaniard for you. Always adaptable, going where others go, becoming one of them and then, meeting others like themselves. Here we are: three Americaniards’” (1990: 346). No space is off limits in the city for these Americaniards, taking on the very center of urban life in New York City. This example shows how any space, no matter how central to society it may be, is a potential Third Space. Additionally, Joseph Coates has mentioned that at the time Alfau was writing, in the 1940s, due to President Roosevelt’s “Good Neighbor Policy” for improving relations with Latin America, some of New York’s streets had been renamed, such as 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, which had become “The Avenue of the Americas” (Coates 1998: ix). Therefore, it is increasingly appropriate that Alfau would reference some of these streets as he forges a physical liminal space. Of all the descriptions of the creation of hybrid space in New York City, this is one of the most optimistic, expressing less of the tension that comes with liminality. Another passage delves a bit further, as “Alfau” and Garcia search for a place that somehow resembles home:

Now such a situation, conditions making such an occupation possible, could never be found in this city. During many hours of loitering, Garcia and I have tried and failed. True enough, they have cafés or their equivalent here, and parks with benches and avenues with people walking through them, but the social, club-like atmosphere which miraculously partakes both of the casual and the inevitable is missing (1990: 71).

Both characters are motivated by a longing for a place that fits with the old culture, but they find that nothing satisfies or fulfills. From these passages and from other texts in the novel, it seems that the city of New York fits as a hybrid space for the Americaniards, but it is the most removed

from their home culture of all the spaces they will find, as they forge an in-between space out of the epicenter of their “Other.”

Narrowing the focus further to the neighborhood of the Lower East Side, the novel creates yet another Third Space. However, the comments in the novel on the Lower East Side tend to differ between the manuscripts within the novel and the actual novel itself. The manuscripts portray the Lower East Side as being more of a ghetto, with little interaction between the outside world and those inside the neighborhood. The first instance of this separation comes from Garcia’s story about Ramos: “Upon first arriving in New York, Ramos roomed in a house on Batavia Street patronized by Spanish laborers. His funds were low, he did not speak English, he felt lost, and although the place was worse than his last pension, he had to clutch at it like a drowning man” (1990: 78). In this scenario, Ramos’ interactions are only with Spaniards inside the neighborhood, and the passage depicts total isolation. Similarly, when “Alfau” relays the story of Don Hilarión, it becomes another account of the vast separation between the neighborhood and the outside world. After the undertaker completes the stuffing of the dead Don Hilarión, the narrator comments as to how this could even possibly happen:

“Well, you know. These foreign families can live in New York in their own colony, completely isolated from the rest of the town, like in an independent state. As long as they do not bother the rest, the city does not bother to find out. The thing remains among the group, but if anyone outside their circle has learned of it, it has been probably discarded as an old Spanish custom” (1990: 190).

In the way that the manuscripts within the novel represent the Lower East side, a ghetto would be a much better label for these ethnic neighborhoods. However, in these stories within the novel, Alfau seems to be creating a platform for presenting stereotypes that perhaps represent the outsider’s simplified and generalized perspective on these spaces, but may not be accurate when seen from the inside.

Further evidence for this division between the manuscripts in the novel and the actual novel itself comes from the other scenes in the novel when the image of the Lower East Side does leave behind the stereotypical ghetto mentality and directs itself towards the idea of a Third Space. One such example comes again from these walks with Garcia, this time through the Lower East Side:

We had often walked through the small, dingy streets and he always had a searching look during those walks as if trying to make out something and I suspect that he was trying to capture and savor a resemblance to his memories of Spain. It was his hobby, together with writing, to relive the past; but in the Lower East Side, it was more like rummaging among rubbish and I felt that we were but frustrated scavengers of memories (1990: 52).

While the picture portrayed of this search for the past amidst the new is not the most positive, there is a sense in which the old and the new meet in the Lower East Side. The element of in-between is present, but it does not exist without tension. Later in the text, the two characters return to the special nature of the Lower East Side as being a place of hybridity, trapped between the past and the present:

There is something about most of the East Side, rain or shine, that lies somewhere between what we call reality and what we call a dream. It is the quality of a memory that has lain forsaken like an unattended grave. Nowhere else in New York can one find so everpresent the spirit of the has-been, of the window of a shop on Sunday inhabited only by our own reflection as we go by. It has the eerie texture of a sudden breeze on a calm day. Garcia suggested once that it seemed as if the tradesmen, the children, even the domestic animals there were saying: "I remember, I remember," without speaking, but I think that what they are really trying to say is: "Remember me?" And "remember" is one of the saddest words (1990: 85).

The physical location of the Lower East Side is tied to the memory of the places from which these immigrants come. It is a place grounded in a new reality, but trapped between that reality and the dream of a previous life. Therefore, there is a strong contrast between this description of the Lower East Side and the description of the same place from inside the manuscripts, a differentiation some reviewers, such as John Crispin, have failed to make, describing the setting of the novel as "New York's Spanish colony," a label that does not reflect the intricate conglomeration of nations Alfau describes (1991: 673). In the reflections on the Lower East

Side in the main narrative of the novel, the space blends and mixes different ethnicities, with no mention of specific nationalities.

Another specific hybrid location in the novel is the ethnic theater that puts on Spanish productions. Even from the description of the theater, one gathers a sense of transience: “Now, this Spanish Theater in New York, at least at the time of which I speak, was a living and dying monument to the tenacity of Spanish traditions. It had had countless starts under different managements and usually performed once a week on Saturdays or Sundays” (1990: 46). The constantly changing managements marks the niche market that takes interest in such a performance, but it also accentuates how the Americaniards are constantly coming and going, alternating between the mainstream culture and their own. Stepping away from the novel, there are several historical accounts of these ethnic theaters existing in New York City during the time Alfau was writing. These types of ethnic theater performances were typical during the immigration boom, and those who have researched them describe how they served the function of providing both roots for those who had just arrived, as well as a bridge to the new culture since the productions could never hide the fact that they were taking place in a strange land. One such description explains:

Ethnic theater thus functioned to maintain ethnic groups through the ritual celebration of shared ethnic cultural values. It provided a sense of belonging for the disoriented and dislocated. Finally, ethnic theater provided “boundary markers” (the term was suggested by the anthropologist Frederick Barth) indicating the boundary enclosing the group and separating “us” from “the others” (Federick Barth in Pencak, Berrol, Miller 1991: 149).

This description then goes on to explain that these theaters never maintained “ethnic solidarity” for very long, and would eventually mold themselves into more American models, even losing the use of the original language (Pencak, Berrol, Miller 1991: 166).

As for the example of the ethnic theater in the novel, the particular theater mentioned is reluctant to change and progress. As “Alfau” critiques the performance of that night, he reflects:

“The performance we had seen that night was really bad. I don’t know why every time this theater presented a play it had to do it in that obviously stagey, artificial and stilted fashion of the end of the century” (1990: 48). First, the theater appears to be trapped in the past, reliving the last literary golden age in Spain at the end of the century with *La generación del 98*. The generally bad productions, lacking innovation, seem to reflect the difficulty of finding an appropriate liminal voice. Moving from the actual performance to those who attended, the description once again alludes to the nostalgic searching associated with this place: “The audiences were also, with few exceptions, of the type that lives in the past, or as we say in Spanish, likes to stew in its own juice. Garcia was somewhat of this type. Strong inclination to relive the past and he is the one who had got the tickets and had persuaded me to accompany him” (1990: 48). The very ones who are attending these plays seem to be inhabitants of a Third Space, finding refuge in the things that remind them of home, yet living in a foreign land. The portrayal of these attendees is negative, as if they represent the opposite end of the spectrum from the Green Man, entirely clinging to what is gone, instead of dwelling in the in-between.

The liminal element in the novel continues to expand through the mention of ethnic societies. These societies were actually part of immigrant New York City during the years of the immigration boom, from 1880 to 1920 (Weil 2007: 167). For the newly arrived immigrants, these societies were great channels for adaptation: “In part these organizations were indispensable to those in a bewildering society who needed security, but immigrants also designed these groups to thwart complete assimilation into the dominant society” (Dinnerstein, Nichols and Reimers 2003: 124). The perspective here is fascinating, since the authors believe that these societies were a form of resistance against the popular assimilation model. In the

novel, the society occupies a place between the real and the ironic, as it is set off by Alfau's dry satire:

At the time he met this individual Garcia was working for the Sociedad Española de Socorro. Word was received that this fellow Ramos, a Spanish citizen living in New York, was in a very bad way both in health and finances and threatened the colony with the humiliation of becoming a public charge in a foreign land. To come forth to the aid of such cases, in the name of charity and patriotism and racial pride, was precisely the business of the Sociedad and Garcia was sent to investigate the case (1990: 52).

Alfau's irony most likely comes as a result of the lack of assistance available to these immigrants, since from the historical research on this time period we know there were many immigrants experiencing difficulties with health or finances. Therefore, this Third Space is represented as a utopian dream that does not exist as such in reality, once again emphasizing the difficulties of immigrant life and the lack of actual support for those finding themselves dwelling in the in-between.

Another context through which hybridity is explored comes from the topic of the Church. The subject of the Church and religion is avoided throughout the entirety of the novel, until the very last pages, when the author chooses to broach the topic. The Americaniards, in discussing which church to attend, must choose between an English church and a Spanish church:

"[...]—besides, if we are going to church, we might as well go to a Spanish church, and I don't know any in this neighborhood. A church in English has never seemed quite right to me. Catholicism is a heritage with us. We made it famous. We understand it. The others don't know what it's all about— We are living contradictions. I boast Moorish blood and then claim priority to the religion that banished my people from my country." (1990: 346).

While this statement at first glance seems to revert back to a ghetto mentality, the "we are living contradictions" again reaches into a liminal perspective, especially since, as Don Pedro explains, he is of Moorish blood, and furthermore, because they are in New York City, and even going to a Spanish church in New York City is a move toward the Third Space. The following passage only strengthens this claim:

“Nonsense! By the same token I maintain that any Catholic church is Spanish by essence. You yourself have insisted that God is from Madrid or Sevilla and a Roman Catholic, and when a Spaniard enters any Catholic church or any country in the Americas, he does so as if it were his own house by divine right. Agreed? Furthermore, this place is named after the patron of the Irish.” As he ascended the steps, de los Rios beckoned to us: “Come on in. This is growing complicated” (1990: 347).

Don Pedro’s solution is to transfer part of one’s self to a new land and claim a piece of that land as one’s own space. Therefore, the move here to take the Catholic Church in New York City and claim it as part of the identity of the Americaniard is an intentional and direct step into the Third Space.

One final physical location that embodies hybridity in the novel is “El Telescopio”, in English, “The Telescope,” the neighborhood café where the Americaniards meet. While the café is run by Spaniards and is supposedly traditionally Spanish, it is indeed a Third Space, since it has its own nuances that have made it less traditionally Spanish and more a form of a hybrid:

There were no wineglasses in sight at El Telescopio and everybody drank out of the bottle— a tradition that was started by a fantastic habitué, a certain Don Pedro, known to most of us as the Moor, considered an authority in anything typically Spanish. He had stated sententiously that the true Spaniard would drink manzanilla from cañitas, sherry from chatos, but regular wine only from the bottle, leaving the wineskin for picnics and ordinary wine, but glasses, never (1990: 24).

While some of the cultural artifacts portrayed in this passage are Spanish, from the manzanilla, the sherry and even the ordinary wine, they are warped and changed because of the tastes of one of the more demanding customers, not because of traditions from Spain itself, again rewriting tradition from a version of a memory. The liminal quality to the café continues to the décor, as the narrator describes the café as being truly authentic:

But what made El Telescopio authentic is that it was not decorated in the so-called Spanish style. True, there were posters, some imported, advertising bullfights in Madrid or Sevilla that couldn’t do one any good here, and others domestic, advertising some Spanish film or play in some theater usually in Harlem— I mean, the one in Manhattan. It was in the yard that Garcia and I were sitting (1990: 25).

While the bar is not decorated in Spanish style, the paraphernalia that adorns its walls is definitely Spanish. However, even the advertisements on the walls are for “Spanish” performances in New York City, another reference to the in-between.

Finally, the café is perhaps the strongest example of a physical location that unites the Americaniards as a community. One of the positive attributes the narrator bestows on this café is the fact that it brings so many different people together:

It gathered laborers, businessmen in the import and export lines, nightclub entertainers in moments of repentance at their disloyal success, plain expatriates and even derelicts from the not-too-distant Bowery in extraordinary moments of self-respecting affluence, all of whom, no matter how different otherwise, had two things in common: their language and the phenomenal respect which every Spaniard has for his food and his wine, and El Telescopio made good on both scores (1990: 24-25).

While these Spaniards perhaps would not have been friends in their home country, this diverse population is brought together by the uniting cultural bonds of language and food. As the novel progresses, many of the important scenes take place at this café, thus this is a way in which the café is the center of the Third Space, just as the café has great importance in traditional Spanish life. The café is also responsible for providing nostalgic moments that unite the Americaniards, an example of which being the flamenco performance toward the end of the novel.

## **5.2 A Third Space in an Abstract Sense**

While there are several locations in the novel in which hybridity becomes synonymous with buildings or neighborhoods, there are even more occasions in which the Third Space is much more abstractly located in the minds of the Americaniards. The first instance comes from a description of New York City, beginning “Manhattan looked like a quarry,” its lights at nightfall making it look like a gold mine:

Down on the prism of the sidewalks, they were diffused reflection of livid dancing polarization, the streets spectral bands. This was the light fantastic on the sidewalks of New York and as each star appeared above, it found its reflection below, until the city had become a multiplying mirror of the sky (1990: 19).

First, this passage calls to mind the concept of the *flâneur* as developed by Walter Benjamin, especially since the narrator becomes the detached urban observer of the city itself. In this way, Alfau follows in the footsteps of Baudelaire, since his poetry became the basis for the concept of the *flâneur*, as well as Federico García Lorca, who adopted his own *flâneur* perspective during his time in New York City, leading to *Un poeta en Nueva York* (1940) (Araya Alarcón 2012). There are several images in this passage that point to the breakdown of the binary opposition ingrained in the composition of New York, becoming a spectrum of countless versions of the city. There is also a mirroring, which could again be interpreted as binary, except this mirroring is multiplied, creating a myriad of different interpretations of New York. Even the word prism paints New York as being represented in endlessly different ways. Another more abstract form of hybridity comes in one of the descriptions of Garcia: “Garcia reminded me of a certain sidewalk in Madrid where almost everyone knows everybody else” (1990: 70). In this example, Garcia, the character living in New York, carries a specific location in Spain in his very being. Indeed, Garcia’s liminality is only recognizable through an impalpable sensation that emanates from his very soul.

### **5.2.1 Writing the Third Space**

Writing as a creator of hybrid space is yet another theme found throughout the novel. Writing is a hobby that many of the characters ridicule in the narrative, perhaps reflecting Alfau’s unease and frustration with the lack of results from his own work. One can sense this frustration when “Alfau” exclaims, “But who is going to read it? Unless it is for your own satisfaction or records....” (1990: 34). The concern over a lack of audience echoes through the very theory of the Third Space, as stated in the previous chapter. Later in the novel, Don Pedro, the one who urges “Alfau” to write on the Americaniards, repeatedly begs Garcia to stop writing these stories:

“What, another story? This fellow Garcia is implacable. I tell you, my countrymen— and considering that this one seems more Latin American than Spanish with all this obsession for writing. You know, man?” He pointed at Garcia across the table: “You’ll never go back to Spain or even heaven unless you stop this nonsense. What you have to do is to throw away all your intellectual paraphernalia, build yourself up and lead a clean life. That’s all, my friend.” He looked at Garcia with mock ferocity: “Otherwise I will bring you personally by the ear into the presence of Satan” (1990: 249).

The solution Don Pedro offers Garcia sounds all too similar to assimilation: to leave all the past behind and start again as an American. However, Garcia continues writing, trapped between the two cultures, asking “Alfau” to translate the works into English in an effort to bridge these two parts of himself. Closer to the end of the novel the question of why Garcia continues to write surfaces once again:

Only the night before he had read to me the last part of his story of the family, a work quite wasted in my opinion, but which showed the tenacity of his Spanish consciousness and refusal to forget old ideas and sentiments. The novel itself meant nothing, but the fact that he had engaged in writing it, his self-deception in not seeing that it was a thankless task, that he was doing it at the wrong time and in the wrong place, the candid impracticability of it all, was a synthesis of his personality (1990: 282).

Twice in the short passage the narrator mentions that Garcia’s work of writing the novel is meaningless, again presenting the question of who would be able to read a novel written from the Third Space. “Alfau” the narrator, and perhaps Alfau the author, comes to the conclusion that the actual writing is the important aspect of the whole project, as it is an outward reflection of Garcia’s hybrid self.

### **5.2.2 Music that Transcends**

Just as writing becomes a Third Space for the Americaniards in the novel, so music becomes a trigger that causes the Americaniards to be impelled into the Third Space. Towards the end of the novel, the Americaniards experience together a musical performance that transports all of the listeners to an abstract state of hybridity. “Alfau” describes this experience of solidarity:

The music of Cáceres inundated my ears. It had been gaining the upper hand over my reveries and now was master and held me in its grip again. It suddenly burst upon my consciousness and woke me up. I found myself standing in a semicircle with all the others. We were all like

somnambulists, closing in, suctioned, hypnotized by the prestidigitations of Cáceres as if we were all seeking to be carried through the round hole of the guitar, back to the womb of our mother country (1990: 293).

The text evokes a religious tone as the Americaniards gather and transcend their daily life in New York through the music. The familiarity of the music lifts them directly out of New York City in search of remembering, almost in a Proustian way, the other half of their identity. Perhaps the key word to this passage is the word “seeking.” The music does not transport them back to Spain itself, but it awakes in each of them the desire to return, in whatever way possible. The rekindling of their old culture brings them to a place of in-between that continues even after the music has stopped:

Then I started for the West Side through the empty streets, the music of Cáceres still assaulting my mind in waves of memory, in bright visions, making the mind a torch in the night. I knew that all those who had lived there that day must feel as I did, because of our common bonds, that the thoughts that had been evoked, whether real or imagined, had proven authoritative, legitimate, and with the music still in my ears I began to understand Don Pedro and possibly my people and even other peoples, within myself (1990: 344).

What is described here is like a communal epiphany, which the narrator tries to rationalize. Furthermore, the situation in which the narrator finds himself is a creative description of what it is to dwell in the Third Space, for as his feet are walking in one land, his mind is traveling through another, and he finds himself caught up in the in-between, a space where he can participate in both. Peter Christensen has used such instances in Alfau’s work to link him to Jorge Luis Borges, stating, “*Chromos* as a whole shares the Argentinian’s preoccupation with the denial of time through memory, and so Alfau may have been influenced by the elder master on that level” (Christensen 1993). While it is impossible to confirm this relationship to Borges, it remains true that Alfau’s creation of the Third Space does break down the limits of time through the act of remembering. Returning to the previously cited passage, another important aspect is that all those present share in this moment of in-between and transcendence, conveying the

manner in which the Third Space creates a community for those who have been “othered” or those who have felt they have lost their identity and search for a way to reconcile two extremes.

The fact that the narrator is not alone provides authentication, as if to say that he has not imagined all this out of his personal nostalgia.

### **5.2.3 The Spain of Their Memory**

Memory, as experienced by the characters in the novel, is another key abstract state of hybridity.

Many characters scattered throughout the novel come to the conclusion that the Spain they desire to return to is no longer an actual place, but the place they have created in their memory. One such moment occurs when “Alfau” gains access to fragments of Fulano’s thoughts:

Out of place here and yet he was glad for this opportunity to see all this and it was a good substitute for his frustrated desires to return to Spain, but not the Spain where he had lived in his early youth, but the one he had imagined then and imagined since and which had grown in his mind into a great artificial, international stereotype, fed on the things he knew most foreigners thought of his land. But that Spain, had it existed, he had never known. He came from another section, not from that southern section where all this color and gaiety was supposed to exist, nor from any place with popular history or tradition, but simply from a place which might have been anywhere, and he had come to New York and waited all these years to see the Spain he had imagined. It was a very short substitute and he was out of place— (1990: 307).

Therefore, memory is a place that is only inhabitable by that one person who recalls the events and whose memory distorts and molds the real events into nostalgic episodes. Fulano goes on to explain that this space is a very lonely one, since his own memories, or his own inventions of memories, are unique to himself, which is a strong contrast to the prior communal epiphany as they all listen to the guitar:

Why this nostalgia about a country he scarcely remembered? Why not nostalgia about this other country where he had been so long? About his youth in this country? But he did have that at times and even now at this moment and, although in these surroundings Spain had gone to his head, there was a vague desire to slip out, to leave and hurry, run back to his own room where he could be alone with his own memories of his own Spain and not the one he made believe he shared with all these luckier people. They had not been like him, separated from their past, feeding their personality on their own identity. Half of them just arrived, the other half visited the old country frequently. They did not remember his Spain and he did not know theirs, and the ones who might have remembered had their memories obliterated by seeing the place change gradually and grow with them, and why should they pick that one particular epoch more than any

other to remember, to see it, to endure the poignant sweetness of its isolated clarity? He resented them. He envied them and they were his brothers, his own more fortunate brothers— (1990: 308).

Therefore, this space is so reduced and so personalized that even those from the same country, who perhaps have had different experiences, cannot share in it. This again fits well with Third Space theory, which states that even memory cannot be trusted as the mind twists and distorts events of the past, creating countless versions of the same events.

#### **5.2.4 Nostalgia**

Nostalgia emerges as an extension of this idea of memory being a Third Space since the act of remembering triggers nostalgia. Again, nostalgia is a sentiment that comes upon several different characters in the novel, including the narrator, but which affects Garcia with greater frequency:

I feared what I might see there, but then I looked at Garcia and I have never seen this melancholic Spaniard look so sad, so crushed by nostalgic despair. I could well imagine what went on in his soul; his desire to recapture and relive the past, an imaginary past that might have been; his frustration and feeling of inadequacy which he shared with so many of his countrymen, his racial sadness and national regret, his love for the unattainable and for his own stories, his poetry and his romanticism, the complications of having to express his race and identity in terms of another (1990: 282).

The narrator here seems to be expressing that perhaps it would be healthier for Garcia to stop this endless process of remembering, regretting and longing, yet it seems that this would be impossible for him. In fact, since Garcia represents the Americaniard “artist,” it seems that this is his role, to inhabit those painful moments of loss or in-between in order to draw his art out of the tension. By constantly reminding the reader that Garcia has never produced any work of any caliber or success, it seems as if the author himself is questioning whether the pain associated with inhabiting the in-between is worth the outcomes. A similar sentiment comes from the mind-reading episode at the end of the novel as “Alfau” enters Fulano’s thoughts:

It was true. He had lost much of his native accent and mannerisms, but he was a Spaniard and would continue to be one to his death, perhaps more so than the others. Distance and time made

it so. One remained less adulterated living in the past, holding the past. His was a people of nostalgia who became more themselves by separation when parting— (1990: 309).

Indeed, the search for identity becomes much more of a conscious endeavor when the obvious markers of identity: home, family and country, fade away.

## 6 Language

One final aspect of the Third Space in the novel is that of language. As discussed in the chapter on the theory of the Third Space, language is a key element since Third Space inhabitants often feel disconnected and unconvinced by either one of the language options available to them. In *Chromos*, one finds a similar dilemma leading to comments on the use of English, on language as a whole, translation and literature. This emphasis on language is intentional, and a further reflection of the author behind the pages of the novel:

Felipe Alfau: My English is Iberian— an acquisition. It's half English and half my own creation, the result of an immigrant experience.

Ilan Stavans: One could conclude that in a country like the United States, made of immigrants, the English language is a hybrid.

FA: It is. Every generation, every ethnic group creates its own deformations.

IS: Like your characters, those dreamers in *Chomos* that live in Manhattan without anybody noticing them, speaking a language very much their own.

FA: Yes, like them (Stavans 1993a: 151).

Indeed, Alfau's own use of language in the novels reveals his hybridity, as one reviewer of *Locos* notes, "He writes in a rather strange English: at times it reads like translation or sounds too careful to be a native speaker's; occasionally it is surprisingly street-wise American (Six 1990: 86).

Therefore, the discussion of language in the novel is much more than a distanced objective portrayal, since the author himself is unavoidably wrapped up in this liminal language. This next section explores the use of language in the novel, emerging from the very voice of the author, along with the commentary by the characters within the pages of the novel as they discuss their own hybridity.

## 6.1 The Use of English

Having already addressed the metanarrative bookends created through the image of “chromos,” yet another idea bookends the novel, being the difficulty of learning English. As the narrator claims at the very beginning: “The moment one learns English, complications set in” (1990: 7). The reference is not simply about learning another language, whatever language that may be, since the narrator repeatedly references that English in particular is troublesome. The end of the novel brings a mirror of this same sentiment, as the narrator proposes it this time with a much fuller explanation:

To express this in my own language would be superfluous. To attempt to describe it in another’s, impossible. In Spanish I don’t have to explain my nation or countrymen. In English, I can’t. It is the question of the synthetic method as opposed to the analytical. In Spanish one sees and things remain unquestioned and clear. In English, one studies and uncovers meanings that one does not understand. It is then that, as I said in the beginning, complications set in (1990: 348).

True to the theory of the Third Space, the narrator is expressing the difficulty, or as he explains it, the impossibility, of finding an in-between, as neither language suits his purpose. Even more profound is the explanation that follows, setting out the strong points of each language and what purpose it serves. This is exactly the struggle encouraged in Third Space theory; the struggle to rearrange language in order to suit the writer’s purpose, and the possibility of gaining a unique and exclusive insight into the aspects of culture reflected through language, unperceivable for monolinguals.

Throughout the novel, there are examples of language that fit neither in Spanish nor in English, samplings therefore, of a potential Third Space language. One of these examples comes as a corny joke exchanged between the characters: “The drama has to do with ghosts and as we Spaniards like so much to make puns, I had said something like this to Garcia: ‘If we were speaking English, I could say that the drama was not ghostly but ghastly, get it?’” (1990: 48).

Jokes existing in the in-between, or being linked to one language but spoken about in another are

attempts at arriving at a hybrid language. Many more examples of Third Space language can be found in the use of code-switching and phraseological calques, creating a text that is only entirely accessible to those who also live in between those two languages. These instances will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4, since these particular language techniques also reflect a postmodern deconstruction of language.

The narrative also offers insight into the connection between language and identity, especially the sensation of identity loss when one must operate in another language. The first statement suggesting this connection comes as the narrator conveys Don Pedro's opinion on second language learning:

In the words of my friend Don Pedro, of whom more later, this could never happen to a Spaniard who speaks only Spanish. We are more direct but, according to him, when we enter the English-speaking world, we find the most elementary things questioned, growing in complexity without bounds (1990: 7).

Don Pedro links the experience of questioning one's own identity to learning English and, as the text prior to this passage conveys, Don Pedro does not necessarily believe that this questioning is beneficial, and that perhaps those Spaniards only speaking Spanish are more happy and contented. Another comment linking the loss of clarity about one's existence to language learning follows: "According to Don Pedro, a Spaniard speaking English is indeed a most incongruous phenomenon and the acquisition of this other language, far from increasing his understanding of life, if this were possible, only renders it hopelessly muddled and obscure" (1990: 8). Alfau's use of irony distances the author from this extreme perspective, however the passage still portrays a sense in which learning of a second language is not necessarily positive for the Americaniard, but instead, it means embarking on a wayward journey. This links well to the many comments found in the novel referencing "not knowing what it's all about." Associating loss of direction with the hybridity of language shows that the Americaniards must

seek out a new language with which to represent themselves, as they cannot authentically do so through English or Spanish.

There are also several characters that have a complex about their ability to speak in English. Even at the first reference when Don Pedro proposes writing about the Americaniards, he, the most over-confident character in the novel, expresses his feelings of inadequacies in English:

He concentrated on me: “You should write a book about the Americaniards, somebody should, but you have not written for a long time— anyway you could not write anymore about your people in Spain— have been too long away, forgotten too much— don’t know what it’s all about and you could not write about Americans— don’t know enough— impossible ever to understand another people. I could not understand them when I first came and every day I understand them less. We meet, we talk, but neither knows what it’s all about— total confusion. My English was abominable when I arrived and every day I speak it worse— impossible; can’t understand a damn thing” (1990: 14).

The more he understands the language, and even more so, the cultural system itself, the more he realizes how intricate and complex it truly is, making the idea of mastering it seem, and perhaps truly be, impossible. As stated earlier, even the slightest accent or structural error is enough to create “the Other” out of an immigrant. The next sentence following this passage confirms this sensation of never arriving at “nativeness”: “I have it on good authority that his English was perfect, but he had nursed an invincible accent and an unassailable syntax” (1990: 14). These feelings of deficiency no matter one’s level of language acquisition prompts a commentary from Alfau stating that language runs much deeper than communication; it is a staple form of identification and the way of belonging to a community, just as much as it is a way of identifying those “Others” in society and maintaining them in an “othered” position. How one copes with this insurmountable barrier is the dilemma of the Third Space.

Another reflection throughout the novel surrounding the idea of English use by these Americaniards is the frustration that these immigrants feel about the English language, relating to

the language as a barrier between them and success. One example of this frustration comes from Garcia's writing; although writing in Spanish, he hopes to have his work translated. First, he deals with the issue of background knowledge: "If this thing is going to be published in English, I must give the reader something of general interest. Can't keep it so Spanish that he cannot find the point" (1990: 230). The fact that he hopes his novel will be successful in the United States has changed the content and the style of what he is writing. In this way, language is reflective of the whole person, since Americaniards find themselves continually in situations in which they need to explain themselves or provide context to those around them. In another episode with Garcia, "Alfau" speaks of the need to modify the content of the novel in order to make it appropriate in English:

But I did tell him that many things sounded in English much more crude than in Spanish, as I believe I had already said before, and that a translation under the circumstances might prove exceedingly difficult and requiring a finesse well beyond my capabilities, so that perhaps he had better count me out (1990: 235).

The characters of the novel are aware that the same content portrays different levels of vulgarity in the two languages, and the knowledge of this alters the writing style. Also, the idea of editing content in order to adapt a novel to the culture mirrors the self-editing these Americaniards have grown accustomed to as they interact with others in the new space. Furthermore, while all this is relevant and true, the passage is yet another instance of irony in the text as one doubts whether Alfau the author would be so scandalized by the content of Garcia's novel, perhaps revealing a critique of American modesty or simply a play on the stereotype of Latin sexuality.

As these comments on English usage among the Americaniards reflect primarily on the frustrations of having to operate in a second language, there are ways in which the topic of English usage goes much deeper. As the characters become aware that language can change

content, as has been their experience in New York City, they come to the realization that relying on the accuracy of one version is unfeasible:

At this time of true narratives, biographies and earnest confessions when many people seem convinced that even if truth is not stranger than fiction, it leaves more to the imagination, it is well to risk this deficient account of unreliable data, too short and incomplete to be considered the biography of a family or even to satisfy this general thirst for supposed truth. But as things when written have an inevitable tendency to wrap themselves in the unfitting garments of secondhand literature, this will probably turn out to be but a grotesque parody of what once was truth (1990: 34).

Since this passage comes from within Garcia's manuscript, there is the same distancing from the author as previously mentioned; however, the sentiment expressed in this particular moment seems representative not only of the manuscript but of the novel itself, revealing Alfau's technique of parody as a way of uncovering the inaccuracies of stereotypes. Again, the Third Space permeates the narrative, this time with the inability to achieve Truth, arguing for the allowance of various versions of an experience.

Therefore, in evaluating the comments made on English language use, it becomes clear that hybrid language is a result of something much deeper than simply learning a second language. Within the novel, the commentary on language inadvertently slips back into the metaphysical, reflecting the tension in hybridity, as the narrator continues about Don Pedro:

[...] we experience, see or hear about problems which either did not exist for us or were disposed of in what he calls that brachistological fashion of which we are masters: nervous breakdowns, social equality, marital maladjustment and beholding Oedipus in an unfavorable light, friendships with those women intellectualoids whom Don Pedro has baptized perfect examples of feminine putritude, psychoneuroses, anal hallucinations, etc., leading one gently but forcibly from a happy world of reflexes of which one was never aware, to a world of analytical reasoning of which one is continuously aware, which closes in like a vise of missionary tenacity and culminates in such a collapse of the simple as questioning the meaning of meaning (1990: 7-8).

First, the most basic things are questioned, the fundamental parts of life that had never been even considered on a conscious level prior to learning a second language. In this way, the definition of language learning portrayed through the characters in the novel is that in learning a language, one is not simply learning a new system of linguistics and vocabulary, but an entire cultural

system that accompanies and is permanently tied to that language. This reflects Anderson's theory of how intrinsic language is to the creation of identity in a nation. Beyond the questioning of prior assumptions, there are also several sections of the passage focusing on the emotional strain that comes with this process of questioning, as one's own identity is ripped at the seams and must be sewn back together following a new pattern, or inventing one's own. This is reflected in the passage through the words "nervous breakdowns" and "collapse." The misogynistic references to women in the passage are also fascinating, again connecting language learning to much deeper social norms and the grey areas of morality that emerge more frequently upon leaving home. Finally, there is an emphasis on the heightened awareness of all things, to the point of exhaustion. This liminal identity must be forged between the old and the new since neither one is comfortable anymore.

Another aspect of the language of these Americaniards is the specificity about the impact of learning English on Spaniards. While it would be easy to generalize the ideas presented in the novel to all those who learn a second language, the novel remains specific to the Americaniards, even to the point of creating generalizations in favor of forming a niche situation around the Spaniards living in New York City. On the borderline between irony and criticism, the specific impact of learning English on Americaniards or Latins, is described thus:

This applies to all persons, including those born to the language and, at times, even more so to Latins, including Spaniards. It manifests itself in an awareness of implications and intricacies to which one had never given a thought; it afflicts one with that officiousness of philosophy which, having no business of its own, gets in everybody's way and, in the case of Latins, they lose that racial characteristic of taking things for granted and leaving them to their own devices without inquiring into causes, motives or ends, to meddle indiscreetly into reasons which are none of one's affair and to become not only self-conscious, but conscious of other things which never gave a damn for one's existence (1990: 7).

Alfau's purpose in narrowing the discussion to the case of Latins in New York City could be yet another of his ironic claims, however, the insistence on only commenting on one particular people group could be an argument for difference instead of general stereotyping.

Finally, the novel pursues the discussion of language and identity to the point of claiming that learning a second language alters one's psyche. This, perhaps, is the deepest level at which language is discussed in the novel. Again, irony is present as the narrative discusses this impact on the spirit of the immigrant, but some truth is also expressed:

The case of Garcia was, according to the Moor, a complex one and should be allowed to play itself and straighten itself out. He had an intricate theory that when a Spaniard takes to drinking and bumming in this land, it is due to an Anglo-Saxon psychosis. He has absorbed too much of his environment, is saturated with it and requires the native, domestic antidote- must take the cure that has been perfected for this condition. Although Garcia could not speak English well at all, the barrier of the language in his case, as in that of many others, had acted only as an osmotic membrane: the words had not gone through, but the fundamental ideas and feelings had, and he was suffering from an Anglo-Saxon psychosis. The Moor concluded, with his habit of generalization, that every new language one learns, or every new environment one joins, stimulates new centers of the mind and new emotions, creates new associations of ideas, new viewpoints, and therefore produces an additional psychosis (1990: 195).

On the deepest level, past finding a language that appropriately expresses the Americaniard, past the struggles of identity, is a sense of descending into madness, into the undoing of the self as one inhabits a new space. It seems, by the solution given, that this psychosis is an effect of having swung too far on the pendulum towards the American side of the Americaniard, emphasizing that hybridity must be a delicate balance between two extremes. While there is irony present in the passage, it also reveals the layers of language's effects on the individual, reaching all the way down to the psyche itself.

## **6.2 Special focus on the word "cursi"**

Having seen in general how the issue of language plays itself out in the novel, achieving a sense of a Third Space language, there are a few specific elements of language in the novel that deserve special attention. The first of these is the word *cursi*. This word is discussed at length,

especially in relation to Garcia's manuscripts. The word takes on extra importance since Alfau's book of poetry is entitled *La poesía cursi*. The study of the word is relevant to the discussion of language since the characters of the novel struggle to find a translation for the word: "He searched for the right word or explanation: 'Cursi is what I mean. That is the word: cursi'" (1990: 56). Later in that same dialogue, the characters again reference the lack of a good equivalent in English: "The word 'cursi' is difficult to translate, its meaning almost impossible to convey with any other word, and the closest I can find to it in English is the word 'corny.' I told him that I knew what he meant and he went on" (1990: 56). Both languages, in a sense, fail the characters, leaving them to communicate and come to an understanding of one another only through shared experiences.

As the novel progresses, the issues grow as Garcia attempts not only to translate the word *cursi* but to use the *cursi* style in his writing. Garcia thereby strives to make a concept from his old culture relevant and relatable in his new culture. He states: "I am quite serious about your helping with the translation and if I convince you, I hope you will bear that in mind and try to create that cursi feeling in English" (1990: 56). First, Garcia is clearly taking a concept that is supposedly Spanish and trying to render it in English. He also gives importance to the role of the translator, recognizing the creation that takes place in translation instead of mere transposing of words. His view of language is also unique, as he is hoping to accomplish a feeling, more than just the combinations of words on the page, but an actual ambience that could be created through language.

In taking another step back into the irony of the passage, Garcia associates the *cursi* style with Spanish literature, however, in the Spanish heritage of this use of *cursi*, the style is used to accomplish an ironic tone, the cornerstone of all such literature being Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.

Therefore, Alfau, clearly versed in Cervantes and the Spanish literary tradition, appears to have used the Cervantes-reminiscent *cursi* literature without the element of irony for Garcia's manuscript, in order to satirize the American author himself, aware of literary theory and tradition, yet still missing the point entirely. Therefore, within that context, the comments from "Alfau" on Garcia's writing become a double-edged sword:

My applause startled Garcia and also the cashier who was the only other person besides us still in the restaurant: "I say Bravo! Like your characters. You certainly got it cursi, boy! Bull's eye cursi." I poured the rest of the arrack into the cups and held mine up: "To the great cursi art which in your hands becomes a science or vice versa" (1990: 97).

Seen within the perspective of Cervantes and his satire through the use of *cursi*, the reference to "the great cursi art" actually refers to this Spanish literary tradition, however, the irony is that Garcia has made it into a "science," that is, creating a formula that anyone can follow, yet missing the element of satire as a way of criticizing society.

### **6.3 Issues in Translation**

While reference has been made to translation throughout the chapter, the issue of translation is a significant one to consider within the topic of language use in the novel. Again, most of the references to translation come from Garcia's manuscripts and his interactions with "Alfau." As the characters struggle with the translation of the work, they must grapple with translating not just words, but entire concepts that would be foreign to the English reader. As Garcia's novel lacks originality, most of these references to translation reveal an ironic tone: "Garcia was quite enthusiastic about the typical words and phrases he had collected in that dialogue but I argued that it could not be put successfully into English, and its virtues, if virtues they were, should be lost in a translation" (1990: 211-212). Reviewing the words Garcia used in the original language, the use of "portera" and "portería," in English, meaning the caretaker and the vestibule, again shows the irony surrounding Garcia's ideas on translation. Even the very

discussion between the author and the translator is of significance, since the writer feels a deep need to communicate from both the old and new in him, but those around him do not understand his point. In some ways, Garcia and “Alfau” together represent the Third Space author, one half longing for the liberation that comes with sharing nostalgia and memory, the other skeptical of whether any good could possibly come from it.

Within the issue of language and translation, there are several occasions in the text when the narrator disapproves of the content in Garcia’s manuscript and refuses to translate it. He claims that it will offend the English audience:

However, and to clinch things, I said that if I had anything to do with the translation, I would not tolerate any more such passages which could only offend the ears of the English reader and create the wrong impression about our fair sex and our country where we can be as mid-Victorian as the best (1990: 62).

While keeping in mind the irony that surrounds Garcia’s manuscript, there is something to be said here about the individual nature of the Third Space. In Garcia’s mind, he has portrayed the story to perfection, while “Alfau” finds it to be an inaccurate representation of his country. Even two Americaniards cannot agree on the literature they are creating in the in-between. Also, the idea that some facets of the old life cannot be accepted in the new life creates an incompatibility that is once again part of the tension of finding oneself between two cultures.

To conclude this section on the area of translation, the discussion of translation in the novel expresses the impossibility of translating directly from one language to the other. The novel gives several reasons for this impossibility: being cultural norms, the minute differences of word usage, or the loss of ambience in the text as a result of translation. While Alfau, when he wrote the novel, would have had no premonition of the importance of this discussion of translation, or leaving the words in the original language, when the novel was published in 1990, the lack of translation would be considered one of the outstanding aspects of the novel, as Jack

Shreve describes it: “Richly aphoristic, with titillating digressions into mathematics and metaphysics and with many Spanish words left untranslated, this book represents intellectual fiction at its best” (1990: 110). Returning to the end of the novel where “Alfau” concludes his comments on writing in English, this passage previously referenced is again relevant to this area of translation:

To express this in my own language would be superfluous. To attempt to describe it in another’s, impossible. In Spanish I don’t have to explain my nation or countrymen. In English, I can’t. It is the question of the synthetic method as opposed to the analytical. In Spanish one sees and things remain unquestioned and clear. In English, one studies and uncovers meanings that one does not understand. It is then that, as I said in the beginning, complications set in (1990: 348).

The inability of attaining either one of the two styles reveals a frustrated desire for authentic existence. Furthermore, in this passage, Alfau references the different thought processes representative of the two spaces and the different characteristics of each language.

#### **6.4 Literature**

Within the commentary on language in the novel, there is a special emphasis on writing itself, especially on the writing of literature. The topic of writing emerges at several points in the narrative and the profession of writing is usually spoken of ironically and negatively. From the story of Don Hilarión comes the comment: “A writer! Like all the rest of them. They are always talking for the sake of talking. Who takes writers seriously?” (1990: 175). This seems to represent the stereotypical Spaniard, or perhaps Americaniard, not valuing literature or those who write. The two authors, Garcia and “Alfau,” also at one point threaten to read to each other:

With feline smoothness Garcia reached, and I threatened: “If you read to me, I’ll read to you.” “Please, gentlemen,” came from Dr. de los Rios, “sheathe your respective literary weapons. I am sure that everything can be settled amicably.” (1990: 152).

The idea of the two authors being desperate to have an audience, but neither one wanting to listen to the other reveals the isolation of this individual space, where one must write for writing’s sake, without the hope of being able to share the work and have it well received.

It is also true that throughout the novel, “Alfau” consistently ridicules Garcia’s manuscript. This achieves a further distancing between the narrative and this novel within a novel, and it also puts further emphasis on the tension of the Americaniard, not satisfied with a narrative that relies on the past. “Alfau” criticizes Garcia’s narrative for its simplicity, its *cursi* style, and its stereotypical content. At several points in the text, “Alfau” stops Garcia when the novel becomes too stereotypical:

I was not impressed. Garcia is given to exaggerations and to speaking carelessly and claiming that many things, including anecdotes which have been known for generations, have actually happened to him. Then when confronted with a challenge to his veracity, instead of yielding like a sensible fellow and admitting that he only presented it as his own experience to lend it more drama, he will insist on braving it out to the bitter end and sometimes creates very embarrassing situations (1990: 51).

This comes in the middle of a commentary on the debatable truth of a passage from Garcia’s novel, again confronting the stereotypical and inaccurate text created by Garcia. It is as if Garcia represents the text of an Americaniard still living, if only in his mind, in Spain, and “Alfau” embodies the Americaniard seeing the text from a different hybrid perspective and bent on proving the prior version obsolete. “Alfau” also goes to great lengths to criticize the *cursi* style Garcia has chosen for his novel:

“Wait, Garcia! Let me finish it for you.” I recited: “And the two tears sparkled among the gathering shadows like the best gems in the store.”  
Believe it or not, that is exactly the way he had it written down (1990: 227).

“Alfau” is attacking the predictability of the narrative Garcia is creating, focusing on the lack of originality in the style Garcia is bent on writing, perhaps because it does not portray the hybrid state Garcia has come to inhabit.

“Alfau” even criticizes Garcia’s use of vulgarity as part of the style of the manuscript. At several points in the novel, “Alfau” interrupts Garcia’s reading with a form of censorship of the sexual content:

“Please!” I stopped Garcia. “Don’t go and transpose the words now. That would be the last blow.”

With astounding docility, he crossed out a line with his pencil and then said that he might tone down the whole thing in the final draft. When he resumed his reading, I think he missed a few lines (1990: 101).

While it seems unlikely that the author is actually offended by this type of dialogue, it is more likely that this is a way of satirizing the contrast between the two cultures: the American, supposedly thoroughly reserved, and the Spanish, increasingly vulgar. At other points in the novel, “Alfau” is comparably more direct in his criticism of this vulgarity:

At this point Garcia’s story took a not entirely unexpected turn for the pornographic and I halted him. I don’t want to project myself too much into this and am not averse to the grand classical ribaldry of a Boccaccio or a Quevedo, but the uncalled-for and irrelevant pornography that mars like grease spots much of our literature at the turn of the century does not appear engaging and in Spain we have coined another word for it (1990: 61-2).

He goes on to add that the word is “sicalipsis” (1990: 62), a gratuitous second context designed to shock the reader who might not yet have emerged from the straight-lacedness of the nineteenth century. Here the actual criticism seems to have more to do with the stereotypical representation of sexuality in some writing from Spain than the use of sexuality in the novel itself. The contrast is made, however, not with those who use sexuality in a new creative way in the novel, but with a supposed classical standard, once again opening up the possibility for this comment to actually be interpreted as ironical. The explicit discussion of writing on sexual issues reminds us of another immigrant writer to the U.S., Vladimir Nabokov, to whom Alfau has already been compared by Jill Adams as a fellow innovative immigrant writer: “If Nabokov captures the sumptuous delicacy and intricacy of his beloved lepidoptera, then Alfau is the proud Spanish bull, with all his pomp and flash. Russian ballet versus gypsy flamenco” (1999). Nabokov set his novel *Lolita* (1955) in the year in which Alfau was writing *Chromos*: 1947. It would take Nabokov several years to get his novel published, and then first in Paris. There are many elements in common between the two novels by immigrant authors, not least the laying

bare of the narrative process. Since what Alfau is criticizing is not sexual content, but its treatment, one feels he would not have entirely disapproved of *Lolita*.

There are also several comments in dealing with Garcia's manuscripts about the difficulty of being a Spanish writer in New York City. Several references to finding work as a writer reveal the difficulty of finding a publisher interested in what the Americaniard authors have to offer. One such comment sounds suspiciously autobiographical: "There he had met some friends and they had walked. One of them was a Spanish writer who wrote chronicles about New York for South American papers and was always making bad suggestions" (1990: 175). The fact that this character is never identified and sounds very similar to Alfau himself makes this seem all the more autobiographical. Indeed, reviewers such as John Crispin have noticed this apparent "biting self-satire" especially ridiculing the profession of writing (1991: 673). Repeatedly, the Americaniards are only capable of attaining success in Latin American, or in this case, South American, publications, again revealing the difficulty of finding an audience interested in their work. What is left to offer is an outsider's perspective to a famous place, to those who would also consider themselves outsiders.

Therefore, the novel deals with the difficulty of finding an audience as an Americaniard writer and it also offers a commentary on the tensions within the writing process in the Third Space, even on the level of content. One such example comes when Garcia is preparing yet another stereotypical Spanish scene:

I was looking at Garcia and remembered a description in his novel of a bullfight, full of stock situations and cast-iron sentimentalities and impossible feats of courage and skill; something in the manner of "Casey at the Bat," or the Kid's last fight. He felt that in English this should prove very edifying and instructive to readers and help them understand the Spanish soul. We had argued the advisability of introducing it in his story and in the end, I convinced him by saying that it would be as silly as getting sentimentally technical in Spanish with descriptions about baseball, or to translate the Merriwell series (1990: 138).

Garcia's problem of content comes from wanting to share his old culture with the new culture. "Alfau's" reply that such an idea would be "silly" does not provide such a strong case to oppose it, and the comment of "sentimentally technical," while apparently an oxymoron, actually describes what Garcia is attempting to do, to make the situation of a bullfight real to the English audience out of a sentimental motivation. Outside of this moment of the narrative, in reality, Alfau, the author, does offer a picture of the bullfight, once again achieving the distance and the hybridity of an Americaniard, referencing the importance of the bullfight, but on such an abstract level that it reveals his own state of in-between. One cannot help but recall another outsider who would attempt to capture the essence of the bullfight, Ernest Hemingway, in his work *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), who is yet another possible influence on Alfau's writing; however, Alfau maintains a much more distanced perspective than Hemingway, creating an interesting contrast between this Americaniard and the American expatriate.

## **7 Conclusions**

Seeing New York City within the framework of the theory of the Third Space dramatically changes the stereotypical image of the city at the turn of the twentieth century. The traditionally famous national narratives of "the melting pot" or the "immigrant haven" are rewritten through the lens of the Third Space as tensions and in-betweens for those coming to the United States during that time period as immigrants. The idea of the ethnic neighborhood is also reconsidered in this theory, no longer the reinstitution of a ghetto in New York's poorest neighborhoods, but a difficult, unstable Third Space for immigrants in which cultures clash and support networks have to be forged. In seeing New York City through these eyes, the national narrative of the "immigrant haven" crumbles, creating a space of difference of experience, more dependent on socio-economic standing than the "self-made" immigrant myth.

The novel, therefore, reflects New York as a Third Space through several different ideas represented in the narrative, including the Amerienciards, the Green Man, or the portrayal of the Lower East Side. The novel also points out on several occasions the Amerienciards' experience of being "othered" in New York City and how the hybridity attained by the characters is one of tension and discomfort, not the peaceful serenity of finding a solution to the identity conundrum. Therefore the adaptation process presented in the novel shows a revolutionary rejection of assimilation. Alfau's rendition of the Third Space consists of an incomplete adaptation with countless difficulties along the way, instead of the smooth transitions the Nativists were preaching at the time.

While this relationship between the novel and the theory of the Third Space is fascinating in itself because it is the playing out of the theory within a specific niche situation, it is also important to keep in mind when the novel was written and who wrote it. The novel, written in the 1940s and kept locked away in a dresser drawer, came into existence almost fifty years before the postcolonial movement became predominant, and within that movement, the idea of the Third Space. Having discussed the location from which the writer was working, it becomes all the more evident that this novel simply does not fit with the trends of New York City in the 1940s. In fact, most immigrant narratives were stories of assimilation: the immigrant's struggles and trials upon first arriving but the long term success and Americanization as their situation improved. With most immigrants taking on the humble attitude of acceptance before the rhetoric of Americanization, Alfau's critique of the concept is nothing less than revolutionary. When asked how he came to write in such a style, Alfau confirms this countercurrent motif in his work:

P: Cuando escribió *Locos* ¿seguía cierta tradición literaria?

R: Bueno, en realidad estaba tratando de transformar una tradición. Verá desde los griegos hasta la actualidad, la música ha hecho avances tremendos. Del unísono a la policromía, ha habido descubrimientos increíbles que nos han llevado de la longitud a la latitud<sup>1</sup> (Stavans 1992b: 611).

The innovation in his work is therefore, according to Alfau, entirely intentional, to the point in which we could even call it a pursuit of innovation, his own attempt to offer something new to the literary world.

One final accomplishment of the novel is not just the innovative historical and theoretical aspects of it, but the unique techniques employed to accomplish these ideas. The use of the novel within the novel works well both within the paradigm of the Third Space as well as Postmodernism in that it creates distance and an alternate perspective within a single narrative. Also, the metanarrative creates a frame, again distancing the action of the plot from reality. The running commentary on the writing process also reveals the mechanism behind the narrative, laying open the device, a principal characteristic of Postmodernism and relevant to the Third Space in that it shows the struggle and tension of the writing in the in-between. The satire of the novel also works in favor of the Third Space, in the inability to state any one position or truth directly and the growing belief in the countless versions of events or situations. Therefore the novel *Chromos* is ahead of its time in its content, style and technique. In an interesting twist, when Alfau was nominated for the National Book Award, some critics, such as Carol Iannone, felt that the nomination was politically driven, stating that the novel itself was not worthy of the award, but the sheer novelty of *Chromos* had manipulated its way to recognition under the guise of the even-playing field of Postmodernism and Postcolonialism (1991: 53). While her voice is definitely the minority of those who have commented on Alfau's work, such statements are

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<sup>1</sup> Q: When you wrote *Locos*, did you follow any particular literary tradition?

A: Well, actually, I was attempting to transform a tradition. I mean, since the Greeks up until the present-day, music has made tremendous advances. From unison to polychromy, there have been incredible discoveries that have led us from longitude to latitude.

fascinating since this means that Alfau has not only entered into categories (the “post” movements) that chronologically do not correspond to him, he even suffers from the same critiques as other authors from those categories.

Beyond the innovation in the work *Chromos*, which has been thoroughly examined in this chapter, Alfau’s work also reveals to us the specifics of this Third Space of the Americaniards and his own representation of how it feels to live in a state of hybridity. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, such authors and works offer us insight into the reality of identity since they represent the struggle to create a fluid sense of self in the flux of two cultures. From Alfau, some of the insights we gain are a deep recognition of the tension of existing in such a space, not one to be ignorantly exalted. Alfau also teaches us through this novel that creating, that is, to be an artist, within such a space, is both an act of self-imposed torture and a form of salvation, since by remembering and representing one’s own reality, one constantly relives the loss and nostalgia of the past, and one’s own inadequacies about the present and future. Moreover, it is also a salvation, since the writing itself becomes the catharsis, no matter the monetary sign of success, or lack thereof, assigned to the work itself.



### **Chapter 3: Stereotypes in *Locos***

This chapter will discuss the novel *Locos: A Comedy of Gestures* specifically focusing on the use of stereotypes in these connected short stories. The chapter will begin with a theoretical basis for analyzing this technique, giving attention to the use of stereotypes as critique as well as postmodern variations on stereotypes, followed by a broad application of this theory to the novel as a whole. From this foundation, I will then proceed to the discussion of specific stereotypes in the short stories, analyzing these portrayals of Spanish characteristics through the helpful additional frameworks of Valle-Inclán's *esperpento* literature and Julio Caro Baroja's theories on the Spanish national character.

#### **1 Stereotypes: Dufays' Five Categories**

Before looking more specifically at the novel *Locos* and how Alfau uses stereotypes in the ironic aspects of the novel, first one must define what exactly is meant by stereotype since this term will become so foundational to the study. When examining the theory surrounding stereotypes, the word "fixed" often appears. While postmodern and postcolonial scholars have come to see identity as fluid and ever-changing, stereotypes insist on locating identity in one particular characteristic. Another word often associated with stereotypes is "generalization." This reveals another aspect of stereotypes in which entire groups of people are expected to react or behave the same way. These are some of the characteristics of stereotypes as related to people, but they are also applicable to stereotypical situations or beliefs. While these are only some of the general foundations of stereotypes, they offer a basic definition of the word that will allow the reader to look more specifically at literature.

A helpful study on stereotypes by Jean Louis Dufays entitled “La relación dual con los estereotipos, un indicador de la recepción contemporánea”<sup>1</sup> (2012), breaks down stereotypes into several categories. These different categories will be helpful in deciphering the use of stereotypes in the novel *Locos*. The first category that Dufays proposes is that of representations, ideas and beliefs. To clarify what he means by these broad categories, Dufays gives the example of stereotypes that show the superiority of a certain class or group of people. The second category he suggests is what he calls a “thematic configuration,” meaning two words or concepts that are often portrayed together. His example is again helpful in clarifying this information, as he proposes “la rubia tonta” or “the dumb blond” as two separate concepts that are stereotypically correlated. His third category is one perhaps not as frequently associated with stereotypes: the “script,” reminding the reader of schema theory in which situations become so typical that individuals automatically recognize them without much mental processing. In literature, the idea of script is related to scenes that have become typical in literature, such as a duel or a seduction scene, which the reader automatically recognizes as a script and therefore expects that the scene will progress in the traditional manner. The fourth category is the language used to describe a particular scene, Dufays’ example being the scene of the first kiss, so often used in literature that readers have become accustomed to the presence of a certain lexicon accompanied by certain tones and styles within such a scene. The final category is clichés, verbal phrases that have been overused to the point of losing a degree of their original meaning as they become recognized more as clichés than descriptive writing (Dufays 2012: 46).

### **1.1 In Anticipation: A few examples from *Locos***

By using this framework as the background for the study of *Locos*, one can recognize Alfau’s use of different categories of stereotypes more easily, and also find which categories are most

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<sup>1</sup> The Dual Relationship with Stereotypes, an Indicator of Contemporary Reception (My translation)

representative of his style. Before studying the stereotypes of each particular short story in *Locos*, at this point it will suffice to accentuate a few from each category found throughout the novel.

The first category then, focuses on ideas or beliefs that are “stereotypical.” One example of this sort of stereotype in the novel would be the story of Pepe Bejarano in “The Wallet,” who plays the part of the Spaniard who has returned to Spain after a long absence and suddenly sees himself as quite superior to the rest of his countrymen. Alfau is intentional in the placement of this stereotype, stating it directly by allowing the reader into Pepe’s thoughts: “Having been so long away from his country, he had subconsciously absorbed the foreign belief that Spain is a backward country and that when one crossed the Pyrenees southward one entered eternal night” ([1936] 1988: 84). What follows in the plot is a playful reaction to this stereotypical belief, but this example of Pepe is perhaps the most clearly stated stereotype about a belief or an idea in the novel, as Pepe repeatedly comments on certain ideas or events being “typically Spanish” (1988: 86). Another example of stereotypes of beliefs and ideas can be found in the novel, albeit more indirectly, through the contrast of rationalism and Romanticism, portrayed in the two characters Dr. de los Rios and Garcia. These two characters and what they represent will be discussed at length in the next chapter, but basically they embody in their characters two opposing beliefs: the rationalism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century versus 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanticism. By personifying these two movements in different characters, every action, thought and statement becomes stereotypical as it reflects the movement itself. This is perhaps a more creative way of using stereotyped beliefs in literature, since it projects the discussion through the characters.

Dufays’ second category of “thematic configurations” also appears throughout the text of the novel as different representative characters enter and exit the stage. The novel is

appropriately titled *Locos*, in English “The Crazy Ones”[my translation], because it is, on a basic level, a montage of different character sketches, so it is only appropriate that this be one of the strongest categories of stereotypes used in the narrative. The examples are endless, from the *chulo* to the prostitute, from the beggar to the crooked *funcionario*, from the expatriate to the *chino*. Alfau also takes on the religious through his characters: the priest, the nun and the religious fanatic, Doña Micaela. Perhaps the greatest achievement of the text in this regard is the way in which the stereotypical characters are framed through the metanarrative, as “Alfau” encounters the idea for each of them through his visit to the local café, giving each of the characters a sort of “everyman” quality, which becomes a perfect foundation for creating a stereotype. However, this category is more specifically about the characteristics associated with each of these typical characters, such as the *chulo* being French, the beggar being a fraud, or the *chino* being violent and untrustworthy. In the religious stereotypes as well, the priest is pure-hearted, while the nun is a wayward spirit, and the religious fanatic is obsessed with death. Alfau excels in this area as a novelist, and the narrative is overrun with thematic configurations of characters that will be discussed more specifically later in the chapter.

From the third category, Alfau clearly incorporates several stereotypical scenes into the text. As a starting point, one can begin with the metanarrative focus at the beginning of the novel in the *Café de los Locos* in Toledo. As part of everyday Spanish life, there could be no more central or stereotypical location than the café *tertulia*. Another stereotypical scene can be found in the short story “Fingerprints,” since the narrative takes place over a game of cards between old acquaintances. Another possible example comes in the final short story, “A Romance of Dogs,” as it begins with the typical *bildungsroman* construct of the coming of age among school boys. While these aspects exist in the novel, they are a secondary source of

stereotypes within the text, as the novelist tends to focus more on the characters' personalities and thoughts than the action of the story itself. In fact, more stereotypical scenes are referenced in the text than are actually played out in the plot itself. This is especially true in the story "The Wallet," when the possibility of a duel is mentioned after Don Benito insults Pepe, or when Pepe takes on the role of the *torero* with a young girl in his *pension*. In both of these cases, it is logical for the actual duel or bullfight not to take place, since the story is about a man returning to a country and feeling removed and distant from what used to feel normal and habitual.

The fourth category, being the style or tone of the stories, could be of interest to the study of the novel since scholars have referenced this novel as being a form of detective story, but of a metaphysical type (McCarthy 1988: 206). This definitely allows for a stereotypical style, using the typical plot developments, twists and surprise endings that a detective story would follow. The best example of this is in the story "Fingerprints," since the plot does unfold around a crime, the twist being when Don Gil himself is arrested as the perpetrator of the crime. However, as is typical in Alfau's work, the story is not so simple or straightforward and is much more a commentary on identity than a crime story in itself. Other moments of narrating in a stereotypical fashion would be the passages focusing on Garcia's Romanticism, taking on the stereotypical poetic daydreams related to the Romantic movement. His moments in the park of stopping to embrace a tree, or when he stops to weep over the coming of spring accentuate the stereotypical Romantic tone.

The final category of stereotypes is that of the cliché. The fascinating part about Alfau's narratives is finding these predominantly Spanish clichés incorporated in the text written in English. They stick out from the rest of the smooth, well-written narrative, surely surprisingly strange or disconnected for those lacking knowledge of Spanish idioms. Some of the clichés are

easily understandable even though they are clearly translated directly from Spanish, an example being about dishonoring a dead family member as Doña Felisa repeats, “if poor Gil should lift his head” (1988: 32). Another such cliché comes in the story “Fingerprints,” as Don Gil discusses the “hill of January,” much more easily recognized as the *cuesta de enero*, a concept entirely without meaning in English (1988: 63). In Spain *la cuesta de enero* is used in reference to the time after the holiday of Epiphany, characterized by cold dreary weather and a lack of funds as a result of the Christmas holidays. Some of the words left in Spanish could also be considered clichés, such as Cavañitas telling Garcia, “We are Los Madrileños and must not let this *comehostias* put anything over on us” (1988: 174). The word *comehostias*, meaning “those who eat the host,” is used in everyday language as an insult for priests. To summarize this category of stereotypes in the novel, there are several different levels of clichés in the narrative, those that are written in English and easily understandable, those that are written in English but require a knowledge of Spanish to understand them, and finally, those left in the original language. Alfau’s purpose in using such clichés seems to be to create a Spanish ambiance within an otherwise English textual discourse modality.

## **2 The Role of Stereotypes in *Locos***

Having discussed the fact that stereotypes of all kinds exist in the narrative of *Locos*, the next step is to try to understand the role of the stereotypes in the novel. After all, scholars have discussed how stereotypes can have different functions within literature. Much of the literature that belongs under such labels as postmodern or postcolonial is written by individuals with an elevated level of consciousness about their surroundings and especially about identity. This lends itself to using the stereotypes intentionally in order to accomplish a specific purpose within the text. Dufays speaks of how this is often the case in such literature:

Un estereotipo, como lo dijo ya Paulhan a propósito de los clichés, es antes que nada un enunciado, un modo de hacer o de decir o una idea “de los otros” que yo rechazo. Mas como este rechazo introduce *ipso facto* una disyunción, un desacuerdo entre el enunciador y su receptor, el estereotipo aparece por definición como un lugar de reversibilidad de valores: según los contextos y los receptores, las mismas unidades verbales o temáticas son evaluadas como simplistas, falsas, inmorales, usadas... o al contrario como ricas, verdaderas, necesarias, elegantes<sup>2</sup> (2012: 47).

So, since stereotypes can be used on several different levels within literature, it is left to the reader to discern whether the stereotypes are to be taken at face value, and if not, to discover the meaning behind the use of stereotypes in the text. Scholars who have researched stereotypes in the field of literature offer several different criteria for investigating further into the use and meaning of stereotypes.

### 2.1 “Ethos”: The author’s presence

Interestingly, while the author’s “ethos” seems unrelated to stereotypes, Ruth Amossy chooses to begin her discussion of stereotypes by emphasizing this particular point. She defines this idea of “ethos” as “la imagen que el locutor proyecta de sí mismo en su discurso”<sup>3</sup> (2012: 28). Again, she is very careful with her language, stating that the author chooses to portray only an “image” of himself. When considering how this image of the author portrayed through the text is important to the idea of stereotypes, Amossy insightfully explains:

En el caso del *ethos*, habrá que ver pues cuáles son los elementos de su persona que el locutor exhibe y de qué manera éstos responden a un modelo sancionado en su propia cultura; o cuáles son los elementos que destacan en su discurso y que lo asimilan a su pesar a un modelo cultural al que no recurre conscientemente<sup>4</sup> (2012: 33).

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<sup>2</sup> A stereotype, as Paulhan has already stated on the subject of clichés, is, before anything else, an enunciation, a way of doing or saying or an idea “of the others” that I reject. But as this rejection introduces, *ipso facto*, a separating, a disagreement between the speaker and the receiver, the stereotype appears by definition as a place for the reversibility of values: according to the contexts and the receivers, the same verbal units or themes are evaluated as simplistic, false, immoral, over-used... or on the contrary as rich, true, necessary, elegant [my translations].

<sup>3</sup> “The image that the speaker projects of himself in his discourse.”

<sup>4</sup> In the case of *ethos*, one would have to see which of the elements of his person the speaker shows and in what way these elements respond to a model sanctioned by his own culture; or which of the elements stand out in his discourse and which are reluctantly assimilated to a cultural model to which he does not consciously appeal.

Therefore, just as stereotypes exaggerate certain aspects of a culture, creating a distorted caricatured version of a specific identity, the author's ethos illuminates certain aspects of his own persona, while removing others from view. When seen from this perspective, the representation of the author in the text could play many roles; it could potentially be an additional stereotype, a reactionary voice, another voice propagating the stereotypes, or even an apathetic bystander. A careful examination of this "ethos" can lead to important discoveries about the use of stereotypes in the novel in general.

The idea of ethos within the postmodern novel can become increasingly complex since many postmodern authors choose to create a metanarrative within the text. When upon beginning the novel, the reader is greeted by the author himself, in the postmodern novel it is likely to be a subliminally distorted version of the author instead of a true representation. Again, this brings special importance to the idea of "ethos," since "El *ethos* se presenta como una autoimagen deseada y programada por un sujeto hablante que domina el arte oratorio y que pretende influir en las mentes mediante una representación apropiada de su persona"<sup>5</sup> (Amossy 2012: 29). This convoluted "ethos" often found in postmodern works is definitely applicable to *Locos* as well, as the reader encounters several distinct depictions of the author's "ethos" in the text, since Alfau appears simultaneously as character, narrator and author.

The first place to begin in this evaluation of the "ethos" in the novel *Locos* is through the "Prologue" that introduces the reader to the novel. From the very first pages, it becomes virtually impossible to separate Alfau the author from "Alfau" the narrator, as the apparent author leads off by stating that "the pages have been numbered clearly and the stories arranged less clearly in a conventional order which my friend Dr. José de los Rios, and myself have found

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<sup>5</sup> "The *ethos* presents itself as a self-portrait desired and programmed by the speaking subject who dominates oratory art and who attempts to influence minds through an appropriate representation of his person."

somewhat adequate” (1988: ix). Therefore, from the outset of the novel, planes are already broken, since the supposed author is interacting with his own characters. From the Prologue, the reader also surmises that the author is narrating the story, but as the novel progresses, the reader quickly comes to the realization that the “author” he meets in the Prologue is in fact an alter-ego, “Alfau,” who is an unreliable narrator. This fundamental aspect of the “ethos” in the novel has the double effect of making the author appear closer, yet as a result of the creation of “Alfau,” the true author dissociates himself entirely from the novel, becoming all the more distant and enigmatic. In case the reader is incapable of reaching that conclusion on his own, “Alfau” again suggests:

And even as I write this prologue, I realize how true this is, for I can find no connection with that individual and official author of this book who once while in the mad, fantastic city of Toledo wandered one day with his friend, Dr. José de los Rios, into the Café de los Locos (the Café of the Crazy) where he witnessed things and saw people which in his playful imagination took the shape of this book, who with the lack of conscience typical of an author advised an acquaintance there to trade his insignificant, though real life in this world for the still less significant and not at all real existence in these pages, who at the end of a chapter flung a window open and let in real life to take the stuffy and fictional life of the one character who was his childhood friend and who in a persistent confabulation with the characters found in that Toledo café, is the abstract, but nevertheless real, perpetrator of this experiment (1988: x).

One can sense from the jumbling of roles of narrator and author that Alfau the author has removed himself from his fiction through his “double,” the narrator, yet he still creates an “overly modest” author persona for himself.

Beyond the distance imposed between the narrator and the author, Alfau then proceeds to surrender his control of the novel not only to his narrator but to the characters themselves. He states: “I am not entirely to blame for committing this novel; the characters used in it being, I believe, far more responsible than myself” (1988: ix). The language takes on that of a detective story, with the novel being an act “committed” and that someone must be held “responsible” as if it were a crime. Alfau the author allows himself to dwell on this idea of surrendering the control

to the characters and he returns to it repeatedly throughout the “Prologue,” allowing the reader to sense its importance, as he continues:

For some time I have been realizing more and more clearly the way which characters have of growing independent, of rebelling against their creator’s will and command, of mocking their author, of toying with him, dragging him through some unsuspected and grotesque path all their own, often entirely contrary to that which the author has planned for them (1988: ix).

This reminds the reader of the second part of *Don Quixote* (1615), in which the characters are self-aware in the fact that they know they have been the characters of a very popular novel.

Alfau, in his emphasizing the independence of his characters in writing their own stories creates a literary echo back to the high point of the Spanish literary canon itself. At this point, the reader has been given a twice complicated “ethos,” as the author Alfau allows himself to be supposedly subjected to his narrator self, “Alfau,” and then yet again to his characters as they overrun his plot.

This compounded “ethos” escalates one step further when Alfau becomes a character in his own narrative. The final story of the novel, “Romance of Dogs,” is partially composed of a supposed manuscript written by Garcia, one of the characters in the novel. Alfau is included in this manuscript as one of Garcia’s boyhood friends. While this “Alfau” seems entirely removed from his duties as narrator, he still remains privy to special knowledge about the past lives of the other characters, expressed in the text when Garcia remarks: “Alfau seemed to know the story already” (1988: 174). Once more, the separate planes of author, narrator and character are broken and “Alfau” seems to simultaneously perform different roles at the same time. This third level of authorial persona portrayed in the text furthers the playful and unconventional “ethos” Alfau has created.

The question then becomes what Alfau the author is hoping to accomplish through his “ethos”. The first conclusion that one can take from this portrayal of the author is, once again, a

postmodern emphasis. In fact, the idea from Postmodernism of playing in the chaos that has become so representative of the movement is stated directly in the text: “By the end of this book my characters are no longer a tool for my expression, but I am a helpless instrument of their whims and absurd contretemps” (1988: xi). Instead of a struggle at the loss of meaning, the author’s solution is to surrender his intentions for the novel and play amidst the absurd and chaotic mess. Also, by making his persona unreliable and inconstant, he plays with the concept of reality and truth of experience. Beyond this postmodern moment, another possibility is that the narrative is basically a playing out of countless stereotypical caricatures interacting with one another. In some ways, if this is the basis of the novel, it makes complete sense that the narrator and the author would have little to no power, since each stereotypical representation will play itself out simply by following the fixed identity assigned to it through the stereotype itself. By Alfau insisting that he has removed himself from orchestrating the events of the story, the reader supposedly sees the raw stereotypes without any manipulation from the author. Finally, by recreating himself on the level of character, Alfau portrays himself as yet another stereotypical madman: a young, impressionable schoolboy.

## **2.2 Distancing**

Another aspect worth considering is the distancing between the author and the text, as this may offer clues as to how to read the stereotypes in the narrative. The existence of the stereotypes within the text does not automatically mean that the author is using these stereotypes as a form of criticism. There are many potential reasons as to why the author may use stereotypes and it is always dangerous to read into his intentions, especially when considering works of fiction, since the opinions and perspectives represented in the text cannot be automatically assumed to be the author’s own. As Bakhtin explains:

A prose writer can distance himself from the language of his own work, while at the same time distancing himself, in varying degrees, from the different layers and aspects of the work. He can make use of language without wholly giving himself up to it, he may treat it as semi-alien or completely alien to himself, while compelling language ultimately to serve all his own intentions (1981: 299).

In this way, countless authors have used strategies such as stereotypes without having to associate themselves with the content of the stereotypes themselves. However, as Bakhtin points out here, the fact remains that the author does indeed choose the language and creates the plot of his novel, whether his intentions are ironic or not.

The distancing in the text is therefore an important clue in deciding what the author's intentions might be in using stereotypes. Dufays references Voltaire's use of stereotypes in his work *Candide* (1759), stating that the overemphasis on Voltaire's distance from the content of the work is a clue to the fact that he is writing ironically (2012: 51). With this famous work as an example, one cannot help but wonder, then, if Alfau is not using a similar strategy by overemphasizing his distance from the content that is being portrayed. As previously mentioned, he states repeatedly that the characters are, in fact, more in control than he is, and in case this has not been made clear enough, repeats: "I should add: the author is lost" (1988: x). Later on, he again insists on the sovereignty of his characters, stating: "Time and space do not exist for these people, and that naturally ruins my work completely" (1988: xi). Alfau, in his marked distancing from the plot of the novel and the perspectives portrayed by his characters, seems to line up with Dufays' argument on *Candide*, that such emphasis on the disconnect between the author and the work could be a clue as to the irony and critique taking place through the stereotypes being portrayed.

Therefore, in evaluating the novel *Locos* according to the schema provided by Amossy on the ethos of the author, one can see that Alfau attempts to include the maximum amount of distancing. First, by including his own name on the level of character, narrator and author, he

appears to be closely linking himself to the text and to the characters' actions and beliefs. However, at second glance, he in fact has distanced himself more from the text in that the character and the narrator provided with his name are clearly farces and far from actually representing himself. Therefore, in considering how the ethos frames the stereotypes in the novel, one could say that Alfau has achieved the greatest level of distancing available. This distancing is a metanarrative tool that allows the reader to interpret the stereotypes that run rampant throughout the text as a strategy for critiquing the very beliefs they represent.

### **2.3 The Reader's Role in Interpreting Stereotypes**

Having established that there is more than sufficient distancing in the text to allow the stereotypes to be considered as part of a larger critique throughout the novel, the final piece of the puzzle of the narrative is the reader. As Joep Leerssen expresses it in his essay on how to read stereotypes, the part of the equation of writing, narrating and reading that is impossible to control is the reader. This is because each reader is bound to react differently to the text and each one brings with him different backgrounds and knowledge that may or may not align with the author's (2012: 79). Therefore, if the author is displaying a stereotype deeply embedded in his home culture, someone who has had little to no contact with that culture will most likely miss the stereotype entirely, either not knowing that it existed or not recognizing it as such. Ruth Amossy expresses this sentiment when she claims: "Esto significa que el lector (ya que sea un participante en la interacción o el analista) conoce los estereotipos en vigor en la cultura y el campo de actividad del locutor, es capaz de apreciar su valorización social y de percibir sus funciones en un tipo de interacción determinado"<sup>6</sup> (2012: 33). This presents itself as an especially complicated issue when considering postcolonial works or immigrant narratives, since

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<sup>6</sup> "This means that the reader (given that he is a participant in the interaction or the analyst) knows the stereotypes inherent in the culture and the field of activity of the speaker, is capable of appreciating their social value and of perceiving their functions in a specific type of interaction."

the potential reader is most likely to be unaware of stereotypes or references from the other culture.

In *Locos*, the aspect of metanarrative has an interesting impact on the issue of the reader. The metanarrative defines the course of the reading, especially at the beginning of the novel when the reader is addressed directly by this narrator “Alfau” and is given a series of instructions. As with other aspects of the text, the overlaid emphasis on how to read the novel screams out irony to the reader. “Alfau” begins by stating that the reader “can read it in any fashion, except, perhaps, upside down” (1988: ix). The playfulness carries on as “Alfau” continues: “As a contrast and a tacit reproach to this most impolite animation of the characters, the reader should exercise a certain amount of composure and under no circumstances show signs of the slightest surprise at whatever takes place” (1988: xii). This once again places the narrative well within the characteristics of the postmodern novel, where all is a game and the reader is invited to lose himself in the chaos. Such an emphasis on the supposed lighthearted nature of the novel also seems to beg the reader to take the novel in the very opposite manner, carefully considering the order of the stories and the shifts in the characters that take place.

On another level, anticipating the reader’s eagerness to reach conclusions and draw some sort of meaning from the novel, the narrator once again steps in to warn the reader before he should continue. The first piece of advice is: “I must beg the reader to expect nothing but that, which in this case, and due to the unreliable characters and myself, conveys no meaning at all but only empty situations” (1988: xi). Reaching the end of the Prologue, and thus the end of the most direct interaction with the narrator, he again insists:

In other words, the reader is expected to sit back and watch this procession of strange people and distorted phenomena without even a critical eye. To look for anything else, or to take seriously this bevy of irresponsible puppets and the inconsistency of the author, would not be advisable, as by doing so and imagining things that might lend themselves to misinterpretation, the reader

would only disclose, beneath a more or less entertaining comedy of gestures, the vulgar aspects of a common tragedy (1988: xii).

Once again, the emphasis on the lack of meaning or significance behind the creation of the novel allows the irony to speak for itself, as if Alfau is in fact beckoning and inviting such criticism and investigation into his work. It also suggests, in the final phrase of the passage that this “entertaining comedy of gestures” is in fact a critique on several aspects of society, hence the reference to “common tragedy.”

As theorists agree that the one unstable part of the equation of using stereotypes in literature as a form of criticism is the role of the readers, it is interesting to note the special attention that Alfau gives to preparing his readers for what is to follow. He speaks almost entirely in irony, but the general message through that irony could be both a warning to withhold from initial conclusions and to enjoy the madhouse, but also, an indirect invitation to search for a deeper criticism within the pages of the novel. As this chapter will later discuss, the stories of the novel do lend themselves to this form of criticism.

#### **2.4 Using Stereotypes as Critique**

The first step in considering stereotypes as criticism is to establish whether stereotypes are indeed a valid tool for such endeavors. There have been scholars, such as Roland Barthes, who have stated that stereotypes can only be the opposite of good literature, avoiding the idea that they could in fact be used as part of criticism (Dufays 2012: 49). However, other scholars have supported the idea that stereotypes can be part of criticism in narrative. As Ruth Amossy states, “el tratamiento de los estereotipos en el discurso ficticio ha dado lugar a innumerables trabajos que han demostrado efectivamente cómo éste puede complicar o deshacer los estereotipos

étnicos, sexuales u otros”<sup>7</sup> (2012: 39). The important idea here is that the stereotypes are not used necessarily only in irony, but that the stereotypes can be used to show that they are, in fact, overly simplistic or unrealistic. However, the more extreme option of directly opposing the message conveyed by the literature through irony is another valid option, as previously seen in Dufays (2012: 47). The reference to rejection, disagreement or reversibility of values, emphasizes how the author can use stereotypes in a variety of manners simply through the styling and tone that surrounds the very stereotypes. Therefore, despite the rejection of a few authors of the idea that stereotypes can be used as a type of criticism, most theorists agree that stereotypes can indeed be a rich strategy for criticism, and they can be used as such through the tone of the writing selected by the author.

A further issue with the use of stereotypes as criticism is the difficulty of interpreting when stereotypes are used as a reinforcement of the idea they convey or when they are indeed used as criticism. Some of these manners of recognizing stereotypes as criticism have already been discussed, as, for example, the author’s distance from the content of the novel, the further distancing accomplished through the use of the narrator, or the author’s efforts to direct the reader in his interpretations of the novel. Beyond these clues, another way of interpreting the stereotypes is to consider the tone of the writing surrounding the stereotypes. Dufays references Amossy’s differentiation between the possibility of the stereotype being read as a concept, or the stereotype being read as an opinion. He then goes on to state, “no hay nada que permita zanjar objetivamente entre estas dos interpretaciones: mientras que la enunciación no va acompañada de ninguna señal metalingüística que revele la posición del enunciador, el resultado interpretativo es

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<sup>7</sup> “The treatment of stereotypes in fictional discourse has led to innumerable works that have effectively demonstrated how this very treatment can complicate or undo ethnic, sexual or other stereotypes.”

incierto, sometido a la bivalencia”<sup>8</sup> (Dufays 2012: 48). The necessary factor for understanding how to read the stereotypes in the text belongs to the metalinguistic aspects of the writing. Using Noam Chomsky’s definition of this idea of metalinguistics, this means that the reader must then have an understanding of the narrative’s function, structure, and usage. In other words, the reader must evaluate the background of the text as it relates to the stereotype.

Therefore, in order to recognize stereotypes as something more than what they represent at face value, and that the stereotypes may be read as a form of critique through satire, the reader must use metalinguistic skills to recognize the role of the stereotypes in the text. As John Clement Ball states in his work on satire, satire must follow a set of “norms,” otherwise it will not be recognized as being, in fact, satire (2003: 18). He goes on to explain that, “the critic must be alert to the fact that some satiric representations will look like reinscriptions of condescending colonial discourse, as well as to the possibility that ambivalence and satiric multidirectionality may qualify a text’s apparent loyalties” (2003: 23). Again, this strategy relies on the reader’s ability to evaluate the metalinguistic aspects of the text, looking for discrepancies that show the author’s irony in using certain stereotypes. Ball becomes even more specific in explaining what readers should be on their guard for: “When satire blends languages, styles, or discourses in its parodic mode or as a form of humorous incongruity, satire theories are inclined to set up linguistic gaps as hierarchical determinants of evaluation” (2003: 23). Once again, this form of reading the text requires evaluating it on a more global level in order to see whether the very conglomeration of styles or tones may lead to a satirical background surrounding the stereotypes in the narrative.

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<sup>8</sup> “There is nothing that allows us to objectively decide between these two interpretations: if the enunciation is not accompanied by any metalinguistic signal that reveals the position of the speaker, the interpreted result is uncertain, subject to double meaning.”

Another way of reading these stereotypes as a form of criticism is to see if the author in fact breaks down the stereotype through providing a variety of positions and perspectives that no longer allow the reader to see the stereotyped message through a unitary lens. This idea is called interpolation, as Bill Ashcroft explains in reference to stereotyping in postcolonial literature: “this strategy involves the capacity to interpose, to intervene, to interject a wide range of counter-discursive tactics into the dominant discourse without asserting a unified anti-imperial intention, or a separate oppositional purity” (2001b: 47). This differs from the previous, more satirical interpretation of stereotypes because it is not stating the erroneous nature of the stereotype in itself, but stating that it limits and creates binary oppositions when it claims that entire groups of people act in a certain way. This form of stereotyping has been experienced often by groups of people living in the United States, as we saw previously in Suzanne Oboler’s comment on the denial of a sense of self to individuals through the umbrella term “Hispanic” (2002: 77). While this is a very specific example from a non-literary source, the same can be true of stereotypes found in literary texts, as certain literary texts may break down binary oppositions by showing the difference where the stereotype claims unity.

## **2.5 The Postmodern in Stereotypes**

One further caveat must be discussed before delving further into the content of the novel *Locos*, for in the case of postmodern literature, the idea of “criticism” or a pointed message being delivered through the use of stereotypes must be replaced with the idea that the stereotypes are simply part of a game and the chaos of the text, without the necessary teleological design. As Dufays explains: “desde esta perspectiva, leer literariamente— y, de este modo, hacer de su lectura un juego— equivale a someter el texto a evaluaciones contradictorias, no con el fin de desconstruirlo, sino de conseguir que produzca un máximo de efectos, de manifestar el carácter

complejo y múltiple de su valor”<sup>9</sup> (2012: 49). The idea that the reading should be a game, a chaotic enjoyment of multiple ideas and characters colliding with one another, is representative of the postmodern movement, and this is another important reason for incorporating stereotypes into the text. This way of using stereotypes does not lead to any direct rebuke of the stereotypes or offer a more accurate picture of what the stereotype is portraying; it is a simple release from all searching. As María Louisa Ortega applies this postmodern perspective to literature, she states: “nos deja disfrutar”<sup>10</sup>; what the reader clearly recognizes is a game consisting of colliding stereotypes (2012: 116).

In considering the role of stereotypes in the postmodern novel, while the postmodern disintegrates into game playing and chaotic absurdities, stereotypes can still be used on different levels. Dufays presents the concept of the *vaivén*<sup>11</sup> in the postmodern novel, stating that what may appear to be a straightforward recounting of stereotypes, can in fact be a postmodern version of stereotype, depending on the author’s use of the stereotypes in the text: “El autor juega con el doble estatuto de los estereotipos, los presenta como indiferenciados, ambivalentes o indecibles”<sup>12</sup> (2012: 51). He then goes on to explain the four different ways that the postmodern author might present stereotypes. He first states that the author may show an indifferent attitude toward the stereotypes, not showing a particular opinion about their existence. As a second option, the author may reveal several different and discrepant stereotypes in a polyphonic manner. He might also show more marked contradictions through his narrating of the stereotypes by juxtaposing several different perspectives. Finally, the author might

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<sup>9</sup> “from this perspective, to read something as literature, and in this way, to make from their literature a game, is to submit the text to contradicting evaluations, not with the purpose of deconstructing it, but of achieving the production of the maximum number of effects, to manifest a character that is complex and multiple in its value”

<sup>10</sup> “It allows us to enjoy it.”

<sup>11</sup> oscillation

<sup>12</sup> “The author plays with the double statute of the stereotypes, he presents them as undifferentiated, ambivalent or undecidable”

demonstrate ambivalence toward the different perspectives throughout the novel (Dufays 2012: 51). All of the different strategies that the postmodern author might employ with his use of stereotypes reflect a common thread in that they do not use this technique with a single goal in mind. The new goal is to simply get lost in the world of the stereotypes and perhaps show their inaccuracy through the misaligning of the stereotypes as they collide in the text.

### **3 Categorizing *Locos* within the Theory**

Having discussed how stereotypes can be used as criticism and also examining what it means for stereotypes to be used in a postmodern style, it now remains to locate the novel *Locos* within the differing theories. First, as a matter of clarification, Alfau's use of stereotypes in *Locos* strongly opposes what Jill Adams has stated, that "there is no evidence of dubious politics or personal prejudices to be found in Alfau's work" (Adams, J. 1999). While Alfau's use of stereotypes as a form of criticism is definitely a more indirect strategy, one cannot doubt the presence of politics in Alfau's work and in *Locos* especially. Therefore, in this area, I agree with Phoebe Adams' perspective on these representations in the novel, since she states: "The thinking of these people constantly harks back to Spain, providing their creator with an excuse to poke wry fun at Spanish preoccupations and character" (Adams, P. 1990: 133). As Phoebe Adams explains, the use of stereotypes becomes an essential tool for creating a critique of Spanish character. However, since *Locos* combines aspects of criticism with postmodern game playing, the two are difficult to separate and for this reason will be dealt with in the same section.

#### **3.1 Metalinguistics**

As previously discussed in the theory on stereotypes, metalinguistics is very important in interpreting the stereotypes found in the narrative. In looking at the novel *Locos*, the need for evaluating the novel on a metalinguistic level is apparent as a result of the multiple levels of

irony in the text. First, the structure of the novel is unique in that it is a compilation of several stories, and, as the narrator has announced at the beginning, these stories can supposedly be read in any order desirable, however, the irony portrayed through the fallible narrator reveals that these stories are arranged and meticulously calculated in the order they are presented. Also, within the structure of the novel, the Prologue forms part of the metalinguistics, as the reader interacts with the supposed author, who turns out to be “Alfau” the narrator. Later in the novel, there is a series of footnotes in which “Alfau” reappears in the text, redirecting the reader and apologizing for his characters. Toward the end of the novel, one finds a manuscript, yet another structure within the novel. Within the stories themselves, the characters shift in and out of their personalities and their identities, one such example is Pepe Bejarano, who plays a different role in three distinct stories. An even more dramatic case of the shifting characters is Carmen, who at times becomes Lunarito, who in one story is a nun, and in yet another, a sister at the age of adolescence. All of these shifting characters and interweaving stories allow the reader room to believe that the content of the novel is not to be taken at face value, opening up the idea that the stereotypes could possibly be used as criticism.

When considering how the reader should interpret the metalinguistics of the story, there are several different areas of usage that the reader can access as clues. The first of these areas of usage is the very naming of the characters in the novel. The name Padre Inocencio is not arbitrary; it already prompts the reader to wonder to what point this name, and therefore the character himself, is ironic. The names Garcia and Dr. de los Rios are references to literary or historical figures and equally intentional. Garcia summons up images of Don Quixote, lost in a sentimental haze, or perhaps even the romantic/modern poet Federico García Lorca, who was Alfau’s contemporary, reaching the height of his fame around the time of the publication of

*Locos*. Of course, this correlation is entirely subjective, since it is impossible to know if Alfau had, in fact, read García Lorca's work. The name Dr. de los Ríos most likely is in reference to one of two progressive Spaniards: either to Francisco Giner de los Ríos, an advocate for secular education, or his nephew Fernando de los Ríos, a socialist politician who was famous during the time Alfau was writing. The connection between these two historical figures, Fernando de los Ríos and Federico García Lorca, whose families were long-time friends, could even potentially mirror the friendship between these two characters in the novel. The names of the two brothers, Pepe and Gaston, are both stereotypes in themselves, representative of their countries. Then in the name Carmen, one finds a seemingly endless history of this name representing heroines and femmes fatales throughout Spanish literature and French depictions of Spain through Mérimée and Bizet (1988: 107). These names are blatant icons, transporting the reader to a series of associations and references with each name. On another level, the use of Spanish in an English text also must be read in a metalinguistic way, as sometimes words are translated and explained, sometimes they appear in the original language with no additional information from the author, and on yet other occasions, they are already translated into English by the author, only to be recognized as such by the reader who notes a foreign calque within the structure of the phrases. As a result of all of these separate aspects of metalinguistics, the novel *Locos* opens the door for reading the stereotypes as a form of criticism.

### **3.2 Reinscriptions with Discrepancies**

With the background behind the stereotypes established through a study of the metalinguistics in the novel, the next step is to examine how the novel goes about presenting the stereotypes themselves. First, in comparing the novel to the picaresque novels that Spain is famous for, the character "types" are all present. As in *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), the reader encounters the

beggar, the priest and the impoverished nobleman. As in Unamuno's *San Manuel Bueno, martir* (1931), one finds the priest who struggles with his faith but keeps silent. The character of Carmen beckons back to Bizet's classic opera, *Carmen* (1875), based on Mérimée's novel (1845). However, while the stereotypical characters are present in the novel, if the reader is searching for criticism among the naming of the stereotypes, the next step is to look for discrepancies. In this sense, *Locos* does not disappoint. The first and perhaps the strongest case is Padre Inocencio, who, it would seem, is not as innocent as one would suppose, but the fact is never verified by the narrator. The next would be the discrepancies in the character of Carmen, who is tainted by the fact that her lover is actually her brother. The character of the beggar is distorted in that he is not poor, but is the Minister of Finance. In this way, *Locos* aligns itself well with the theory behind using stereotypes as criticism, as it seems to play along with the stereotypes themselves, yet the discrepancies cause a distancing between the mere presence of the stereotype in the text and the author's actual meaning.

### **3.3 Breaking a Unitary Lens**

*Locos* also shows strains of criticism amidst its stereotypical characters, since it breaks the single lens that is usually associated with the portrayal of stereotypes. Going back to the original definition of stereotypes, the fixation of an identity on a singular quality or attitude, we find that Alfau does not limit each character of the novel to one particular characteristic. Perhaps the best example of this is, yet again, Pepe Bejarano, who, throughout the story "The Wallet" has his foreign veneer slowly washed off him until he finds himself back in his own Spanish self. This breaks down the very stereotype Alfau is using in the story, since Pepe arrives on the scene as the stereotypical Spaniard who has lived outside of Spain for a long period of time, yet he does not remain in that perspective throughout the story, as he slowly finds himself absorbed into

Spanish society again. Other examples of this would be “Alfau” the narrator as he is allowed to experience Tia Mariquita or as he experiences Garcia as an outsider as well. As one final break from the unitary lens of the stereotype, the metanarrative established in one of the first stories, “A Character,” takes away the stereotypical nature of the characters as the reader always keeps in mind the fact that these characters have been created out of “real” people taken from the Café de los Locos in Toledo.

### **3.4 Playing in the Madness**

Finally, in considering the postmodern element in the novel *Locos*, this seems to encapsulate Alfau’s approach to stereotypes within the novel. First, the postmodern element has already been established by the references to playfulness and chaos previously discussed. From there, through evaluating the different *vaivenes* presented by Dufays, the use of stereotypes in the novel falls within the category of indifference. The other categories of polyphony, contradiction and ambivalence do not fit the narrative as well because within the text of the novel there is not a strong allusion to discord; with the exception of religious stereotypes, the stereotypes are apparently held up intact. Alfau relies almost entirely on the metalinguistics so the reader must draw his own conclusions about the stereotypes presented in the novel. To create opposing points of view within the novel is too forthright for Alfau’s style, especially since the obvious context clues accomplish the element of criticism without the aid of a contrasting viewpoint. Even when considering the elements of criticism that do exist in the novel, it remains true that the novel fits well in the postmodern framework, since even the criticism is created in a playful manner, without really searching for a solution to the issue being addressed. As Susan Elizabeth Sweeny has noted, the frame of the detective story is altered in order to achieve this very purpose: “rather than successfully solving a mystery, the detective confronts the insoluble

mysteries of his own interpretation and his own identity” (1993: 208). However, in confronting them, Alfau does not despair at the lack of resolve, but embraces this enigmatic state.

### 3.5 Valle-Inclán and His *Bufones*

By using stereotypes in characters as criticism while maintaining a postmodern style, Alfau’s *Locos* reminds the reader of the genre of *esperpento*, the grotesque, developed by Ramón del Valle-Inclán, and even more specifically of his use of *bufones*, fools or buffoons. He established what he hoped would become a new genre of literature, giving it the name *esperpento*. *Esperpento* literature intentionally uses deformed individuals as characters in order to portray the grotesque or, in other cases, it creates deliberately inaccurate descriptions of reality. This genre also frequently used the concave mirror, since it is a way of distorting the human figure into the absurd or even grotesque. Valle-Inclán’s use of the *bufones* was not original to himself, but came from Goya’s famous portraits of several *bufones* as a depiction of the grotesque, both comic and tragic. These *bufones* fit well into Valle-Inclán’s new genre because they represent the fallen nature of the modern man, incapable of the heroism of prior generations. He relied on these images in order to portray a tone that would be both playful and yet still critical, as he described it, cited by Alfonso Reyes: “La articulación simultánea de planos cómicos y trágicos”<sup>13</sup> (Dougherty 2003: 205). *Esperpento* is Valle-Inclán’s solution for allowing playful madness while still creating a critique of society. It is, for him, an image that can accomplish both at the same time: “El esperpento valleinclanesco y la vida real se identifican en la visión del autor para crear un mundo desconcertante donde coexisten la tragedia y la farsa, donde la angustia y el desatino humano están en constante juego”<sup>14</sup> (Cardona and Zahareas 2012:

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<sup>13</sup> “The simultaneous articulation of comic and tragic planes.”

<sup>14</sup> “The Valle-Inclán grotesque and real life identify themselves in the author’s vision to create a disconcerting world where tragedy and farce coexist, where anguish and human nonsense are constantly at play.”

125). Valle-Inclán sets out to show the inconsistencies he sees in society by exchanging the typical heroic protagonist for the ridiculed, deformed and grotesque *bufón*.

Having established that Valle-Inclán uses these *bufones* in order to create a playful criticism, the next step is to understand what exactly he was criticizing. In many of the interviews with Valle-Inclán, he insists that these *bufones* are not simply a playful critique of modern society, but a specific critique of what the Spaniard has become (Dougherty 2003: 207). Therefore Valle-Inclán's goal, as stated in *La novela de hoy* (16-V 1930), in creating this new genre is to write characters that reflect what he feels is the truth of the society he lives in, being a run-down, broken Spain that carries tragedy within itself, no longer capable of recreating the great heroes of the past (Dougherty 1983: 192). He states in *Luces de bohemia* that the country has traded in its role as the heroic protagonist in its prior glory for its role as the *bufón* of Europe:

Los héroes clásicos reflejados en los espejos cóncavos dan el Esperpento. El sentido trágico de la vida española sólo puede darse con una estética sistemáticamente deformada. España es una deformación grotesca de la civilización europea. Las imágenes más bellas en un espejo cóncavo, son absurdas.<sup>15</sup> (Valle-Inclán [1924] 1999: 132-133)

By using these *bufones* as representatives of Spanish society, Valle-Inclán was expressing the ridicule that Spain had acquired in the eyes of the rest of Europe. He believed that Spain was severely lacking in modern progress, especially relevant since he is considered a writer from the famous *Generación del 98*, a wave of success in literature and the arts in Spain. He believed that the political decisions Spain was making would only cause the country to lag further behind the leaders of Europe. His phrase “el sentido trágico de la vida” references the title of an essay by his contemporary, Miguel de Unamuno (1912).

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<sup>15</sup> Classical heroes reflected in a concave mirror become grotesque. The tragic sense of Spanish life can only yield a systematically grotesque aesthetic. Spain is a grotesque deformation of European civilization. The most beautiful of images when reflected in a concave mirror are grotesque.

Therefore, the aim of *esperpento* literature is to express the ridiculous, the absurd, and the obscure, which connects well with Alfau's work, especially in *Locos*. In fact, Susan Elizabeth Sweeny has briefly linked Alfau's work to the genre of *esperpento* literature in her article "Aliens, Aliases, and Alibis: Alfau's *Locos* as a Metaphysical Detective Story," along with Borges and Nabokov (1993: 207). Valle-Inclán himself explains for us in the *Diario de la Marina* (1921) what he hopes to accomplish through this genre with the goal of setting up the ridiculous, as he explains, as cited in *Un Valle Inclán olvidado*:

Estoy iniciando un género nuevo, al que llamo "género estrafalario". Ustedes saben que en las tragedias antiguas, los personajes marchaban al destino trágico, valiéndose del gesto trágico. Yo en mi nuevo género también conduzco mis personajes al destino trágico, pero me valgo para ello del gesto ridículo. En la vida existen muchos seres que llevan la tragedia dentro de sí y que son incapaces de una actitud levantada, resultando, por el contrario, grotescos en todos sus actos<sup>16</sup> (Dougherty 1983: 107-108).

The very use of *bufones* allows the author to show the decline, as he sees it, in humankind, satirizing customs and culture by exaggerating them to the level of ridicule. The relationship between Valle-Inclán's characters and his critique of Spanish society is a helpful framework for understanding what Alfau's purpose could be in his use of stereotypes in *Locos*. Jack Shreve, who reviewed the novel on its republication by Dalkey Archive Press, anticipates this combination of techniques when he briefly alludes to this method: "Neatly divided into segments that read like short stories, it juggles a congeries of absurdist types such as pimps, beggars, and priests in what can be taken as a metaphor for Spain today" (1989: 81). This technique resembles *esperpento* literature partly in how it plays between tragedy and comedy. Many of Alfau's stories appear to be comedies through the tone and the supposedly conventional structure, yet these stories reveal a deeper tragedy through satire. Furthermore, many of Alfau's

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<sup>16</sup> I am beginning a new genre, which I call "the eccentric genre." You know that in the ancient tragedies, the characters marched off to a tragic destiny, producing a tragic gesture. In my new genre, I also guide my characters toward a tragic destiny, but to do so, I use the gesture of the ridiculous. In life, there are many people who bear tragedy inside of themselves and are incapable of a higher attitude, resulting in the opposite, their becoming grotesque in all their actions.

stories border on the grotesque and the surreal, especially on the level of characters, fitting with Valle-Inclán's use of *bufones*. Finally, just as Valle-Inclán uses the *bufones* in his satire of modern Spain, so Alfau uses his *locos* in his own critique of Spain.

#### **4 Stereotypes of National Identities**

Having evaluated the novel as a whole insofar as Alfau uses the stereotypes to create a form of criticism in a postmodern sense, the next step is to take an in-depth look at the stories themselves, focusing especially on the stereotypes they include. In order to organize the stories by the stereotypes, the main stories dealing with this technique have been separated into two groups, those dealing with national identity as compared to “the Other”, and those dealing with Spanish national character in itself. Within the discussion of each of the stories, the kinds of stereotypes will be presented, along with the critical or playful motives for dwelling on those stereotypes, followed by a comparison of the use of the stereotypes as *esperpento* literature. In the first section, the stories “Fingerprints,” “The Wallet,” and “Chinelato” will be discussed, and in the second section, the stories “The Beggar,” “The Necrophil” and “A Romance of Dogs” will be considered.

##### **4.1 Spain and Other Nations**

###### **“Fingerprints”**

Within the story “Fingerprints,” two main stereotypes are dealt with, the first being the stereotype of the Spanish patriot. In his work *El mito del carácter nacional*, Julio Caro Baroja describes the patriot as one who usually has a much higher impression of his own country than of his neighbors:

De todas maneras, contradictorios o no, los clisés se fijan: paralelamente en España se construyen imágenes, más o menos deformadas y antipáticas de italianos, franceses, ingleses, alemanes,

flamencos, portugueses, etc. Entre la figura que cada nación beligerante se hace de sí misma y la que hacen los enemigos hay enormes diferencias de intención<sup>17</sup> ([1970] 2004: 45).

In “Fingerprints,” Alfau’s exaggeration of the stereotype is apparent from the opening scene of the story since Don Gil believes he alone is a true patriot of his home country. An example of this absurd patriotism is found when Don Gil remarks on his being the only one to have his fingerprints recorded. The narrator explains: “This Don Gil considered an irrefutable proof of the fact that he was the only faithful citizen and only patriot in Spain, aside from the young King, whose fingerprints, by the way, were not recorded” (1988: 59). In this passage the narrator takes an active role in furthering the irony of this character who only considers the King his equal in patriotism, but not even based on his own absurd criteria.

As an added twist, the stereotype of Spanish patriotism is not one that praises Spain endlessly; on the contrary, it is a pessimistic patriotism. In this irony, Don Gil actually announces the advantages of other countries over his own:

Don Gil had shouted and pounded on the café tables. As a true Spanish patriot who cared for nothing but his country, he had insulted Spain. He said that the Spanish people were careless and lazy, that they never boosted national glories and never asserted themselves before other nations. Don Gil was sure that if his father had been a Frenchman or an Englishman, the whole world would know that he was the great discoverer of fingerprints (1988: 58).

In Alfau’s representation of a Spanish patriot, Don Gil becomes a crusader fighting for Spain’s advancement. The irony only continues as Don Gil perseveres in putting his hope in his family’s success and in changing the history of Spain: “The name Bejarano would stand out. The Bejaranos would be an important family in Spain. He could not allow his father’s memory to die out in obscurity. Spain had produced too many forgotten glories, too many unrecognized geniuses” (1988: 61). This image of the patriot fits well with the classical image of Don

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<sup>17</sup> In any case, contradictory or not, the clichés fix themselves, in the same way in Spain they construct images, more or less deformed and disagreeable of Italians, the French, the English, Germans, the Flemish, the Portuguese, etc. Between the positive image each battling nation creates of itself and the one made by their enemies lie huge differences of intentions.

Quixote, wishing to reach beyond and attain something more, only to fight fake battles and return home realizing it was all for nothing.

Furthering this idea of Don Gil representing a quixotic national stereotype, when the Bejarano family is left utterly destroyed both by external and internal forces, the outcome bears a strong resemblance to the melancholic ending of *Don Quixote*, for when Don Quixote tries to rise above his circumstances and create a change in his surroundings, he is cut down at every turn. The use of Don Quixote as a national stereotype is not surprising, since, as Ilan Stavans has stated, the entire novel *Locos*, is “a wholehearted homage to Cervantes” and even more so since Alfau, reflecting on his newly-found fame at the time of being rediscovered, would call himself “hidalgo redeemed” (Stavans 1993b: 143) (Shapiro, D. 1993: 198). With this in mind, in returning to the story, a glimpse of this stereotype comes from the narrator’s description of the Bejarano family: “The Bejarano family had been always rather obscure and unimportant. It belonged to the middle class, a term which in Spain has a far sadder meaning than anywhere else, because of the fatal, everlasting qualities of classes there” (1988: 58). The importance of classes and the impossibility of rising above one’s class has been a long-standing literary focus, especially prominent in Spanish literature. However, if this issue of class is the stereotype being represented, then Alfau chooses an entirely postmodern representation of it. There is no criticism included on the metanarrative level of the story, since the “criticism” comes from the stereotypical character himself, whose absurdity and pointless demise become the central point of ridicule, a mockery for the reader to enjoy. This wandering off into madness and laughing at the absurdity of it all is a key characteristic of postmodern literature, this being one example of how Alfau accomplishes this postmodern play on several levels in the text.

The second stereotype employed in the text of “Fingerprints” is the way in which the text uses the French as “the Other”. Alfau’s treatment of the relationship between the French and the Spanish is once again more comedy than criticism. A perfect example of this comes when describing the marriage of Don Gil and Doña Felisa:

Now, Don Gil abhorred anything that sounded French. As a real patriot he used no reasoning for his dislike— he hated the French simply for being French. His wife, on the other hand, entertained a sincere admiration for the neighbors across the Pyrenees, but as a true woman she used no more reasoning for her preference. She simply loved the French for being French (1988: 62).

Alfau’s representation of the view of “the Other” is so perfectly placed that it is stereotypical. The fact that a true patriot is defined here as not having a reason for his hate of “the Other” creates a playfully executed criticism against the nation as a political entity. We have already discussed the role of “the Other” in the formation of nations, and this theme becomes a main stereotype represented here in a simple and playful revealing of the ignorance behind the stereotypical sentiments. Also, in this section satirizing the patriot, there is also a stereotypical representation of women which falls into the category of misogyny.

As a continuation of these stereotypes of Spain and France, the children are also divided between the two. Gaston is typified as the Frenchman: the womanizer. This becomes even clearer in the following story, as Gaston slowly molds further into his stereotypical self: “when Gaston returned from that trip of his to Paris he had undergone a decided change. It seems that that city brought out his true colors” (1988: 83). The reader also then discovers that he is a professional pimp (1988: 84). However, while this is the representation of the French through the characters of the children, the Spanish side does not fare much better. Carmen, given the name most stereotypically representative of the Spanish femme fatale, free in love and of strong temperament, is painted in this story as a whore. This is one of the occasions when Alfau chooses to leave a word directly in Spanish, particularly interesting, since the word choice is

stronger in the Spanish than the English. The moment comes when her mother exclaims, “Carmen you little *puta*, come here” (1988: 67).

Returning to the first central stereotype represented in the story, the Spanish patriot, one finds Alfau’s satirical criticism of this character reminiscent of the *bufones* of Valle-Inclán. Alfau takes a stereotype that is usually represented as heroic and honorable and carries it to the obscure. Don Gil is willing to sacrifice himself for his country, but his own criteria as to why he is the ultimate patriot are irrelevant and absurd, since his acts of patriotism are based on his work in fingerprints, which he claims will be the glory of Spain. Alfau reflects Valle-Inclán’s image of the depraved modern man because even the patriot cannot reach glory, instead he is reduced to obscurity and shame. For Don Gil, this comes at the end of the story when he becomes, as he believes, a martyr for his country, when in fact he has foolishly confessed to a crime he did not commit. Alfau’s criticism seems to be first that the Spaniard chooses to mark his fame in obscurity that will never amount to anything, like the Bejarano claim to fingerprints, and then also that the society itself punishes the man who attempts to mark his own path and achieve success, since Don Gil reaches his demise as a result of Garcia planting his fingerprints at the scene of the crime (1988: 42).

In the characters of Carmen and Gaston, there again seems to be a deeper satirical criticism at work. One of the relevant concepts to this particular story, specifically in the stereotypes of Spain and France, is the idea of the two Spains. As previously mentioned, at the time Alfau was writing, Spain was divided into two political ideologies, the first bent on preserving a purely Spanish conservative Spain and the second motivated by excelling in European modernity, drawing from scholars from France especially, as well as being much more politically liberal. It is important to note that the differences between these two Spains, and

therefore two entire ideologies, were so extreme that they would soon form the two sides that would fight a devastating civil war. What is fascinating is that in using a brother and sister to represent these two sides in the story, Alfau makes a strong political criticism. The incestuous relationship between the two characters seems to point to a lack of ideological purity on either side of the two Spains, that each one would willingly break his stance for personal gain. Alfau seems to be pointing out inconsistencies found on both sides of the political division, and a lack of pure motives in their political campaigns. Secondly, the incestuous relationship in the story leads to a further devastation within the Bejarano family, as the two end up becoming lovers, to the shame and even demise of the family. In comparing this theme within the story to Spanish history, this perspective appears to have carried some truth when one considers the monstrosities committed by both sides before, during and after the Spanish Civil War. Alfau's image of the downfall of the Bejarano family seems almost prophetic in light of the devastation caused by the Civil War and the following years of starvation and extreme poverty, not to mention the families divided by political beliefs, leading some to prison, exile or even death. Patriotism was laid claim to by both sides in the Civil War, as Xosé-Manuel Núñez Seixas claims in his essay "Nations in Arms against the Invader":

Wartime nationalist discourses had certain apparent similarities, particularly the Spanish "patriotic" appeals developed on both sides of the conflict. But this does not mean that both messages were identical. [...] On the republican side, nationalism constituted just one legitimising argument alongside others. [...] Nationalism played a much more important role on the rebel side from the very beginning. Its crucial function as a mobilization tool was only marked by the call to defend Catholicism (2005: 64-5).

### **"The Wallet"**

Moving along to the next story that involves stereotypes regarding "the Other" in Spanish culture, in "The Wallet," the reader follows Pepe Bejarano as he embodies and encounters stereotypes of both Spain and England. This kind of stereotyping is not surprising, as recent

scholars analyzing the relationship between Postcolonialism and the use of stereotypes have found: “la noción del estereotipo aparece con frecuencia en trabajos que se proponen analizar la representación del Otro en el texto literario”<sup>18</sup> (Van Tongeren 2012: 316). Since “the Other” is the main stereotype developed throughout the story, the author elaborates and delves into the details of this portrait of cross-culture stereotyping. The first stereotypical encounter in the story is Pepe’s appearance as an outsider in his own country:

There was something in his general demeanor that bore the unmistakable seal of the foreigner (that is, from the viewpoint of a Spaniard). Perhaps it was his shaven face, or his extraordinarily fair complexion; perhaps it was only the pipe he was smoking, a thing which at that time, in Spain was the privilege of a foreigner, or of a person who desired to be considered a foreigner—hundred percent Spaniards smoked a pipe only when they traveled in a ship, that is, away from Spain (1988: 79).

The behaviors marked out as foreign in this passage are the shaven face, the complexion, and most importantly, the pipe. Throughout the story, the pipe becomes a symbol of Pepe’s otherness. The pipe symbolizes the detective-story nature of *Locos* as it points to pipe-smoking Sherlock Holmes. Pepe Bejarano even claims to have studied under the detective while in England. As Mary McCarthy points out in her “Afterword” to *Locos* (1988: 206), just as Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* (1980) contours an allusion to Sherlock Holmes and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902), here there is a direct intentional reference to Arthur Conan Doyle’s detective: “Yes, Pepe, yes. I should like to write an official letter to that gentleman, to that great man—Cherlonskby, is that the man?” (1988: 96). What adds to the force of the stereotyping is the belief that Sherlock Holmes is a real person. Returning to the use of this trope within the story, when Pepe embodies the role of “the Other,” his pipe is close by, but when his pipe falls or is forgotten, he has lapsed back into the role of the native. The first time this pipe dropping takes place is when Pepe is confronted with the news that his brother is indeed a pimp:

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<sup>18</sup> “The notion of the stereotype frequently appears in works that propose an analysis of the representation of the other in literary texts.”

“The pipe dropped from Pepe’s mouth, because just for a moment the foreign qualities which supported it had yielded to surprise and his face stood there naked, unmasked, pipeless, suddenly bewildered and unmistakably Spanish” (1988: 84). The pipe does return later in the story, however, as Pepe pendulates between embracing his otherness and coveting his nativeness.

Returning to the English stereotypes portrayed in the story, the first linguistic one comes with the reference to language used during the blackout of Madrid: “All of them anonymous letters, except one signed with a woman’s name and very heavily scented, the contents of which might pass in Spanish, but in English would never do” (1988: 81). The English are supposedly equated with model decorum, while the Spaniards are associated with foul language, devoid of any shock value for the insider. Later, another reference to Pepe’s new English customs comes when Pepe fails to respond to an insult from his uncle: “But Pepe had spent several years in England, and many of his Spanish characteristics had been removed. Therefore let us not blame him for his diplomatic silence” (1988: 83). Once again, the English are represented as diplomatic and responsible, while the Spanish are presented as emotional and at times, irrational. As a whole, the stereotypes are presented in this case as indifferent, not consequential in any way. Even the negative end of the binary opposition toward the Spanish is taken in a playful tone, not as a biting criticism.

The stereotypes of Spain continue with Pepe’s interactions with his uncle as the distanced “outsider” confronts the native. The first example is Pepe’s uncle’s insult: “Pepe, you are a *sinverguenza*. I suppose it runs in the family, I mean, your father’s side. He was a dreamer and a secondhand Quixote” (1988: 83). The first of the Spanish stereotypes has to do with a classic stereotype, created around the dreamer Don Quixote, to be a *sinverguenza*, to “have no shame” in depending on others or constantly asking for favors. The second case of stereotyping in the

passage comes not from a character, to which the reader has become accustomed throughout the novel, but through a series of connecting events. The protocol of what to do when someone insults you, including slapping and a potential duel, is presented in the story as a stereotypical series of steps (1988: 83). These stereotypes create a sort of Spanish code of decorum, dictating the Spanish characters' actions and attitudes while rendering Pepe a confused outsider.

A further grouping of stereotypes created in the story "The Wallet" comes in the area of sexuality. The first stereotypical encounter with sexuality comes when Pepe discovers from his uncle that his brother is a pimp: "Really, there was such a profession in Spain, there were real men in Spain yet" (1988: 87). The two stereotypical assumptions here are that in Spain prostitution and pimps were valid occupations, and second that this makes one a "real man." The next encounter with sexuality comes with his interactions with the maid in the hostel. Again, the part to focus on is the connection he makes between the Spaniard in him and his sexuality: "Pepe felt sure that he had aroused her feminine admiration. His Spanish characteristics were pushing their way out of him" (1988: 91). The Spanish in him is the part that drives forward his seduction of the maid. Again the stereotype relating Spain with sexuality is reiterated as Pepe reflects on the incident: "Well, when Pepe left the *casa de huespedes* after having swallowed his cold chocolate, he was thinking of how a mere infant in Spain could teach a full-grown man so many new things" (1988: 92). Clearly, there is a stereotype being represented here, especially focusing on Spanish sexuality. This is nothing new to Spanish literature, since this stereotype has been in place ever since the invention of the character Don Juan. However, Alfau's perspective on this stereotype is, once again, playful. There is a lack of criticism found even in the metanarrative of the text surrounding such a polemical stereotype in the 1920s. This further emphasizes the postmodern use of stereotypes throughout the novel.

As the story “The Wallet” continues, the occasion arises for breaking the two stereotypes, both of the Spaniard and the foreigner. As Pepe readapts to being in Spain, one expects that he would acknowledge that neither stereotype is legitimate because he himself would embody the breakdown of these stereotypes, being partially Spanish and partially English. If the story were to follow this direction, it would align well with what Bhabha states about cultural difference instead of stereotypes:

The enunciation of cultural difference problematizes the binary division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address. It is the problem of how, in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic. That iteration negates our sense of the origins of the struggle. It undermines our sense of the homogenizing effects of cultural symbols and icons, by questioning our sense of the authority of cultural synthesis in general (2004: 52).

In this situation, the character Pepe could create an area of cultural difference that would break down the binary oppositions created through these stereotypes both of Spain and the foreigner. However, this is not the direction that the story takes, as Pepe seems to only be capable of embodying stereotypical behavior, and nothing in-between. Pepe actually seems to represent a form of “fetishization” as he gazes out at “the Other” from either his English side or his Spanish side. This becomes especially clear when one considers the definition of stereotype by Bhabha:

The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (which the negation through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the *representation* of the subject in signification of psychic and social relations (2004: 107, emphasis original to the text).

Pepe’s reaction to being an outsider in Spain seems to embody the “arrested, fixated form of representation” in that he is incapable of coming to a position of hybridity between the two. Instead, he vacillates back and forth between the two extremes.

In the moments when Pepe finds himself identifying more fully with his position as an outsider in Spain, he feels his superiority to Spain and his fellow citizens. The first comment about this attitude toward his homeland comes when discussing the blackout in Madrid:

Having been so long away from his country, he had subconsciously absorbed the foreign belief that Spain is a backward country and that when one crossed the Pyrenees southward one entered eternal night. Naturally, when he arrived at Madrid in this general darkness this subconscious belief found a strong echo in his senses. He felt like one who is dreaming (this, of course, is a feeling shared by most Spaniards who return to Spain after a long absence) (1988: 84).

First, the passage clearly represents a stereotype of Spain from an outsider's perspective: stating that Spain is indeed a backward country. Secondly, even Pepe's experience of being an outsider is stereotyped, as the narrator informs the reader that these feelings are typical among others who, like himself, are returning to Spain. Later in the story, these feelings return as Pepe learns that his brother is a pimp: "And Pepe, smoking his pipe, felt for his brother the admiration of a tourist" (1988: 87). The narrator does not allow Pepe an "in between" space for him to inhabit; even though the person being discussed is his brother, his only response is one of an absolute outsider.

However, Pepe's responding as a foreigner in moments of supposed hybridity is only half the equation. In other moments, he abandons his foreign position of "the Other" and becomes a native once again. The importance of these episodes is that even in these situations, there is again no moment of in-between. He is either fully Spanish or fully English. One such example, taken again from when he discovers that his brother is a pimp, shows this other side of Pepe's behavior:

The pipe had fallen from his mouth. The last chip of his foreign veneer had dropped from him, the only thing that remained to make him still feel an outsider and spectator, witnessing the phenomena of an extraordinary land without present reality, had abandoned him and his race had come out. He felt again at home. (1988: 85)

Once more, the moment takes place during an emotionally driven response. The second time when Pepe strips off his foreignness and regains his native Spanish self is with the maid at the hostel. Even in this state of hesitancy and lack of confidence, Pepe once again responds with the stereotypical gesture of a bullfighter. Again, the character is not allowed to rise above the stereotypical, whether it is Spanish or English.

Therefore, in the story “The Wallet,” one finds not a moment of cultural difference, but stereotypes. Indeed, the stereotypes are held intact throughout the entirety of the action. However, this does not mean that the story can then be taken at face value. The exaggerated sense in which the stereotypes are delivered, from the symbol of foreignness of Pepe’s pipe to Pepe’s bullfighting in the seduction scene, convey the irony in these stereotypical representations. Again, Alfau’s approach to stereotypes rests upon the metalinguistics to portray the ironical playfulness behind the stories. This is, once more, a postmodern technique in which the stereotypes are not represented with a particular goal in mind, but to enjoy the playfulness of the inaccuracy.

This story also seems more autobiographical than the rest of the stories, as it deals with a young man, around the age of Alfau at the time he was writing the novel, returning to Spain. Interestingly, Pepe is also one of the most introspective characters in the novel, and Alfau allows him to be much more three-dimensional than the rest of the characters. On another level, the stereotypes associated with Spain in this story are much more superficial than the stereotypes from other stories, in other words, they are the stereotypical stereotypes of Spain. The main ones addressed are the crime associated with Spain’s larger cities and moral depravity at large, the obsession with sexuality and the extreme poverty. With such stereotypical stereotypes, the satire of the story is much less biting than in other stories. In comparison to *esperpento* literature, Pepe

does not resemble the *bufones*, since he himself is not ridiculed; however, he does find himself sinking back into Spanish customs and Spanish “depravity” that he had escaped from by leaving Spain. In this way, Spain itself becomes the *bufón* of the story, showing its grotesque habits of perverted sexuality, dirty and poverty-stricken inhabitants and degraded moral standards. When one views the story as a representation of Spain as a *bufón*, one sees the same criticism as Valle-Inclán proposed: Spain as the *bufón* of Europe.

### “Chinelato”

In looking at the third story that focuses on Spaniards in comparison to “the Other,” the main focus here seems to be more on the concept of *limpieza de sangre*, purity of blood, an idea that was central to Spanish culture from the 16<sup>th</sup> century movements and in classical Spanish literature. After the expulsion of the Moors and Jews in 1492, Christians often had to prove that they had no Moorish or Jewish blood in order not to be discriminated against like the *conversos*, those who chose to adopt an often doubtful conversion. In this story, the idea of “fixity” in the creation of stereotypes is fundamental to the plot, since the story deals mainly with an example of “the Other” within Spanish society. Bhabha offers this insight on the concept of fixity:

An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of “fixity” in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as a sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and demonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always “in place”, already known and something that must be anxiously repeated [ . . . ] (2004: 94-95)

This fixity that would align well with colonial discourse appears constantly throughout the story “Chinelato.” The story begins with a clear representation of the stereotype being used, a childhood rhyme about a Chinese man:

*Alto, gordo y chato,  
Juan Chinelato;*

*Tira los garbanzos y se come al gato*<sup>19</sup> (1988: 102).

The idea of cat eating clearly marks the stereotypical notion of a person from China. The same reference takes a more prominent role in the plot when Señor Olózaga proposes marriage to a young woman, to the response of, ““It is useless, Señor Chinelato... you do not understand... you do not seem to want to understand... You see, Señor Chinelato? My daughter is white” (1988: 114). Once again, the main characteristic known to the reader at this point in the narrative is Señor Olózaga’s race. Even his true name is rarely used in the text, and is replaced by “Chinelato” to the point where he is even addressed directly by other characters as “Señor Chinelato,” on several occasions. This fits well into the colonial ideas about stereotypes and their power within a colonial framework: “The most tenacious aspect of colonial control has been its capacity to bind the colonized into a binary myth” (Ashcroft 2001b: 21). This is what the reader sees played out in the story as Señor Olózaga is caught up in a binary opposition, where he is only allowed the role of “the Other,” no matter what he may believe himself to be. Stereotypes are often used as part of this binary opposition, creating a clear divide between the native and “the Other.”

Besides Señor Olózaga’s stereotypical representation in the story and the stereotypical reaction of the Spaniards toward his skin color, what follows is a stereotypical reaction to his situation, as he apparently desires to reach this *limpieza de sangre* through marriage. During the story he marries two women, and the text includes details specifying that both women were very pale, or white (1988: 119). Even in reference to the wife’s relationship to Señor Olózaga, the imbalance of the marriage is stated: “The man who knew used to tell me that it was a shame that an aristocratic white lady like her had run herself to death for such a nigger” (1988: 120). In

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<sup>19</sup> Tall, fat and flat-nosed,  
Juan Chinelato  
Throws out the chickpeas and eats the cat

order to complete the circle of abuse, the text also includes the fact that, “For some reason Chinelato delighted in making his wife suffer” (1988: 121). It seems that this text could almost be taken for a metaphor of the colonial situation, where the colonial regime has been overthrown by the natives, and the natives will have their revenge.

The conclusion of the story shows the repercussions of the stereotypes and the alienation placed upon Señor Olózaga. It seems to be a fictional retelling of what Ania Loomba diagnoses: “Despite the fact that racial classification may be at several levels a ‘delusion’ and a myth, we need to remember that it is all too real in its pernicious social effects” (Loomba 1998: 106). From the rest of the plot, Señor Olózaga is known to be a cruel man, especially in relation to his wives. The sentiments that promote the racial classifying surface through the voice of the narrator in the text, as he states: “Of course, he was not Spanish and undoubtedly the blood of all races was mixed in his veins to produce a strange and dangerous character” (1988: 103). This time, the issue is not only his skin color, but what characteristics may be passed along with the color of his skin. This fear of “the Other” often surfaces through the use of stereotypes about immigrants: “Hablar de migración implica abordar el fenómeno del estereotipo o de la representación cultural, que refleja predominantemente los comportamientos xenófobos de la cultura receptora hacia los inmigrantes”<sup>20</sup> (Declercq 2012: 87). This seems to be the case with Señor Olózaga, as the effect of the myth and alienation created out of his skin color is explained:

All these things were more than sufficient to appeal to the imagination of children and arouse their interest and gossip, not to mention that of the grownups, and during that summer the whole neighborhood was in a fever. This individual frightened and attracted everyone, he often must have appeared in the dreams of many, sometimes like a black ogre, sometimes like a Chinese dragon, always spitting fire and devouring children (1988: 103).

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<sup>20</sup> “To speak of migration implies approaching the phenomenon of the stereotype or the cultural representation, that predominantly reflects the xenophobic behaviors coming from the receiving culture toward the immigrants”

What follows, then, in the text is simply that Señor Olózaga lives up to this reputation in his repeated cruelty to his wives, especially in the scene when he roasts his own child like a sucking pig and presents it to his wife.

Joseph Scott, in his treatment of this short story, references a meritocracy, which he claims Señor Olózaga has won, by possessing more money and power than the family that originally rejected his offer of marriage. However, he bases this claim on his version of the conclusion of the story: “despite the fact that Chinelato is cheated of his revenge on Don Esteban, he goes on to a series of colorful adventures which end in an old age of comfortable, quiet wealth” (2005: 20). I strongly disagree with Scott’s argument on the premise that this is an inaccurate recounting of the end of the story, when in reality, the story closes with Señor Olózaga roasting his own child. Through this exaggeration Alfau may be hinting at the difficulty for any Spaniard to be able to guarantee that he is one-hundred percent of Iberian blood, with over seven centuries of Moorish presence in Spain, and perhaps even before that, as incursions find settlements by Visigoths and other northern tribes. Instead of Scott’s proposed meritocracy, Alfau more likely seems to be representing an obsession with the *limpieza de sangre* which has created a seemingly endless continuation of a colonial relationship established through religious intolerance in Spain long ago. If the concept of meritocracy has any role in this story, it is a biting satirical dystopian meritocracy, in which cruelty and revenge are rewarded.

Once again, in considering Alfau’s representation of these stereotypes in the story, one discovers that Alfau relies on the same strategies of indifference and mimicry. He does not speak out against the stereotypes describing Olózaga, in fact, the very plot reinforces the stereotypes presented, the meaning behind which could be one of two possibilities. This could be the same postmodern ambivalence of running with the absurdity of the stereotypes to the

extreme, which seems a valid possibility, considering the outrageous actions of Olózaga during the final chapters of the story. The second possibility could be that this is Alfau using the technique of mimicry as a form of critique. By following what would seem an appropriate colonial text about the native and the colonized, but all the while adding hidden ironies through distancing and ambivalence, this could be a form of creating a critique since it raises the fixation of cultural identity to a conscious level where the reader can become fully aware of it (Bhabha 2004: 129). While intentions are yet again difficult to decipher, the very outrageousness of the story points to irony and therefore a form of mimetic critique.

Therefore, in contrast with the story of “The Wallet,” the end of the story “Chinelato” offers a much more biting satire in the way in which the story concludes with both the grotesque and the surreal. Señor Olózaga is presented to the reader as a *bufón*, as the narrator conveys his strange and “deformed” physique through the gossip of those around him, especially focusing on the color of his skin, the inconsistency of his race and the mystery of his origins. The grotesque element continues in the description of his wife, as her appearance turns ghostlike the longer she is married to Olózaga. Finally, when Olózaga roasts his own child, the grotesque is at its climax, reminiscent of Valle-Inclán’s use of the technique. Finally, the surreal is presented through the story of Tia Mariquita and her dream-like state of mourning over the loss of her child.

Therefore, the story that focuses most on racial stereotypes has many elements of the grotesque and the surreal, revealing a much more pointed criticism of Spanish society, the concept of *limpieza de sangre* and the effects of alienation, along with national divides. However, the postmodern infiltrates this story as well, since the characters live on in dissonance, with no search for meaning after the brutal events of the narrative.

A further stereotype could also be represented through the character Chinelato, since his name comes from an actual historical figure most likely familiar to Alfau. There appears to be a devious reference through his name to Salustiano Olózaga (1805-1873), the Basque politician who was Prime Minister of Spain in 1843. Like Chinelato, he was dangerous, in that he was one of the inculcators of the Revolution of 1868 to remove Queen Isabel II. Salustiano Olózaga was tutor to the young Queen Isabel II during the regency of María Cristina, but his turning against her is probably the basis of Alfau's depiction of Chinelato killing and eating his own child. The ex-Prime Minister had to take refuge in France and finally died in Paris, albeit as Spanish Ambassador there. One further parallel between these two Olózagas is the importance of the *limpieza de sangre*, since Salustiano Olózaga's grandfather managed to certify his *limpieza de sangre* and noble line, which was obviously fundamental to his grandson rising to so high a position. Therefore, the underlying political motives are very relevant, and in the two Olózagas' Basque origin, Alfau may be pointing to the dangers of the splintering of Spain under the Republic of the 1930s.

#### **4.2 Stories Focusing on National Character**

In examining the idea of stereotypes participating in the creation of national identity, first it must be clear that the existence of a "national character" is a myth. This is in line with Benedict Anderson's idea of the imagined community, and both Anderson and Bhabha state that stereotypes form part of the creation of this imagined community of nation. In considering the specific nation of Spain in relation to stereotypes, Julio Caro Baroja's work *El mito del carácter nacional* fits well with the work by Bhabha and Anderson because of the very word "myth" that he uses to describe Spanish national character. He states: "Considero, en efecto, que todo lo que sea hablar de 'carácter nacional' es una actividad mítica; es decir, que el que habla o charla se

ajusta a una tradición”<sup>21</sup> (2004: 34). He therefore claims that these myths used to describe a nation are not, in fact, based on reality, but on tradition itself. Indeed, in a prior work, *Temas castizos* (1995), Caro Baroja had begun to break down this identity into several subgroups, considering the traditional image of the majo or the gypsy (21, 105). He claims that myths become pawns in the hands of whoever might wish to manipulate them for his personal gain, since when it comes to these myths: “No es verdad ni mentira. Es reflejo de una posición pasional frente a situaciones consideradas buenas o malas, para el que lo utiliza”<sup>22</sup> (2004: 34). This makes Caro Baroja’s work highly pertinent when considering literature that bases itself on Spanish stereotypes.

As Caro Baroja continues, he states the reasons why he believes these stereotypes which create a “national character” are, in fact, myths. First, he speaks of the unlikelihood of characteristics enveloping a nation such as Spain, which is divided by regions through geography and even language. He states:

Si a partir de un momento dado podemos hablar de España, y por lo tanto de los españoles como tales, habrá que hacerlo en unos planos y no en otros: porque hasta en nuestros días el carácter de “lo español” se puede descomponer mucho frente a caracteres tales como los de lo “catalán”, lo “gallego” o lo “andaluz”, por no hablar de algo tan enigmático como lo “vasco” o algo tan ambiguo como lo “castellano”<sup>23</sup> (2004: 40).

Therefore, when one considers the possibility of a national character that summarizes all of these different groups, one reaches the conclusion that any such ideas of a “national character” are in fact generalizations, or, in other words, stereotypes. He also states that another flaw in searching

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<sup>21</sup> “I consider, in effect, that everything that is spoken of as ‘national character’ is a mythical activity, in other words, the speaker adjusts himself to a tradition.”

<sup>22</sup> “It is neither truth nor lie. It is a reflection of a passionate position as a response to situations considered either good or bad, for the one who makes use of them.”

<sup>23</sup> If at a given moment one can speak of Spain, and as a result, of Spaniards as such, one must do so on some planes and not on others: because even in the present day the character of “the Spaniard” can break down when confronted with characters such as “the Catalan,” “the Galician” or “the Andalusian”, not to mention something as enigmatic as “the Basque” or something as ambiguous as “the Castilian”.

for a national character is the very fact that most countries, when they look at themselves, do not see themselves objectively:

En suma, cada nación se va haciendo su figura, y así van saliendo las pinturas tópicas de los españoles hechas por españoles, las de los franceses hechas por franceses, las de los ingleses, etc. Todos se ven con benignidad. Los defectos son defectillos. Las virtudes, virtudes en tono mayor<sup>24</sup> (2004: 48).

While this is an interesting perspective, it seems that Alfau does not fit well into this category, since most of his representations of Spanish national character are quite negative, whether they are meant to be ironic or not. This negativity toward one's own country is more reminiscent of the *Generación de 98* and their harsh critique of Spanish society.

María DeGuzmán has discussed Alfau's use of stereotypes in her work discussing the Black Legend. I agree with her initial premise, that the stereotypes in the novel do make an attempt to describe the national character:

At first glance, both *Locos* and *A Spanish Prelude* appear to endorse a number of stereotypes that reinforce the notion of an essential "Spanish identity," equating Spain and "Spanishness" with ignorance, illiteracy, close-mindedness, conservatism and reactionaryism, mysticism, fanaticism, monomania, fatalism, superstition, secrecy, deception, prostitution, mendacity, laziness, impracticality, obsession with death, madness, terror, and punishment (2005: 248).

I agree with her list of attributes describing the stereotypes Alfau portrays, however, I disagree with her perspective on how these stereotypes are satirized in the novel. She claims:

I maintain, however, that these two texts "ironize" the stereotypes they present by creating visual images through verbal description that then, through subsequent verbal descriptions, are broken, redrawn, or deconstructed, or that already contain clues distancing the reader from the image as a transparent glimpse into the essential identity of the "Spanish" characters and settings. These characters and settings are offered initially as potential signs of "Spanishness" and Spain's fate, but then are complicated, partially erased, or taken away altogether (2005: 248).

Except in the case of Padre Inocencio and Sister Carmela, which will be discussed in this section,

I argue that the stereotypes in *Locos* are upheld with a sense of ambivalence, only satirized

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<sup>24</sup> In short, every nation little by little creates its own image, and in that way topical portraits emerge of Spaniards painted by Spaniards, the French painted by the French, and the English etc.. They all see themselves optimistically. The defects are minor. The virtues are given great importance.

through the irony of their exaggerated state or the events that take place around them, but never altered in themselves. However, I do agree with DeGuzmán's conclusion that the result of Alfau's use of stereotypes is to break down the idea of a national character.

### **“The Beggar”**

In turning to the story “The Beggar,” clearly the stereotype being represented as typical of Spanish culture is the role of the mendicant in Spanish society. The act of stereotyping a specific role in society is something that Leerssen comments on in his work on stereotypes:

En muchos casos, por lo tanto, la estereotipación nacional no es simplemente una cuestión de poner ciertos rasgos psicológicos de una nación o grupo étnico, sino que es la atribución de determinados roles actorales a una determinada nacionalidad dentro de una configuración narrativa<sup>25</sup> (2012: 74).

In this particular story, Alfau takes the idea of theatrics to another level, since the beggar represented is not in fact poor, but acting as such. Before turning to the content of the story, another reference must be made to the idea of stereotypes used as humor, as Leerssen also comments that the overuse of a stereotype to the point of humor is a way of showing irony:

[...] el hecho de que los clichés, una vez establecidos como tales, se vuelvan particularmente adecuados para la mención irónica y ecoica, y por qué la utilización de estereotipos nacionales se derivará con tanta frecuencia hacia el género de la caricatura, el humor, y la perpetuación no completamente seria<sup>26</sup> (2012: 77).

This will be very important when discussing the content of the story “The Beggar,” since humor is employed consistently in the use of the stereotype.

In the story, begging is represented as a profession. Alfau does not falter from this representation in the entire story, though the irony is evident. First, the reader is informed:

“Begging in Spain is, besides a respectable occupation, a profitable business and an enviable

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<sup>25</sup> As a result, in many cases, the national stereotyping is not simply a question of putting forward selected psychological features of a nation or ethnic group, but it is the attribution of determined acting roles to a specific nationality within a narrative configuration.

<sup>26</sup> [...] the fact that clichés, once they are established as such, become particularly appropriate for ironic or echoing references, and this explains how national stereotypes so frequently drift toward the genre of caricature, humor and a fixed image which is not completely serious.

profession” (1988: 41). The tone continues into the details of the story, when Garcia is described by the narrator: “Garcia was not a beggar. He did not wear the uniform” (1988: 41). When Garcia is searching for Don Laureano, the response he is given is that “He always closes at six,” as if he worked at an office and not at begging (1988: 44). Even the very tools he uses are portrayed with dignity and professionalism: “Lunarito, get me my begging suit” (1988: 47). Again, while the story is steeped in irony, the stereotype remains intact: that begging is common in Spanish society, to the point of becoming a respectable lifestyle.

The text also portrays another stereotype, while it does not go so far as to name it overtly. Garcia, as the narrator informs us, is not a beggar: “Garcia belonged to another profession” (1988: 42). The true details of Garcia’s profession come from “A Romance of Dogs,” found at the end of the novel, but the general idea is to convince friends and acquaintances, even strangers, to become his benefactor: Garcia’s main resource in beginning these sorts of relationships is explained in the story: “It was quite fashionable in Spain to have a sentimental story to display at café tables, or at a bench in El Prado, late at night, or at the moment of exchanging confidences” (1988: 43). The text does not evaluate this parasitic profession as thoroughly as the profession of the beggar; it just states that it is questionable whether it could be as profitable in the long run.

Furthering the absurdity in this representation of the role of the beggar in Spain, Alfau weaves religious imagery into his depiction of this beggar. In perfect irony, the story begins to speak of the beggar with priest-like reverence as Garcia slowly feels smaller and smaller in the presence of the “beggar.” The priest references begin when Don Laureano goes to look for the lost coin: “Lunarito entered carrying with difficulty a bunch of rags of unsuspected weight, undoubtedly the begging suit, and laid it on the beggar’s half-outstretched arms as an acolyte

would lay a cassock on his priest's hands" (1988: 47). The act of begging takes on the airs of a holy ritual on a deeply ironical level, since Lunarito is far from the character of an acolyte.

Garcia slowly begins to feel that he is very inadequate in comparison to the "beggar," until he reaches the point of worship:

And Garcia could no longer meet the smiling eyes of the beggar and felt the blood mounting to his cheeks; he felt ashamed, another new feeling he owed to this extraordinary man, and an overwhelming desire to be sincere, to confess to this understanding soul; he felt repentant and that tears were pushing their way out mightily (1988: 49).

Once again, the language is religious, showing the level of respect toward the "beggar," the ritualistic aspect of begging, and the tradition involved in the profession of begging. The satire here associates religion with deception, even hinting at an image of the priest as a self-serving thief of the masses. While this harsh criticism clearly exists in the passage, the narrator's tone is once again indifferent and the beggar suffers no ill-consequence for his deceitful actions.

While the irony in the story is obvious and it is almost unnecessary to reference it as such, Alfau's use of the irony is important in discussing the meaning, or lack thereof, behind the story. The irony reaches comical levels when Garcia discovers that the beggar is, in fact, the Minister of Finance, and Don Laureano brings forth expensive food and drink. As Don Laureano receives Garcia's adoration, he adds to the irony:

Yes, my friend, you are right; you must work honestly; follow my example; it is hard, I know it. I usually work from six in the morning until six in the evening, but there is a satisfaction in knowing that you have earned a modest living, that you owe nothing to anyone (1988: 51).

The idea of honesty, hard work, and not being indebted to anyone are all purposefully placed and add to the comic element of the story. However, Alfau has one more ironic twist to add, as the story concludes:

If there has ever been a grateful look in this world, it was the one which Garcia gave the beggar. He reeled on his feet, his mouth quivered and he fell, embracing his benefactor, covering his shoulder with fresh tears. He was sobbing aloud, crying words of thanks. At last he fell on his knees and insisted on kissing the beggar's hand (1988: 53).

At the word “benefactor,” the reader is reminded of Garcia’s profession and the story ends with an ironic element of comedy as the true “winner” of the interaction has, in fact, been Garcia, who has won over his new benefactor.

In considering Alfau’s use of irony in the story, two possibilities are available to the reader. Clearly, taking the story at face-value is not a valid option since the story is entirely engulfed in irony. Then, the next step is to choose how to read the irony in the story. The first option is to read it as an actual criticism of this element in society, which would be a respectable possibility since the stereotype of beggars and beggar-like professions already exists in Spanish literature and culture. The second option is to read the irony as being based on a stereotype, but instead of an actual criticism, the option would be to take the postmodern approach and view the irony around the stereotypes as playing amidst the absurdity. Once again, considering the playfulness of the use of the stereotypes and the absurd references to religion and class systems, or the amoral outcome of the story as both beggars go away having achieved what they had desired, this seems a postmodern representation of stereotypes.

In this dilemma of choosing either a satirical criticism or a playful disconnect, Valle Inclán’s *esperpento* literature again offers a form of accomplishing both. The story is playful in the representation of the stereotypes, postmodern in its absurdity, yet the satire is present and a critique of society is offered. Once again, this story of “The Beggar” shows the fallen nature of the Spaniard, incapable of greatness, for whom begging is a profession of dignity, even for the Minister of Finance, and “greatness” is based on how clever a swindler one can become. Moreover, the very fact that this “beggar” is the Minister of Finance, as compared to that of Foreign Affairs or Culture, is an indirect attack on the economic administration of Spain’s

resources. Alfau echoes the genre presented by Valle-Inclán in his depiction of a broken society that lacks a desire for true greatness or nobility.

### **“The Necrophil”**

Caro Baroja references religious fanaticism as being the stereotype most frequently associated with Spain (2004: 81). In the story of Doña Micaela, Alfau apparently forms the plot around one such fanatical woman. While the references to Doña Micaela’s religiosity run throughout the story, this example from the opening lines sums up the character as presented to the reader:

Not having any near relatives and to all appearances very little interest in life, Doña Micaela concentrated her activities to a great degree on going to church. She went to early Mass at dawn, to the benediction in the evening, and during the middle part of the day she always engaged in some sort of novena, or else in one of those cumulative series of prayers in which one prays one paternoster the first day, two paternosters the second and so on, up to fifty or whatever the top number may be, and then decreases the dose accordingly, just as one does with medicines which are dosified, by increasing and decreasing the number of drops (1988: 145).

The description here is not merely a portrayal of the religious, but a description of the fanatical, all-consuming religiosity that Spain had become famous for, and by the dosifying of her paternosters, of her religion, Alfau suggests that such religiosity is a morbid sickness. Further into the narrative, the reader finds Dr. de los Rios reciting words that reference the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as he admires a wound on Doña Micaela when she is in her “dead” state. When he says: “Look,” “Touch” (1988: 156) he echoes the words of the resurrected Christ as he appears to “Doubting Thomas,” the disciple who was absent on his first appearance. Alfau has created the stereotype of the religious fanatic in the story to the point where the main character reenacts the death of Christ and the onlookers are called to participate in her fanaticism.

While this story tends to follow the absurdity and irony of the other stories, it stands out as being one with a more obvious critique. Alfau still plays in the chaos, and the absurdity lends itself to the postmodern, but there are several comments throughout the story that reveal some

truth behind the farce. First, in order to confirm the element of playfulness even within a story about death, there is a comment as to the comedic aspect of the events transpiring: “There was great indifference in her gesture and her sentence rang with a broad, tragic humor in the lonely house” (1988: 154). The dark humor which runs rampant through the story is contrasted with passages of realistic emotion, as Doña Micaela is described:

And Doña Micaela went about lonely. She left her house at dusk and walked along the outskirts of the city, seized by infinite sadness and melancholia, and then she wandered in the direction of the church and spent a long time there in a dark corner, praying. Her sadness became more persistent and she went by with bowed head. She cried often and she cried more when she saw people receding from her (1988: 151).

In contrast, this passage represents true despair and emotional destitution, reminding the reader of Valle-Inclán’s use of both tragedy and comedy in his literature, incorporating both in order to surpass classical tragedy and arrive at the ridiculous. Apart from the emotional level that hints toward a critique of the religious, Dr. de los Rios’ medical advice for Doña Micaela also follows in the same line: “And Doña Micaela Valverde is quite all right now. Dr. de los Rios had all her collections of dolls, mummies and mannequins thrown away, told her to move to a cheerful house and forbade her to step into a church again” (1988: 158). In this passage, the narrator seems only to allude to the idea that religion causes depression, but toward the end of the story, the narrator speaks straightforwardly to the reader with a critique of religion:

You know? This religious business deals too much with the beyond and creates an obsession of death. There are many cases in Spain like the one of Doña Micaela Valverde. Have you noticed those rows of fanatics dressed in black clothes and looking like corpses that go to the benediction at dusk? Well, every one of them has a more or less marked tendency to necrophilia (1988: 158).

The repetition and the direct nature of this critique makes the reader think that this is more than just the ironic playfulness of the story and that there may be reason to believe that this story is an actual critique of religion.

Alfau chooses to accompany this stereotype of the religious fanatic with the grotesque, once again reminding the reader of Valle-Inclán. The combination of Doña Micaela's grotesque, absurd and fanatic religiosity create a form of dark humor. Alfau leads off this element of the grotesque by beginning with the fact that she is, in fact, beautiful: "If it had not been for her perennial black attire and something more difficult to define about her, she would have come under the adjective of attractive" (1988: 146). Later, her eyes captivate, and the final lines of the story lead the reader to believe that "Alfau" has himself become in thrall to her. Since Doña Micaela represents death, Alfau's infatuation with her adds one further example of this theme of attraction to death throughout the story. Returning to the beginning of the story, the narrator references Doña Micaela's actions at a funeral: "And Dona Micaela proceeded to adjust the napkin with nimble, pale hands that matched the corpse, delaying the operation, handling the body as much as possible and talking all the time" (1988: 147). The desire to touch death, to be unified with death is what drives her, as Dr. de los Rios explains: "I believe she enjoys her condition" (1988: 150). The use of the grotesque in this story serves to reveal even further Alfau's criticism of the religious fanatic. The ridiculous is again achieved through Doña Micaela's actions of funeral stalking and reenacting death, showing a society in which religion is no longer an attempt to be in touch with the Divine, but a masochistic absurdity that leads only to death.

### **"A Romance of Dogs"**

Arriving at the final story in *Locos*, one finds a mixing of several different stereotypes. Within the first part of the story, the apparent manuscript, there are many stereotypes that address religion, specifically dealing with nuns and priests. In the rest of the story, there are more themes to be dealt with, concentrating on contrasting Romanticism, Modernism and even

Postmodernism through the eventual demise of the character Garcia. However, these topics will be further addressed in the chapter on the postmodern in *Locos* and *Chromos*, therefore this section will focus on the religious stereotypes found in the first part of the story.

When addressing the role of the priests in the novel, a complication arises with the character Padre Inocencio, especially in deciding whether to read this character ironically or not. First, the rest of the priests are discussed with open criticism, beginning with their views on life. The narrator explains that the way of life the priests preach at the school is not attractive in the least:

I had heard the priests repeat time and again that it was necessary to suffer in order to obtain happiness and also say that the devil likes to make us suffer in order to test our faith in Providence. All these things the priests said at the school and many other things which I did not understand very well. Even at that age I was faintly aware of the absurdity of such a tragic and self-punishing attitude about life (1988: 165).

Later, more is said about the priests' lifestyle, as the boys find out that the priests are sneaking over the convent walls, accentuating the hypocrisy among the priests at the school (1988: 174). All these statements show clearly that there are stereotypes of priests being represented in the story and that there is irony in these descriptions. This irony could be rendered as playful were these priests not contrasted with Padre Inocencio.

The representation of Padre Inocencio, therefore, shows a priest that is unlike the other priests in the village. This is one of the only times in the text that Alfau uses juxtaposing characters in his use of stereotypes, especially since Padre Inocencio does not fall into a stereotype himself, but is a real, three-dimensional character. Therefore, this seems to be yet another case in which Alfau changes his usual playful tone for a more pointed critique. The differences between Padre Inocencio and the other priests abound in the text, beginning with this statement: "Padre Inocencio was somewhat of an exception and a revolutionary character in the

village and among other priests” (1988: 168). The reason for this difference between Padre Inocencio and the other priests is explained in the following pages:

Padre Inocencio was a worldly person. He liked society and the arts. He was an accomplished landscape painter and a good poet. His all-around culture and fine graceful manners set him high above the general rabble of Spanish priests whose rampant and sordid ways are most obnoxious, and who literally steal their way into the homes and pockets of really good people by craftiness and the well-combined use of superstition and fear of hell (1988: 169).

The positive attributes granted Padre Inocencio in this passage are strongly contrasted by the negative stereotypes allocated to the other priests. Alfau uses Padre Inocencio as an anomaly in order to accentuate the stereotype represented by the other priests.

In the novel *San Manuel Bueno, mártir* (1931), Miguel de Unamuno crafts a similar character to Padre Inocencio. While Unamuno’s rendition of his sacrificial priest came after Alfau’s publication of *Locos*, the two priests contain uncanny similarities. For example, both are priests in a small village and are considered as strange priests by the rest of the villagers. They are both also liberals in their thinking and have varied interests outside of religion. Both also end up dying having never felt fulfilled in their earthly roles. The one difference between the two is that Unamuno’s San Manuel allows the reader in on his secret, that he is an atheist. Alfau’s Padre Inocencio does not take this step, although Alfau does not paint this character as having deep religious convictions. Similarly, Unamuno’s novel was a critique of religion as the opium of the masses. Alfau’s story speaks more as a criticism of religious fanaticism and perhaps not of religion as a whole. The difficulty is that, although comparing these two pieces of literature seems extremely appropriate, the existence of a relationship between the two is prevented by the fact that Alfau claimed to have never read Unamuno and Alfau’s version was published first.

Moving away from the character Padre Inocencio, another stereotype represented in the story is the Spanish nun. While Padre Inocencio rebels against the stereotype of Spanish priests, Sister Carmela fulfills the stereotype of the Spanish nun. The young woman whose family

pressures her to become a nun in order to avoid an inappropriate romantic relationship is a common theme in Spanish literature. One such figure would be Doña Leonor from *Don Álvaro o la fuerza del sino* (1835), who is sent to the convent to prevent an inappropriate marriage to Don Álvaro. Another such example would be Doña Inés, who is led astray from her devout life as a nun by none other than Don Juan Tenorio. Therefore, Sister Carmela is not such a far cry from examples in classic literature from Spain. However, there is one more step into the absurd, as Sister Carmela is being cloistered away as a result of an incestuous relationship. This fact, known to the reader from the previous story, is referenced in this story through the eyes of the young boys: “Alfau had the most absurd ideas regarding the cause of her becoming a nun” (1988: 174). Besides this further exaggeration of the stereotype, Sister Carmela does seem to fit well into the generalized role of Spanish nuns in literature in that her reasons for being in the convent are not religious.

While Sister Carmela represents the stereotypical nun, the critique of her situation or her role in Spanish society comes through Alfau’s description of her. Of all the people represented in the story, Sister Carmela is perhaps the only one who possesses the attribute of joy. As the narrator describes her: “She seemed very young to be a nun. She was so friendly, her whole body emanated such familiarity, so much informal comradeship, that I thought in her case the name sister very adequate, as the other nuns had always struck me more as a mother in law” (1988: 176). The critique on this aspect of religion, then, seems to be that the person who is in the convent for the least religious of reasons is, in fact, the best reflection of what a religious person should be. This fits well in Alfau’s growing critique of the religious fanaticism in Spain. In the words of Garcia, the narrator in this story:

Sister Carmela was an exceptional nun.  
She was enormously attractive.  
She was always friendly and gay.

She always wanted to arouse everyone.  
She was entirely too human.  
And one day she went away (1988: 178).

Again, the critique comes as Alfau compares the traditional nun to Sister Carmela in the fact that she was much more alive and much more real than the rest.

Therefore, in the story, the reader is confronted with two characters that deviate from the stereotypical norm. This divergent perspective allows Alfau to create a critique of the religious life through the use of stereotypes. His critique seems to be that priests are at large hypocritical and mediocre at best. As an additional criticism, through the character Padre Inocencio, he states that those who attempt to rise above this deformity within the religious and truly live an exceptional life will eventually become so dismayed at the circumstances surrounding them that they themselves will fail. Through his critique of the nuns he claims that the Church, which should be the first to be human and joyful, is nothing of the sort, creating impossible standards and an atmosphere of gloom wherever its reach is felt. The final drop of satire comes when the only example of joy emanates from Sister Carmela, the character caught up in incestuous sin. The story is one more example in which the playfulness of some of the earlier stories is replaced by a more pointed critique of society. Interestingly, in both cases where the tone becomes more of a critique and less of a game, the topic is religion. Therefore, in Alfau's balance between tragedy and comedy, his stories based around stereotypes involving the religious seem to inevitably return to tragedy.

## **5 Conclusions**

In looking back over the use of stereotypes in the novel, the first conclusion reached in this study is that the stereotypes in the novel *Locos* can be viewed as satire because of the overwhelming number of metanarrative clues. While Alfau is discreet in his use of stereotypes, never directly explaining to the reader what his purpose is, the numerous metanarrative clues make it almost

irrelevant to even question the satire portrayed in the novel through stereotypes. The first clue discussed was the numerous levels of distancing achieved through the use of the narrator, followed by many others, such as naming the narrator “Alfau,” the directives of the Prologue, the use of a manuscript, and the author becoming a character at several points in the narrative. Next, the emphasis within the narrative on the organization of the novel itself reveals the author’s intentionality in each stereotype used. The several references to the reader and the reader’s role in understanding the novel also hint toward the element of criticism present in the novel, heightening the reader’s awareness as he reads. Finally, the indifference portrayed in the use of the stereotypes gives the reader more reassurance that these stereotypes are intentionally placed and represented for the purpose of criticism. There are only a few moments in the novel when this ambivalence dissipates: the three-dimensional character Pepe, who, as I have argued, is not the stereotype being portrayed, since the story uses Pepe’s perspective to stereotype Spain, and also Padre Inocencio and Sister Carmela, who are differentiated from the rest of the characters in that particular story in order to generate a more pointed critique.

While the stereotypes are, in fact, part of a larger criticism, this really only represents half of what is at work in the novel, since the representation of the stereotypes also forms part of the playful madness, typical of postmodern literature. This is also an essential aspect in understanding the novel, since it would appear that Alfau did not write with the intent of solving these problems, but he did use these stereotypes to critique society, in a postmodern *laissez faire* approach. This is presented in the stories as the characters take control of the direction of the narrative, and the author is supposedly held captive to their every whim. The mixing of roles within the stories also reveals this postmodern element, as characters take on (fictitious) “real life,” or as they move backward or forward in time between the stories. Also, the reader can

become lost in the labyrinth as the stories are not in chronological order, and important clues come before and after the conclusion of each story. Finally, the tone of the novel is one of pure enjoyment of the madness, as the language and the details of the narrative suggest the humor incorporated into each of the stories. In María DeGuzmán's critique of Alfau's use of stereotypes as a form of criticism, she reflects a sort of frustration at this method of using satire, since it can be easily misinterpreted: "Alfau's *Locos* never confronts the social repercussions of ironic ricochet, the potential failure or inability of irony to unfix the stereotypes, the danger that irony might in fact conserve and reinforce them" (2005: 255). She then goes on to accentuate the postmodern nature of this kind of endeavor, however, her concern about combining playfulness and pointed critique is a valid one, as stated earlier as one of the possible obstacles of using stereotypes in such a manner. However, the fact that Alfau attempts such a combination reveals, in a way, one of the main dilemmas of the postmodern movement itself: the struggle to come to terms with ethics.

Having established that the stereotypes are both critical and postmodern in the way they are presented in the novel, there are three areas in which the criticism becomes especially prominent in the text. The first case of more elevated satire comes in the criticism of Spanish society, especially in the roles of society and the lack of advancement either available or desirable to Spaniards. The satire also becomes stronger in the stories dealing with "the Other" when both the native and "the Other" are portrayed with contempt through the representation of their stereotypes. Finally, the criticism through satire becomes especially biting when discussing the religious. In the two stories addressing religion, the tone is clearly critical, revealing that this facet of life was especially interesting to Alfau and, from what one gathers from the novel, he deemed it as particularly warped and deformed. And we must remember that Alfau is not

speaking from the position of the anti-Catholic: his siding with Franco was partly dictated by his religious sympathies.

This chapter also investigated the relationship between Alfau and Valle-Inclán, who developed the genre of *esperpento* literature. Therefore, in applying Valle-Inclán's genre to Alfau's work, Alfau's *bufones* reflect a shared literary view of Spanish society, being those who try, in a quixotic fashion, to rise above mediocrity and work for the advancement of Spain, those who would call themselves "the religious" and finally, Spain itself with its backward ways and poverty. Within each story portraying Alfau's *bufones*, Alfau seeks to accomplish the ridiculous, the absurd, and the inability to achieve greatness for these members of Spanish society. His tone achieves both comedy and tragedy, showing a society that has become the *bufón* of Europe. One question that remains is to what extent it is feasible to imagine an actual connection between Alfau and Valle-Inclán, since Alfau claims that he had never read the Spanish literary greats of his time. The similarities are evident, making the reader wonder if the interviews with Alfau, conducted some forty years after he wrote the novel, are, in fact, reliable, or it also calls into question whether Alfau desired to hide his literary connections in order to appear more original and groundbreaking in his time. However, given the fact that the author stated his indifference toward his newfound fame at 88 years old, it seems unlikely that he would wish to withhold information.

A further point of interest has also emerged through the meticulous descriptions of each of the stereotypical characters represented in the text. Alfau seems to remain true to his scheme of typifying Spanish society, taking on the predominant stereotypes by having his protagonists embody them in his stories, yet he strays from this framework when confronting the topic of religion. Alfau turns from his style of indifference when representing stereotypes to more

directly expressing a criticism, so one could see this as a flaw in the novel, since he does not remain true to his objective. However, I prefer to think of this shift in style as part of the postmodern element in Alfau's work, that he refuses to be confined by anyone's framework, even his own. Perhaps then, Alfau embraces the freedom to express himself on this particular topic without constraints. Also, perhaps Alfau's religious tendencies made it more difficult for him to remain objective when representing this particular stereotype.

Finally, as has become clear throughout the discussion of this chapter, while this study has focused more specifically on the use of stereotypes in the novel, *Locos* still remains under the umbrella of the theory of the Third Space, obviously since Alfau was writing this novel on Spain from New York City, inhabiting his own Third Space, but also because of his actual treatment of stereotypes. By exaggerating and playing with the stereotypes themselves, Alfau breaks down these typified characters, just as binary oppositions can break down through perspectives of hybridity. However, especially evident in the story "The Wallet," Alfau in this novel does not create hybrid characters in *Locos* as he does in *Chromos*, pointing, perhaps, to his own development as an author from the publication of his first novel to the time of writing his second. Or, another possibility could be that Alfau himself learned the importance of hybridity on his own journey as an immigrant, and therefore the idea is not only a literary style, but a self-elaborated philosophy.

## **Chapter 4: Form in *Locos* and *Chromos***

### **1 Theorists Divided: Struggling towards definitions**

There has been much debate surrounding the literary theory of the more recent movements of Modernism and Postmodernism. The debate centers itself on the issue of defining a movement out of works of fiction with such a variety of styles, forms, and content. Beyond the difficulties of creating a definition of these movements, some would even argue it is too soon to formulate ultimatums about movements that are still part of current society. This lack of decisive boundaries has left some scholars positing and questioning “post-postmodernism” while others still claim Postmodernism is only a continuation of Modernism.

Therefore, much work has been done in attempts to establish a more definite boundary separating Modernism and Postmodernism. Some assume the time period is enough to distinguish between the two, placing works prior to World War II within Modernism and denoting fiction written after it as postmodern. Others mark political involvement as a distinguishing factor of postmodern works, while others believe both Modernism and Postmodernism are political. The confusion surrounding these recent literary movements have theorists fighting for authors, nitpicking their colleagues’ work, and losing sight of the goal of making these two theories clear for researchers and students who come behind them.

Therefore, with the goal of coming to some conclusions about the form and structure of Felipe Alfau’s novels, the first task is to decide upon the main characteristics of both the modernist and the postmodernist movement and, as much as is possible, clarify what scholars agree constitutes each theory. After having done so, the next step

will be to consider Felipe Alfau's relationship to these two movements so as to better interpret his work.

## **2 Modernism**

### **2.1 Action and Reaction**

Perhaps the clearest of all assumptions about the modernist movement is that it is a reaction to the movements prior to it: the Enlightenment, Romanticism and literary realism. As this trend of reacting against the previous movement repeats itself throughout history, this element does not surprise us. Modernism was a reaction to Romanticism in that it questioned the positivism that had marked this previous movement, as well as the certainty about a few issues felt on a deep philosophical level by Romantic authors. This would lead to a general pessimistic mood that would envelop the modernist movement, as well as the tendency to question and reexamine everything. Having stated that Modernism is also a reaction to the rational processes of the Enlightenment, with its belief in a process of improvement, it follows that Modernism speaks out against the rationality, harmony and coherence that characterizes this prior movement, and that straightforward realism is no longer the foremost goal in the writing of this literature (Goldman 2004: 22) (Lewis 2000). Modernism therefore involves experiments with time and takes away the expectation that the novel will follow a linear chronological time sequence (Lewis 2000: 4).

Another important aspect of Modernism is that it challenges some of the assumptions that the Enlightenment worked from as a foundation. Mainly, this refers to sources of authority, starting with religion, as authors challenge the idea of a traditional God, although the Enlightenment had begun the challenge, with its insistence upon

reason and rejection of many medieval forms of unreason. Yet Modernism also negates the absolute authority of science and even the supremacy of the human mind. As Pericles Lewis explains,

Modernist experiments implied that our perceptions of the outside world and of each other are so tainted by culturally specific or individually idiosyncratic values that there might be no way of arbitrating fairly between the competing claims of various individuals or groups— no eternal facts, no absolute truth, hence no absolute justice (Lewis 2000: 5).

As a result of the challenges intellectuals make toward conventional sources of authority, many modernist works of fiction undermine what had become expected in terms of the source of authority within the novel. This means that the narrator is no longer to be trusted, the rules of novel writing are being broken, and the characters will not always remain inside the roles created for them. The loss of faith in the traditionally held authorities creates this room for experimentation (Goldman 2004: 3).

In order to later make a contrast with Postmodernism, it will be important to understand how the modernists go about experimenting in their writing. This experimentation reflects the modernist sentiment of questioning an objective reality and embracing the disruption that embodies subjective experience. Many of the modernist experiments deal with the structure of the novel. In the past, the structure met the expectations of the readers and never gave them reason to pause and evaluate it, except in some of the eighteenth-century satirists such as Laurence Sterne and his self-reflexive *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767). Modernists, on the other hand, force readers to reevaluate the structure of the novel by drawing attention to it. They accomplish this aim through unique style, use of varied techniques, and shifts in genre. This means that discussing a work of literature no longer focuses solely on the interpretation of the content, but also on evaluating the structure itself and the breaks in the form of the narrative. A famous

example of experimentation in genre comes in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), where at the outset of each chapter, the reader must grapple with the sudden shift in genre. The experimentation would also find its way into the very language in the text:

Linguistic experiment must be seen both as an essential element of literary modernism, and a symptom of how Western culture as a whole changed in the first decades of the twentieth century. The relation of language to reality became a central theme for the modernists whose art was to reveal a constant dialogue between the artist and his or her medium (Caneda Cabrera 2008: 55).

This sort of avant-garde novel would become representative of the first wave of Modernism, whose prominent authors include T.S. Eliot, especially known for being linguistically pluralistic, D.H. Lawrence and Ezra Pound (Caneda Cabrera 2008: 59).

These disruptions in form are also reflected in the very plot of the novels, adding yet another instance of instability present in Modernism. Authors play with the constraints traditionally placed on character development, creating shifts in personalities and unexpected changing of roles without explanation. The reader can no longer take for granted that the narrator is omniscient, honest, or even sane. The boundaries between the fictional plot and the reader are removed by addressing the reader directly or suddenly referencing the author. Finally, whereas before, readers could depend on a decisive and clear ending, during the modernist period authors begin to experiment with inconclusive endings, again challenging the readers' expectations.

Since Alfau himself is a hybrid, with a background in both Spanish and American literature, the Spanish modernist literary scene is also relevant to understanding his work. This is especially true since he has been linked to the famous *Generación del 98*, whose primary authors include Miguel de Unamuno, Ramiro de Maeztu, Ramón del Valle-Inclán and Azorín. While these authors mirror other modernist writers from other countries in their criticism of the prior movements, especially true in how they question

the certainty in the tone of Romantic and Enlightenment works, these Spaniards have an added pessimism about the advancement of Spain as a result of Spain's defeat in the Spanish-American war of 1898. This adversity led the group of authors to be highly critical of Spain as a culture, especially when considering the nation's potential to rise to modernity with the rest of Europe. Maeztu in particular focused on the decadence of the national character, which he believed descended from the national narrative of Don Quixote, using him as a representative of Spain in his comparison to England's national narrative of Hamlet, contrasting the foolishness of Don Quixote to the philosophical and passionate, albeit Danish, Hamlet (González Cuevas 2003: 99). Maeztu's perspective on this topic was echoed by many other works emphasizing this deficit in the Spanish character, one important one being, "España Invertebrada: Bosquejo de algunos pensamientos históricos<sup>1</sup>" by José Ortega y Gasset (1922). He also spoke boldly on this topic: "La rebelión sentimental de las masas, el odio a los mejores, la escasez de éstos – he aquí la razón verdadera del gran fracaso hispánico<sup>2</sup>" ([1922] 1997: 113). Therefore, while modernist authors from other countries doubted the future of modern civilization as a whole, for the Spanish modernist, the focus was more particularly on the painfully dismal future of Spain.

## **2.2 The Role of History**

Many theorists emphasize the impossibility of discussing the time period of Modernism without engaging in the historical and political events that would dramatically alter daily life and perspectives around the world (Goldman 2004: 33). Therefore, it is not surprising that many view Modernism as yet another transition, and one cannot expect

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<sup>1</sup> "Invertebrate Spain: An Outline of some Historic Thoughts" (1922).

<sup>2</sup> "The sentimental rebellion of the masses, the hatred of the best, the scarcity of such persons – these are the true reasons for the great Spanish failure."

works from the beginning of the movement to mirror works from the end of the movement. One of the most significant events during this time was World War I, creating two strong contrasting opinions. Some, generally outsiders, considered it “The Great War,” and boasted that it was the war to end all wars. This perspective creates a rather optimistic view on humanity and technology (Ashton 2005). Typically, those more directly affected by the war, or those more conscientious of the loss of life, the mass destruction and the horrors of war, developed a sense of despair about the future of mankind (Scholes 2006). Writers at that time felt their work must reflect these changes in perspective. Questions loom over writers who wonder: “What art, what music, what kinds of writing might be adequate to express the thoughts and feelings of the new age that so many people felt was coming into being around them at this time?” (Scholes 2006: 121). Many artistic attempts to describe the trauma of World War I would center themselves on the fact that progress is not necessarily beneficial, focusing on the negative effects of modern civilization and the monstrosities of which the human race is capable. This creates obvious changes in the styles and structures of writing emerging from that moment in history, usually referencing a breakdown of expectations or a mechanical tone. Jane Goldman comments on this initial shift in Modernism and asserts that the avant-garde movement at the beginning of the 1900s underwent “regroupings and reorientations” after the war (2004: 28). The catastrophic events of the war also made it possible for Modernism to become recognized as the defining movement in the 1920s, since more scholars found themselves agreeing with the sentiments of these modernists after having witnessed the tragedy of war. However, in the 1920s there was still a strong minority that critiqued the modernists for the soulless and mechanical tone of their

literature. Although Spain did not intervene in the First World War, the devastation of the final loss of the colonies at the end of the nineteenth century made her participate in the sense of bewildering tragedy that affected the rest of Europe in all senses.

As the movement progressed into the 1930s, Modernism worked itself into popular culture, with critiques dissipating as the majority accepted the movement since it embodied the modern advancement in technology and the unsettling realities of living in modern society. In the aftermath of World War II and throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the period marked by the uncertainty of the Cold War, lies the borderline between Modernism and Postmodernism. It is interpreted by some scholars as still being modernist, as they claim that the literature took an even more dramatic turn toward the new and innovative, whereby “formal experiments were linked by a rethinking of the relationship between the objective, omniscient narrator and individual characters with limited subjective perspectives” (Lewis 2000: 4). Other scholars claim these dramatic changes post World War II are sufficiently distinct as to mark the onset of a new movement.

While World War I was a fundamental component in the development of the modernist period, many more transitional moments were taking place around the world which also contributed to the general mood. From the 1910s to the 1920s, Russia and Mexico would become communist through violent revolutions, while the United States would experience the roaring twenties followed by the stock market crash and the Great Depression of the thirties. Spain would suffer a devastating civil war after its short-lived Second Republic, resulting in a dictatorship. While all this was happening, Hitler was gaining power and support in Germany and beginning his invasions. With all of these

tumultuous events taking place in such a short period of time, it is no wonder the modernist period is considered a time of transition, and it is logical that such a shift in theory from the beginning to the end of the period would occur. For those scholars who state that Postmodernism reflects a political activism that Modernism lacks, considering the amount of literature that has come out of each of the conflicts mentioned here, it is impossible to ignore that Modernism included a political activism in its writing as well (Goldman 2004: 19).

### **2.3 Industry and Literature**

Beyond the impact of major world events, the changes in society would also impact the literature of the time, especially the continued post-nineteenth-century industrialization and its effects on life in the city. Writers would utilize the feelings associated with industrialization as themes in their fiction, such as the displaced individual, the loss of ideals, and disillusionment (Lewis 2000: 14). In order to communicate these themes they would mirror the sterile environment of industry by removing sentiment from their writing (Scholes 2006: 124). Even in those stories containing sentiment, it is often disguised or not stated explicitly so that it reflects the machine-like existence in the city. With the growth of cities creating new people groups with particular needs and feelings, the modernist period often uses the marginalized and the middle class as the central point in fiction (Lewis 2000: 11) (Scholes 2006: 41).

Another result of city life would be the emphasis on the individual through stream-of-consciousness writing. During the modernist period, stream-of-consciousness writing became popular especially as it reflected the loneliness that accompanies city life (Lewis 2000: 4). It is as if the authors, confronted with the cold life of the city, try to find

a spark of life in the interior of their protagonists, a criterion illuminated by Sigmund Freud, as Lewis explains: “Perceiving a gap between the meaningful inner life of the individual consciousness and an outer world that shapes that inner life but seems in itself devoid of spiritual meaning, the modernists sought a means to bridge that gap, to glean a meaning from that apparently senseless outer world” (2000: 4). In this way, the modernist period does involve a crisis of belief because the individual is trying to find meaning in the midst of a senseless world. The distinctively modern aspect of this crisis is that it is still searching for a solution. Whether it will find one is still unknown, but the search continues (Ashton 2005).

### **3 Modernism and Postmodernism: The Issue of Differentiating**

To this point, the definition of Modernism seems to be fairly straightforward, but this is the issue of studying one isolated period without comparing it to what theorists say about the prior and later movements. It seems that some postmodern theorists have fallen into the trap of defining Modernism as an extension of the Enlightenment, stating that Modernism represents the rational, humanistic, and empirical, when in fact it is a reaction against those very ideas. However, when one compares what the modernist scholars have to say about Modernism to what the postmodernist scholars have to say about Postmodernism, it sounds increasingly similar (Hutcheon 1988: 35). In order to provide the clearest representation possible of the current situation of literary theory, the next task will be to identify the characteristics that have been deemed “new” in describing Postmodernism but in fact represent Modernism as well. However, it is true that often within these common characteristics one can find slight changes in perspective that set the two periods apart. After having established the common ground, in the following

section the discussion will turn to those points that are, indeed, new in Postmodernism, establishing it as a distinct movement. Yet, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, it remains difficult to consider either period from an entirely objective point of view, since the current perspective is still very much influenced by both Modernism and Postmodernism (Goldman 2004: 8).

### **3.1 Overlaps: Experiments with Form**

One of the ways in which Postmodernism reflects the same characteristics as Modernism is in the use of experimental form. Both movements especially focus on drawing attention to the form by breaking conventional rules of fiction. As Linda Hutcheon explains: “postmodern fiction manifests a certain introversion, a self-conscious turning toward the form of the act of writing itself” (1988: 128). Instead of focusing on outward events and communicating “truths,” these works examine the very process of writing, forcing the reader to evaluate the construction of reality in fiction. Others have called this “laying bare the device,” as if the fiction writer were a magician revealing exactly how he performs each trick, the trick being the act of bringing the reader into a story to the point where the reader feels it is reality, only these writers then turn to disrupt that reality (Ashton 2005: 2). As Patricia Waugh explains: “Metafictional novels tend to be constructed on the principle of a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion” (1984: 6).

While this technique is used in both modernist and postmodernist writing, many scholars have noted that postmodern writers especially focus on breaking apart the invented reality, since their intentions in doing so go beyond a simple critique on the

production of fiction. While their goals in using this technique will be discussed later in more depth in the section relating to deconstructionism, for now it is important to see that postmodern writers draw attention not only to the constructed reality of fiction, but the constructed reality in the world around them. As Waugh states:

*Metafiction* is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text (1984: 2, emphasis in the text).

Perhaps this is one area in which Postmodernism breaks away from Modernism, not in the technique used, but in the purpose of using that technique. For modernists, a certain playfulness with the form negates the logic and order of the Enlightenment. For postmodernists, the playfulness with the form focuses the readers' attention on the fact that the novel is constructed and that just as the writers construct novels with the façade of reality, so human beings create the reality they see in the world.

Part of experimenting with the form of the novel means experimenting with the genre. Waugh states that literature is incapable of meeting the reader's expectations of the novel pertaining to one specific genre:

There is no one privileged "language of fiction". There are the languages of memoirs, journals, diaries, histories, conversational registers, legal records, journalism, documentary. These languages compete for privilege. They question and relativize each other to such an extent that the "language of fiction" is always, if often covertly, self-conscious (1984: 5).

In these modern and postmodern fictions, the author does not make room for one specific "language" but constantly keeps the reader on his toes, creating a chaotic narrative that leaves no voice unquestioned. Derrida concludes that "a text would not *belong* to any genre. Every text *participates* in one or several genres, there is no genreless text, there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging" (1992a:

230, emphasis in the text). These fictions, then, make the reader see that fiction is not only a novel, poetry or a script, but a combination of countless genres, just as reality, or the official version of it, is actually a selective composition of written texts.

Postmodernism then adds the nuance that these texts are created and compiled at the whim and even manipulative drive of historians and politicians.

Beyond playing with the structure through the shifting of genres in order to create uncertainty in fiction, postmodern authors are known for resorting to styles that are conducive to creating an atmosphere of doubt and questioning. One such technique is to disrupt readers' expectations through the use of the absurd. Originating with the Theatre of the Absurd of the late 1950s, postmodern authors capture and incorporate the absurd in order to force the reader into reevaluating what they expect to see in literature (Esslin 1970). Curiously, a contemporary of Alfau, Miguel Mihura, contributed to the Theatre of the Absurd along with the other European authors such as Eugene Ionesco and Samuel Beckett, and like Alfau, was misunderstood because he was ahead of his time. Irony serves as an additional technique to help the reader see reality with new eyes. This irony may come through an unreliable narrator who does not communicate truth to the reader or it may come through the actual plot of the story and how it undermines historical events or progression (Nünning 2008: 38) (Hutcheon 1988: 41). By defying genre boundaries and stretching the limits of logic, the author hopes the reader will experience instability; questioning his understanding of reality both inside the text and, moreover, in everyday life (Waugh 1984: 5).

Interestingly enough, such techniques as the absurd or irony were popular with modernist writers as well, which is why they have been included in the section pointing

out what Modernism and Postmodernism seem to share. The question then becomes whether there is a difference in the reasons why modernist and postmodern writers use these techniques. Both want to communicate uncertainty, but modernists hold on to the hope that uncertainty is not all that humankind has available to it, that there remains some kind of purpose. The postmodernists seem to proclaim quite the opposite: that chaos is all we have available to us and that one can choose to play with the uncertainty and swim in it, or one can explore the depths of despair and drown in it.

### **3.2 An Existential Crisis**

Having discussed the instability in the form, genre and style of both modern and postmodern fiction, the next step is to explore the reasons for the popularity of these techniques and the philosophical origins driving such a style of literature forward. Many theorists state that authors revert to this kind of writing as a result of an existential crisis, a concept that comes directly out of modernist theory. As Waugh explains, “Postmodernism can be seen to exhibit the same sense of crisis and loss of belief in an external authoritative system of order as that which prompted modernism. Both affirm the constructive powers of the mind in the face of apparent phenomenal chaos” (1984: 21). The question again becomes what differentiates the modernist crisis from the postmodern crisis. In many ways, it seems that the modernists were still searching for a way out of this crisis, a search that either ends with a broken disillusionment about the lack of a solution (Virginia Woolf’s suicide upon the brink of another war comes to mind) or a determined optimism about the future. The postmodernists, on the other hand, have come to the conclusion that there is no solution to this existential crisis, which creates a sort of indifference toward ideological conclusions entirely (Morrissette 1985: 11).

With this crisis of existence ending in desperation, it is no wonder that the solution taken by many postmodern writers is simply to wallow in the chaos around them (Thomas 1989: 1989). Waugh, in describing the plot of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, explains that "progression is always digression" (1984: 95). This is often true of the literature from postmodernists because there can be no movement forward. In a sense, this allows the author a freedom to write as he sees fit, as there are no conventions worth keeping and no ultimatums left sacred. As Brink puts it, "Postmodernism is— among so many other things— a snake swallowing its own tail, as it returns, playfully, ironically, and with lighthearted seriousness, to what once appeared to be its age of innocence" (1998: 19). This existential crisis in some ways resembles a group of people stranded on a desert island. The first efforts revolve around trying to find a way to escape from the island and using the island only as a resource for that escape. Once the people have lost hope in that escape, however, the outlook on their lives on the island changes dramatically. Instead of seeing the island as being full of materials useful for their escape, they see the island as a source of comfort, adventure, and life. Beyond the grasp of any external authority, they have the freedom to manipulate those materials in whatever way brings them enjoyment. In the same way, a postmodern writer settles into the desert island of uncertainty and writes with a freedom from empirical constraints or modernist searching.

To say that postmodern writers have stopped the search for stability is not to say that society matches that point of view. In fact, it seems that often the writers' job is to push the readers out of their comfort zones and into an unsettling perspective. Having already seen that writers draw attention to the form, genre, and characters in order to

break down readers' assumptions about reality, it is no surprise that writers will also go to great lengths to communicate this existential crisis. Postmodern writers often accomplish this through writing about the marginalized, since this people group embodies the instability postmodern writers long to communicate and externalize. As one author explains: "One of the things we must be open to listening to is what I have called the ex-centric, the off-center. Postmodernism questions centralized, totalized, hierarchized, closed systems: questions, but does not destroy" (Bertens cited in Hutcheon 1988: 41). If history is told from one closed perspective, the possibility remains that this perspective is neither objective nor accurate. If history is not the pure truth it claims to be, then our identity, which is so wrapped up in our understanding of history, is uncertain. If identity becomes unhinged, nations suddenly become spaces of difference and the voice of the marginalized becomes as valuable as any other opinion, and no one voice can become the center, because the center has been proven no longer valid. Theorists have begun to see this as a new era of history:

Historians told the stories that legitimated and served the perpetuation of the powerful's control of the weak. For some, the collapse of this illusion is taken to have opened the way to intellectual anarchism: to each his or her own history. For others, it may be opening the way to a new intellectual totalitarianism, or at least to an elitist thrust that divorces history from the perceptions of the general educated public (Fox-Genovese 1989: 219).

In other words, the common story that was said to unite nations, peoples, and the world, has dissolved and left everyone trying to rewrite history, and finding that no one can individually speak for everyone, and therefore, that objective history cannot be accessed as it does not exist. This particular aspect of Postmodernism sounds immediately familiar to the previous chapter discussing the Third Space, and, indeed, this is one area in which

Postmodernism shares a great deal with Postcolonialism, especially in the treatment of “the Other.” This creates yet another overlap between recent literary movements.

### **3.3 Politics in Literature**

Perhaps the greatest challenge in separating the old from the new in Postmodernism is in the idea of politics in fiction. Many consider politics to be part of Postmodernism in a way that was unprecedented from the modernists because of Postmodernism’s close ties to Postcolonialism, which is a much more clearly politically-driven movement in fiction writing. However, while it may be true that Postmodernism is more directly political than the modernist period prior to it, as previously stated, it would be impossible to deny the politics driving many of the modernists to write their works of fiction, keeping in mind the dramatic events that surround the modernist period. All the same, it is true that modernist authors present the political in a much more abstract and indirect style than other literary movements. We have already discussed some of these characteristics, such as the industrialized tone in the literature, or the use of stream-of-conscious narration.

Beyond the debate of the originality of including politics within the movement of Postmodernism, some theorists debate whether Postmodernism can be connected to political writing at all. This argument emerges from the fact that Postmodernism associates itself with an inability to consider history or external truth objectively, or for that matter, virtue and morality either although in the last years of the twentieth century there has been a “return to ethics.” Perhaps for this reason, some authors have felt the need to state that not all recent, that is, contemporary literature, is necessarily postmodern (Hutcheon 1988: 4). In attempts to justify this apolitical stance, scholars provide several different arguments as to the reasons for this gap between political writing and

Postmodernism. Some state that Postmodernism shows that literature is not capable of influencing politics, and that it is not a powerful medium for those purposes (Ashton 2005: 26). Others state that the style of writing in postmodern literature is not easily accessible to the masses and therefore is not taken seriously enough to have a wide political influence (Hutcheon 1988: 210). Still other theorists state that postmodern literature expresses an indifference to all things with an ideological end, one of those definitely being politics. For these reasons many scholars claim that Postmodernism and political writing must remain separate entities.

While these are the arguments of those who find that Postmodernism cannot include political undercurrents as one of the characteristics of the movement, still others would argue that Postmodernism is directly and seriously political. One of the main arguments for this position states that postmodern literature sets up a system and then undermines it to show its flaws. In this way it is political when it constructs any form of community and then reveals its inadequacies (Hutcheon 1988: 180). As Mark Currie explains, “the transition from poetics to politics can also be seen as a deconstructive legacy because deconstruction introduced new methods for the unmasking of ideology” (1998: 4). As an extension of this debunking of political façades, one author, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, emphasizes that New Historicism reveals how texts do play a role in the formation of history, and therefore:

Ultimately, to insist that texts are products of and participants in history as structured social and gender relations is to reclaim them for society as a whole, reclaim them for the political scrutiny of those whom they have excluded, as much as those they have celebrated, for all of those in whose names they have spoken or have claimed to speak. And it is to reclaim them for our intentional political action, and ourselves for political accountability (Fox-Genovese 1989: 222).

By acknowledging history writing as a finite and subjective process, the political nature of such texts surfaces along with their inherent biases and beliefs. Furthermore, with the so-called “turn to ethics,” or return to ethics of the last decade of the twentieth century, Postmodernism has reclaimed a right to take sides and not remain neutral.

#### **4 New Methods: Supposedly New Trends in Postmodernism**

##### **4.1 Deconstruction in Language**

An essential starting point for a discussion of deconstructionism is Jacques Derrida’s philosophical hypothesis, based primarily on his published work, *Of Grammatology* [1967] (1998), which essentially furthers other philosophers’ efforts. The first of these predecessors is Nietzsche, who wished to reevaluate the perspective from which we view history in that instead of history being primarily objectively factual, it is fundamentally political, and therefore a manipulated and subjective rendering of the past. Derrida also drew from Ferdinand Saussure’s discussions on the limitations of language as a system of opposing signs. Derrida pursued the breakdown of oppositions in order to arrive at a higher and more accurate view of the world around us, a world of difference, both in language and in our own limited perspectives on reality.

Therefore, one of the biggest differences between modern and postmodern literature concerns this deconstruction of language. Through Derrida’s theories of deconstructionism, the ideas linguistic scholars have taken for granted, going all the way back to Plato, come into question and many assumptions have to be reevaluated (Ashton 2005: 19). Before, there had been a strict one-to-one relationship between the signifier (in most cases the word) and the signified (the object or the idea in reality). As Mark Currie states, “Reference to language is, after all, no different from reference to the so-called

outside world. There can surely be no position outside language from which language can be viewed objectively” (1998: 47). Language has always been assumed to have some sort of true reflection of the world outside of itself, but according to deconstructionism it is only subjective.

When considering how this subjectivity impacts literature, Derrida focuses on literature’s drive to represent reality through language. He states:

With the exception of a point of advance or a point of resistance which has only been very lately recognized as such, literary writing has, almost always and almost everywhere, in accordance with diverse fashions and across diverse ages, lent itself to that *transcendent* reading, that search for the signified which we here put into question (1992b: 104, emphasis in the text).

Based on this perspective, literature, being composed of language, cannot maintain a one-to-one relationship with the signified. Waugh then accentuates the reformulation of the relationship between language and postmodern literature when she points out:

What has to be acknowledged is that there are two poles of metafiction: one that finally accepts a substantial real world whose significance is not entirely composed of relationships within the language; and one that suggests there can never be an escape from the prisonhouse of language and either delights or despairs in this. (1984: 53)

Therefore, with objective portrayals of reality deemed impossible, postmodern literature may focus on this inadequacy of language as a central theme, whilst others dabble with language on a secondary level.

## **4.2 Deconstruction in Society**

As previously mentioned, one of the reasons for emphasizing the structure of the novel in Postmodernism is to draw attention to the similar structures in society, and by drawing attention to them, question them and recognize their subjectivity. Again, Patricia Waugh’s insight on this topic adds some clarity:

Metafictional deconstruction has not only provided novelists and their readers with a better understanding of the fundamental structure of narrative; it has also offered

extremely accurate models for understanding the contemporary experience of the world as a construction, an artifice, a web of interdependent semiotic systems (1984: 9).

Therefore, one of the ways in which postmodern literature extends beyond the realm of fiction to the created structure of reality is through characters acting as novelists, writing their story and the stories of those around them from their individual perspectives.

Postmodern literature also draws attention to limitations of experience and reminds the reader that he is not, and never can be, assured of objective reality (Waugh 1984: 3).

Waugh quotes John Fowles in saying: “Fiction is woven into all [...] I find this new reality (or unreality) more valid” (1984: 2). It is as if the world has known all along that its reality is a sort of fiction, but owning up to that fact becomes intimidating because one must relinquish any authority or objectivity about individual experiences.

It directly follows, then, that when every experience is subjective because it can only be seen through subjective eyes, the authority in postmodern fiction cannot belong to the author, because the reader will never experience the novel from the author’s perspective (Hutcheon 1988: 90). The author has a certain authority by shaping the events and characters toward his own point of view, but in the end, the reader will use his own experiences to interpret what he is reading (Ashton 2005). This aligns with Heisenberg’s famous formula: “It is impossible to describe an objective world because the observer always changes the observed” (Heisenberg cited in Waugh 1984: 3). In past literary movements, the reader was thought of singularly, as if all readers would respond in exactly the same way. Postmodernism’s focus on the plurality of culture and histories can no longer allow this single vision of the reader (Morrisette 1985: 120). True to postmodern trends, the author will try to make the reader aware of his own subjectivity through the reading of the text by a variety of techniques, including multiple endings,

different perspectives on the same actions, addressing the reader directly in the plot, and countless more. The point they are purporting is indeed unnerving: “It is chilling to be reminded that our only access to the whole visual universe of the narrative is through the medium of writing, a medium that the narrative shows several times to be an unreliable guide to the identity of the writer” (Currie 1998: 124). This kind of doubt and reevaluation is exactly what the authors are hoping to create by exposing these techniques to the reader.

By prompting the reader to reevaluate his role in the interpretation of the text, the awareness that comes through that process expands to other assumptions one makes about society, including the telling of history. Hutcheon emphasizes the fact that literature and history are essentially doing the same thing in that they are interpreting experience, and she clarifies that while Postmodernism, “Does not deny the *existence* of the past; it does question whether we can ever *know* that past other than through its textuality” (1988: 20, emphasis in the text). Postmodernism demands that history be, in a way, “rewritten,” because it cannot be thought of as linear, objective or authoritative since “writers on postmodernism hold that, in the late twentieth century, grand narratives ceased to be ‘grand’ any longer and that history was no longer sustainable by traditional historical discourse” (Veaser 1989: xv) (Cobley 2001: 189).

Another way in which reevaluating structure in literature has impacted the way of perceiving literature as a whole comes from the questions surrounding genre. Many postmodern theorists have argued that once one begins to deconstruct the structure of the novel and look more precisely at its components, the genre of “literature” begins to disappear as it is overtaken by philosophy, journals, dialogue, history, essay, and

countless other genres. There is an interdependence that cannot remove literature and make it an entirely separate thing (Derrida 1992a). As Attridge attempts to summarize Derrida's perspective on this point, he explains that:

*No text is wholly governed by the concepts and oppositions of philosophy, every text can be read (though not necessarily without some tough and extended intellectual labor) as "literary." Equally, no text could be wholly "literary"; all acts of language and interpretation depend on philosophical categories and presuppositions (Attridge 1991: 7, emphasis in the text).*

There is an essential blending of fact and fiction that has led to a debate about whether authors of fiction are "liars" in that they represent their fictional characters and stories as fact to make them believable to the reader. They even set them up as historical so that the reader can situate the event in time. Some theorists have created an idea called "alternate worlds" in order to reconcile the fact/fiction problem in literature, concluding that fiction creates a parallel world to the real world in order to exaggerate and thereby critique certain aspects of life.

### **4.3 Creating Plurality out of Oppositions**

Another way in which Postmodernism reacts against prior movements is the way in which it desires to show pluralism as opposed to binary oppositions. The tendency is to think that theorists are referencing morality when they speak about binary oppositions in modernist theory, but that is not exactly the case. More than morality, the focus seems to be on "the Other," the marginalized, but in a much more *restricted* sense than in Postmodernism (Hutcheon 1988: 196). Postmodernism reveals the mechanism behind fiction writing in order to show that it is a human construct, just like one's subjective perspective of reality. These human constructs are fundamentally individual and therefore vastly differentiated, depending on background, personality, or culture. This leads to the conclusion that the only perspective available is a subjective one, whether it

be in history, fiction, or philosophy. Therefore, based on these theories, it logically follows that the colonial “Other” cannot exist. “The Other” suggests a singular, united group of those who are different from the norm. This is one area in which Postcolonialism overlaps with Postmodernism, since both break down the singularity of this group, or any group for that matter, and entirely do away with the idea of “the norm,” for each person’s “norm” is entirely subjective. Postmodern theorists relate this change to the globalization that comes with the increase in travel and technology: “The existence of an unprecedented cultural pluralism has meant that post-modernist writers are not confronted with the same clear-cut oppositions as modernist writers were” (Waugh 1984: 10). This plurality fits very well in the picture of Postmodernism, which aims to open up debate as opposed to searching for a solution and aiming for conclusions.

A final characteristic that sets Postmodernism apart from Modernism is that postmodern fiction usually leaves the reader with an open ending, while Modernism still strains for a closed ending. Again, remembering that Modernism is not the Enlightenment, modernist authors did not feel that they had the answers, but they had not yet surrendered the search for answers. Many theorists believe that this is essentially part of what it is to be human in that “one of the main qualities we look for in art is what we don’t find in life: order, form, integrity” (Sheridan 2003: 9). The modernists were essentially trying to continue the search to end the existential crisis they had arrived at as a result of the dramatic events surrounding the modernist period. Postmodern literature takes this stance one step further, as Hutcheon explains: “The postmodern impulse is not to seek any total vision. It merely questions. If it *finds* such a vision, it questions how, in fact, it *made* it.” (Hutcheon 1988: 48, emphasis in the text). This again reflects the

indifference previously discussed in that postmodernists have given up the search and resigned themselves to questioning and living in a state of doubt. The authors are challenging their readers to throw off what is comfortable and expose their own limitations. As the role of the artist in society is often to bring the people into an examined life, this is exactly what the postmodern writer is doing: asking readers to evaluate the assumptions they make about experience, history, and literature.

In turning from this background section dedicated to the differentiation between the two movements, Modernism and Postmodernism, the instances of overlap between the two will be useful in evaluating the form of Alfau's two novels, *Locos* and *Chromos*. The scholars who have written on Alfau have not always agreed when classifying Alfau's work within these two movements. Susan Elizabeth Sweeny has been the one scholar who has decisively placed Alfau's work within the framework of Postmodernism, while Joseph Coates, who reviewed both novels, found that *Locos* was modern and *Chromos* postmodern (Sweeny 1993: 207; Coates 1990). Furthermore, several authors, including Anna Shapiro, Mary McCarthy and Joseph Scott, have found Alfau's work to be representative of Modernism, with Scott even dedicating a thesis to the topic (Shapiro, A. 1993: 203; McCarthy 1988: 205; Scott 2005: 1). My analysis of the two novels through the distinct lenses of Modernism and Postmodernism will reveal, I hope, that, curiously, the two novels embody more characteristics of the postmodern movement than the modernist. In fact, the very foundational drive of the two novels along with their philosophical framework, reflect Postmodernism. In the analysis in the next section, therefore, these postmodern characteristics have been broken down into four essential groups. The first of these is structural techniques, especially discussing the format of the

novels; this will be followed by the second group which will address the literary techniques, contemplating the content of the novels themselves. The third group of characteristics will focus on the deconstructionist tendencies and finally, the last section will be devoted to the philosophical foundation of the two novels. This chapter will give examples of these characteristics of Postmodernism from both of the novels, working simultaneously with *Locos* and *Chromos*.

## **5 Structural Techniques**

### **5.1 Metanarrative**

The first of these structural techniques, so central to Postmodernism and very much present in the two novels, is the use of the metanarrative. In the novel *Locos*, the metanarrative is immediately present in the Prologue, as in this passage seen in the previous chapter, when the narrator “Alfau” states that he obtained the ideas for the following stories in the “Café de los Locos,” in English, the Café of the Crazies:

I should add: the author is lost.

And even as I write this prologue, I realize how true this is, for I can find no connection with that individual and official author of this book who once while in the mad, fantastic city of Toledo wandered one day with his friend, Dr. José de los Rios, into the Café de los Locos (the Café of the Crazy) where he witnessed things and saw people which in his playful imagination took the shape of this book, who with the lack of conscience typical of an author advised an acquaintance there to trade his insignificant, though real life in this world for the still less significant and not all real existence in these pages, who at the end of a chapter flung a window open and let in real life to take the stuffy and fictional life of the one character who was his childhood friend and who in a persistent confabulation with the characters found in that Toledo café, is the abstract, but nevertheless real, perpetrator of this experiment (1988: x).

While there are many points of relevance in the passage, for the purpose of discussing the element of the metanarrative in the novel, this part of the Prologue states explicitly that the events are not real and that they have emerged as a manifestation of the imagination of the “author,” all stemming from a singular experience at a café in Toledo. However,

while this metanarrative states directly that the events of the novel are imaginary, the novel then goes on to mix “real” events with fictional characters, making even this supposedly clarifying moment in the Prologue part of a muddled confusion of characters and authors.

The metanarrative continues into the first story, “Identity,” as “Alfau” reveals the “real” people he encounters while visiting the Café de los Locos, who will then become his inspiration for the characters of the novel. By using these doubled versions of the characters in the stories, the author achieves yet another layer of distance by placing a filter over the reader’s future perspective of these characters when he will encounter them in the text, emphasizing their fictionality. Also, the image Alfau creates of these characters within the metanarrative focuses on the mundane and the typical, in contrast with the representation of these same characters within the plot, altered dramatically through Alfau’s use of the surreal and the grotesque. One of the best examples of this is when “Alfau” describes Doña Micaela within the metanarrative: “‘Look at that pale lady dressed in black sitting at that table with a gentleman. Notice how she is going to sleep. She is Doña Micaela Valverde’” (1988: 8). In this description, Doña Micaela reminds the reader of the traditional role of the grandmother in Spanish society. However, when Doña Micaela returns later in the narrative she is the depiction of religious fanaticism, engulfed in the surreal and the grotesque through religious symbolism and her obsession with death (1988: 147, 156).

One final curious occurrence within the metanarrative of the novel deserves reference since it evokes the literary heritage in which Alfau is writing: it comes when Don Quixote makes an appearance at this same Café de los Locos. With this reference,

Alfau openly admits his knowledge of the very tradition he is writing in: “I remember seeing there a poor and shabby lean fellow. He claimed to have served Cervantes. Well, the poor man could interest no author at the present moment” (1988: 5). This appears to be one of Alfau’s ironic declarations, which occur at several different moments throughout the novel, written with the intent of drawing the reader’s attention to the exact fact he denies. This is true of this reference to Don Quixote, since as the novel goes on, he appears in the story “Fingerprints” and even takes a prominent role in the story “A Romance of Dogs,” since the character Garcia seems to be a rendition of Don Quixote as well. Therefore, while Don Quixote is not a relevant character in the novel, his presence remains in the ambience of these *locos* throughout the novel, sometimes taking the image of a religious fanatic or at other times a depressive Romantic poet. He is a pertinently apt figure, as he was a *loco* himself.

In contrast, the novel *Chromos* uses a metanarrative of a different style, this time much more based on the surreal. Don Pedro, who, as we have already seen, is portrayed as the devil, leads “Alfau” down into the depths of his own creative genius. Within this novel, however, the emphasis is on the hallucinatory nature of this experience: “I was dizzy and was sure that I was walking in my sleep and dreaming. The monotonous beating of the bare end of his shillelagh against the pavement must have been instrumental in the hypnosis” (1988: 18). In this passage, Don Pedro acts as a sort of muse, only a tortuous and cruel one, refusing to release “Alfau” until he takes on the daunting task of writing about the Americaniards. The actual location of the metanarrative remains a physical place, however, the narrator offers no details as to the specific location. Later, the inclusion of the distorted and aged *chromos* with the insects

crawling out of the walls and across the books reminds the reader less of an actual physical space, placing more emphasis on the surreal and the grotesque.

The metanarrative in the novel *Chromos* abounds with references to the devil and the descent into Hell. Even the words of Don Pedro read like a death sentence spoken over “Alfau,” as he descends down to his fate of writing about the Americaniards: “And at last, to wake up from the dream or sink further into it, his fateful words: ‘Time to go.’” (1990: 19). The connection to a dream reverses the supposed reality of the novel, giving more weight to the metanarrative and less to the rest of the plot that transpires within this frame story. As “Alfau” is carried away by Don Pedro to his fate, the language, as previously seen, contains even more diabolic references: “Everything was foreordained and all inevitable. The old but well-kept Hispano-Suiza that slid to a stop before us, quietly, dark and foreboding like a hearse. The uncanny timing, everything suggested Satanism and witchcraft, the dragnet of Lucifer” (1990: 20). Therefore, according to this metanarrative within the novel *Chromos*, the weight of the task of writing the inner plot of the novel lays heavily on the “author,” as if he would have to die a death. This reminds the reader of the same view of the artist as will be seen in Alfau’s short stories, as one who must “die” in order to give the gift of insight and perspective through his work.

Therefore, the metanarrative in the novel *Chromos* takes on a much more philosophical style than the metanarrative in *Locos*. In *Locos*, the metanarrative reiterates the stereotypical nature of the characters in the novel, creating a contrast between the mundaneness of “reality” and Alfau’s surreal ironic critique. In *Chromos*, the metanarrative speaks more directly to the writing process itself, discussing the deep

commitment necessary in order to achieve such a task. As already seen through the theory on Modernism and Postmodernism, the sole existence of the metanarrative is not sufficient for a novel to be classified as postmodern, but the metanarrative must draw attention to the constructed nature of the text. This is true of both *Locos* and *Chromos*, since both metanarratives reveal the text as created and do not pretend to be a diaphanous representation of reality. The metanarrative in both the novels is, indeed, one of the strongest clues as to the postmodern nature of the two novels.

## **5.2 Layering in the Text**

While both novels contain a strong element of metanarrative, this is not the only example of framing or layering within the two texts. This sort of exponential layering is yet another characteristic of Postmodernism, becoming another way of demonstrating playfulness amidst the chaos. Chandler Brossard has already claimed that this aspect of Alfau's writing is part of what constitutes him as an innovative writer: "A true visionary fiction, like a myth structure, magically combines, orders, and dramatizes multiple realities" (1972: 110). Alfau achieves this layering through his constant muddling of the lines between the main characters and real life, which I have already discussed in the previous chapters. Therefore, as a brief recapitulation, this enigmatic narrator "Alfau," is easily confused with the author, yet the text reveals that the two are not one and the same: there is a delicate and discrete differentiation through postmodern playfulness. The layering continues with the interactions between this narrator and the main characters of *Locos*. Dr. de los Rios is most definitely a character, yet he appears in the frame narrative, external and apparently on a higher plane than the rest of the other characters. Later, "Alfau" himself is lowered to the level of character in Garcia's manuscript, as the

supposedly external narrator becomes the character who was Garcia's childhood friend. With the conclusion of the final story, "A Romance of Dogs," it is "Alfau" himself who concludes the action of the entire novel by bringing about Garcia's death.

This technique of layering is exacerbated through these two main characters in *Locos*, Dr. de los Rios and Garcia, as they become a representation of the Two Spains. However, they are represented in the novel as polar opposites that break down into an equal state of madness. It is clear that Dr. de los Rios represents the progressive, anti-Catholic and modern Spain. Interestingly enough, though, Dr. de los Rios is, in theory, rational and progressive, but in practice he reverts to old superstitions, or even worse, absurd prescriptions of suicide. Alfau seems to be referencing that this new "modern" Spain eventually will lead to suicide, which could be interpreted as being the rejection and death of everything that was once traditional. Also, just as this progressive Spain in real life was the enemy of the Church and the sentimental peasants, so Dr. de los Rios' enemies are the religious woman, Doña Micaela, and the poet Garcia. Perhaps the most important aspect, though, is the fact that the logical, progressive Spain ends up being neither logical nor progressive and in the end, according to Alfau, does more harm than good. His powers of deception are uncanny, however, since all the characters in the novel respect his judgment as he leads them to their deaths. This additional attribute of power reveals a harsh criticism against this progressive Spain.

The second Spain is portrayed, then, through the character Garcia, representing the traditional, culturally-rich and contented Spain, whose work ethic has often been questioned. Throughout the novel, Garcia appears searching for means of gaining money through the least amount of work, from his undermining Don Gil and his fingerprint

discovery, to his “work” of finding a benefactor in Don Laureano. At the end of the novel, he reappears in a similar situation: “he wore long hair, wrote poetry and asked his friends for money. Garcia did not work and led an aimless life, a thing in which most of his friends envied him secretly” (1988: 185). This lack of work ethic aligns perfectly with a criticism of this second Spain, traditionally known for a lack of enterprise and irresponsibility. Garcia’s laziness is also linked to his role as an artist in the novel, since he is the poet, the representative of culture. This aspect of Garcia furthers this representation of the second Spain, since it portrays the rich cultural heritage of the traditional Spain.

When Garcia goes mad, leading to his eventual death, it becomes increasingly clear that Alfau’s intention with these two opposing characters is not to simply represent the two Spains, but to reveal that, indeed, they both break down and fall into madness. Therefore, he leaves neither character triumphant over the other, as both are equally absurd, and what begins as a critique dissolves into a playful chaos. This is yet another facet of the novel in which Alfau’s work aligns itself with Postmodernism, since Alfau leaves his critique incomplete and instead turns to the absurd. However, while Garcia dies at the end of the novel, Dr. de los Rios is left in his position of authority, yet he assumes the role of a crazed despot, with his so-called wisdom of suicide and coughing houses left unquestioned. This could perhaps be Alfau’s prediction for the future of Spain, however, he still definitely prophesies the breakdown of the society itself through the insanity of these two characters.

On yet another level of layering, the characters in the various stories also find themselves confused as to their own status as characters or as reality. This topic, in fact,

becomes the theme of the story “A Character,” when Gaston experiences some confusion as to his own identity, as he explains: “In my dream my sister had the face of Lunarito, you understand me? Perhaps in my dream Lunarito was my sister” (1988: 34). He is unsure of what is reality and what is only a dream. Alfau creates yet another plane of reality, explaining that Gaston was just a character and that Lunarito and Don Laureano Baez exist on a higher level of reality, Lunarito only meeting Gaston through the text:

“Lunarito, did anything happen during my absence?”  
Lunarito made no answer, she had not heard him. She was not there. At that moment she was living in the future, walking with Gaston Bejarano along upper Alcala Street on a rainy night (1988: 38).

Alfau’s tactic of creating several planes of reality and fiction within the stories creates a level of inconsistency and confusion reminding the reader of the chaos of Postmodernism. While this same multi-level layering could exist in Modernism, the fact that Alfau does not seem to search for clarity within this muddling, but simply revels in the confusion itself, points more to the postmodern movement than to Modernism.

Additionally, the characters in the novel do not remain in their same roles from one story to another. One of the best examples of this is Lunarito, who in one story is a lover, in another is a sister, and in yet another is someone else’s mistress, with all of these changes taking place with no clarification from the story to help the reader understand these different roles. Don Laureano serves in one story as a friend of “Alfau” and yet in another story he is an infamous beggar. These multiple personalities of the various characters in the novel again show the sort of lost confusion associated with Postmodernism, especially since the author shows little interest in clarifying the constantly changing roles of the different characters.

In the novel *Chromos*, Alfau reuses many of the characters from his novel *Locos*, making references to the previous novel that allow the reader to believe that these are the same characters, however, in *Chromos* these characters live in New York City and are Alfau's Americaniards. Despite the fact that these characters are different from the characters in the previous novel, if in nothing else than their location, Alfau draws clear connections between them and their defining characteristics from the prior novel: "The quarrel was due this time, I believe, to the irritability induced by the season of the year. Spring in New York was the despair of Garcia" (1990: 74). Just as the character Garcia cannot withstand the coming of spring in Madrid, so this Americaniard version of the same character has a fear of spring as well. This novel also connects Garcia with dogs, just as the prior novel reveals the link between Garcia and these unlikely companions, for when Garcia's mistress dies in *Chromos*, the narrator adds, "There was a dog nosing about Garcia" (1990: 197). This consistent connection between Garcia the poet and dogs offers a possible link to Cervantes' short story "Coloquio de los perros," especially since the two dogs in *Locos* sit at the foot of Garcia's deathbed. Therefore, Alfau seems to allow the reader to conclude that these characters are the same, yet there are several discrepancies that bring a cloudy comparison to these eponymous characters, such as Garcia's novelistic tendencies in *Chromos*, or even more so, the very fact that his character died at the conclusion of the novel *Locos*.

One further element of layering in the text of *Chromos* is achieved by mixing what is presented in the novel as reality with pure fiction. Throughout the narrative, especially in the sections surrounding Garcia's stories, the existence of two separate spheres of fiction and of reality seem to mix and become muddled. Garcia himself is the

main culprit of this inconsistency, as he creates fictional writing, yet still feels the need to anchor his writing in reality: “‘That Virginia was my mother,’ Garcia had said once to me very solemnly, as if this lent matters an authenticity that justified anyone in crashing the literary gates and then condoned his misconduct, once inside” (1990: 119). Within this supposed fiction, Garcia equates these connections with reality as a way of validating his own work. Further layering unfolds as a supposed result of the lack of control “Alfau” has over his own narrative, since much of the novel is interrupted by Garcia’s stories. In this way, the representation of fiction and reality are constantly confused yet connected as the reader must wade through the fiction to access the supposed reality within the novel.

### **5.3 The Breakdown of Genres**

A further characteristic of Postmodernism that emerges through the two novels is the idea of mixing genres within the narratives themselves. In *Locos*, this aspect is clear to the reader, since the novel is composed of a series of short stories, both independent and yet undeniably connected through the metanarrative and the repetitions of the same characters. The loss of one specific genre as an overriding and uniting factor escalates since the final story contains within it a manuscript supposedly written by one of the characters, Garcia, and passed along through one of the other characters in the novel, Dr. de los Rios. The use of this manuscript is especially important because it achieves yet another level of distance between its content and the author, and it also gives the impression of the unfinished, the unedited element within the novel itself. This idea of the imperfect novel is yet another trend in Postmodernism, intentionally revealing the constructed nature of the novel itself.

In the novel *Chromos*, the main area in which one can perceive this breakdown of genres is through the inclusion of the manuscripts from Garcia's novels. These manuscripts allow for an alternative perspective, contrasting the hybridized text, supposedly written by "Alfau," with a stereotypical one supposedly written by Garcia. The inclusion of this work-in-progress, constantly being edited by the author, places an emphasis on the imperfections of the text. These fragments aside, there is also the story of Don Hilarión, but the narrator "Alfau" claims to have written this story, creating yet another contrasting genre to evaluate and even a third level of distancing, between the main plot of the narrative and the stereotypical manuscripts from Garcia. In the final pages of the novel, Alfau allows the two characters Don Pedro and Dr. de los Rios to engage in a debate over music and mathematics, creating another change in genre since these pages contribute little to the plot, but do allow for a philosophical discussion on unrelated matter.

Therefore, by mixing genres and including manuscripts within the novel Alfau reveals the construction behind literature, and that literature in itself is not a genre, but a combination of other genres, some of which can be fact and others of which are fiction. The author is purposefully allowing the reader to witness the construction of the text, experiencing the weaving together of genres and the muddling of reality. Alfau especially accentuates this breakdown of genre by allowing for different competing perspectives to be represented in the narrative through the use of these manuscripts by Garcia.

## 6 Literary Techniques

### 6.1 Laying Bare the Device

The idea of laying bare the device, that is to say, revealing the mechanisms and the thought processes behind the writing, is an approach Alfau frequently makes use of in his two novels. John Crispin has brought to light the innovation behind Alfau's use of this technique, especially accentuating past and current trends in literature: "Alfau's narrative is itself very self-conscious, filled with devices that would be in fashion only thirty years later" (1991: 673). In both narratives, when Alfau lays bare the device, it is done with a clear sense of irony, never revealing the author's true intentions about writing the novels. This, in a sense, exaggerates the postmodern by combining the technique of revealing the mechanism behind the writing with playful elusiveness.

We can see examples of this innovative technique in the novel *Locos*, since, as previously discussed, the narrator and supposed author "Alfau" makes reference to the organizational form of the book and his own purposes in structuring the novel as such. While Alfau's use of an unreliable narrator will be discussed further in the next section, this technique also lends itself to laying bare the device since "Alfau's" instructions regarding the novel are ironic, as is evident in this passage: "This...novel is written in short stories with the purpose of facilitating the task of the reader" (1988: ix, ellipsis original to the text). Here he details the direction and logic of the work, but upon beginning the novel, one finds the stories are only very loosely connected. Indeed, as the narrator continues to describe the novel's organization, the irony only deepens as he directly addresses the reader: "Each chapter being a complete story in itself, the reader may pick up the book and begin it at the back and end it at the front, or he may begin it

and end it in the middle, depending on his mood” (1988: ix). When, upon further reading, this advice is proven to be delusive, the element of play in the novel again surfaces: “En suma, la novela juega con su público, con la realidad, con las convenciones literarias<sup>3</sup>” (Stavans 1989: 175). Therefore, Alfau plays at revealing the structures behind the novel; however, even these moments are purposefully fabricated and misleading.

The narrator “Alfau” further reveals the mechanism behind the narrative in *Locos* when he claims to have lost control of the characters: “The rebellious qualities of my characters have prevented me from writing it. It seems that while I frame my characters and their actions in my mind, I have them quite well in hand, but it suffices to set a character on paper to lose control of him immediately” (1988: 19). While this is clearly written as ironic, the supposed haphazard form of writing gives the reader an assumed behind-the-scenes glance at the workings of the novel. This happens again within the same story when the supposed author takes a break from his narrative, abruptly explaining himself to the reader: “The doorbell has rung. I believe it is my friend Don Laureano. If you will excuse me I shall proceed with my tale some other time” (1988: 20). This spurs on the action of the story as the characters take control. While these passages present a picture of how the novel is written, it is a false version Alfau the author has inserted into the text, creating more distance between the written word and his true intentions for the novel. This particular passage also reminds the reader of the second part of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1615) when Don Quixote and Sancho Panza inform us that they are doing what they like and have usurped the control of the author. María DeGuzmán has noticed this similarity between the two works and how in both novels, “the techniques of intertextuality and appropriation of others’ arguments are used

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<sup>3</sup> “In short, the novel plays with its readers, with reality, with literary conventions.”

to create a debate about national identity” (2005: 276). No theme or technique is left unquestioned and a chaotic sense of inexorable doubting and uncertainty envelops the narrative, leading to a similar questioning of other structures of authority.

The narrator also comments on his own presence in the stories of *Locos*, supposedly betraying his connections to these characters and revealing the limitations of his own writing. The clearest of these cases comes from the story “Identity” when the narrator reminds the reader of what is going on beyond the words written on the page: “Now I, as the author of this tale, can see all that Fulano did after he went away, although I am supposed to remain seated at the café table” (1988: 9). The narrator draws attention to the fact that the story is fictitious and that it would be impossible for the narrator to see Fulano in this moment. By reiterating the basis of fiction itself, the author removes the reader from the action of the story for a brief moment, expanding the gap between the written word and reality. A similar distancing takes place toward the end of the same story when the narrator refers back to his own work: “And in order to fulfill my promise to that unfortunate and most unimportant of all men, I have written this story. Whether I have succeeded in making a character or even a symbol out of him, or whether he will enjoy this poor revival, I do not know. I have done my best” (1988: 15). The author accentuates his own flawed capabilities, reflecting the purposefully imperfect narratives that would come to be associated with the postmodern movement as a reflection of deconstructionism.

A further representation of this sort of laying bare the device is the reference to the supposed author’s participation in the very text he is writing. One such case is when the narrator, in his description of the blackouts in Madrid states: “I will not mention my

personal actions during that week of darkness” (1988: 78). In one short statement, the author achieves both proximity between the narrator and the text, while at the same time reminding the reader of the invented nature of the story and even the artificial existence of the narrator as well. Some of these references to the supposed author of the stories move from the mundane and unimportant to fundamental in order for the plot to function. One could say that the climactic moment of the novel, being the death of Garcia, is brought about by the actions of the supposed author himself, “Alfau”: “Mechanically I moved, I felt that every limb in me acted regardless of my will. I threw the curtains aside and a stream of light inundated the room . . . . Then I lifted the hook and flung the window open . . . .” (1988: 200, ellipsis original to the text). The narrator and supposed author stepping into the text in order to conclude the action of the novel breaks the dividing lines between the author and his creation. Moreover, this is yet another example of Alfau laying bare the device with an ironic twist achieved through the use of the alter-ego “Alfau.”

The novel also contains several comments from the narrator “Alfau” as to the implications of the novel as a whole. This is yet another way of laying bare the device, for the reader cannot be absorbed by the plot itself, since the author is constantly dragging the reader back to the surface in order to discuss the novel being read as a work of fiction, as in this passage previously referenced:

After this, and considering that the action of this book develops mainly in Spain, a land in which not the thought nor the word, but the action with a meaning— the gesture— has grown into a national specialty, I must beg the reader to expect nothing but that, which in this case, and due to the unreliable nature of the characters and myself, conveys no meaning at all but only empty situations (1988: xi).

Gerard Brenan commented on the importance of the gesture to the Spaniard and its shallowness compared to action: “[...] it is a characteristic of Spaniards to be satisfied

with gestures [...] and to neglect the real heart of the matter. The Arabs conquered the whole of Spain in two years. It took the Spaniards eight centuries to get rid of them” (1950: 271). Returning to the reference both to the reader and to the reading of the text with a philosophical goal in mind, the use of irony draws attention to the critique of Spanish society Alfau will formulate throughout the pages of the novel, since as he asks the reader to avoid any search for significance, he is indirectly asking for that very thing. Alfau repeats this same sentiment once more in the Prologue, as we saw before, subtly promoting a cautious and conscious readership:

In other words, the reader is expected to sit back and watch this procession of strange people and distorted phenomena without even a critical eye. To look for anything else, or to take seriously this bevy of irresponsible puppets and the inconsistency of the author, would not be advisable, as by doing so and imagining things that might lend themselves to misinterpretation, the reader would only disclose a more or less entertaining comedy of meaningless gestures, the vulgar aspects of a common tragedy (1988: xii).

This second ironic reference that warns against a deeper meaning behind the writing achieves this technique of laying bare the device since the reader suddenly must think about the novel as a whole, and decide how to evaluate it. In this way, Alfau makes this technique effective through his use of satire as he supposedly begs the reader to simply enjoy the novel at face value.

While Alfau varies the techniques he uses in *Chromos*, the same concept of laying bare the device emerges from the narration of events. While the novel does contain some moments of laying bare the device in the discussion of Alfau’s writing about the Americaniads, most of the comments that fulfill this function materialize in the confabulation of Garcia’s work. First, the mechanism behind the writing is revealed through the editorial process “Alfau” undergoes with Garcia and his novel. This critiquing, modifying and debating that takes place over Garcia’s work draws the reader’s

attention to the instability of the text, the unreliability of its content and its inevitable imperfections. Some of these comments come from Garcia as he discusses his own work:

“I have this part pretty well worked out. Of course, the whole story is old-fashioned and I would like to present it in some parts, especially this one,” he waved the papers in his hand, “in a sort of old-fashioned— well stilted— if you know what I mean, to fit the period.” (1990: 56).

The “author” states his intentions in writing these manuscripts, and the reader is allowed to listen in on the conversation, undeniably altering his experience when later reading these very texts being discussed.

One further way in which this laying bare the device is applicable to the sections in the novel that refer to Garcia’s manuscripts comes when “Alfau” attempts to resolve the inaccuracies in Garcia’s work. Alfau the author distances himself further from these manuscripts through the narrator “Alfau” by constantly barraging Garcia with criticism and corrections:

“How did Fernando get there?” I interrupted. “Did anyone summon him, or did he have the gift of premonition?” To be perfectly frank, I did not care, but I was afraid that Garcia might notice how sleepy I was and I wanted to show him that I was paying attention.  
“Why, yes. Perhaps you are right.” Garcia made a quick note: “I will fix that later,” and he went on undaunted (1990: 156).

This is one of several moments in the text in which “Alfau” intercedes in order to correct some negligence on the part of Garcia. This moment is of particular interest in that it portrays a certain apathy toward the editing of the work, giving the reader the impression that “Alfau” would correct much more of it if he felt it pertinent and of some benefit to the author, but that the very quality of the work does not warrant such an effort. This again provides an example of this technique, yet it remains well enveloped in the layers

of the narrative itself, since these examples come from the narrator commenting on the manuscript within the novel.

The aspect of laying bare the device also reveals the postmodern creation behind Garcia's manuscript, making it appear as if it were entirely lacking the drive and direction that comes with purposeful organization. The narrator reflects on this haphazard conglomeration of notes and outlines and that it is a sign of the resulting lack of success of the novel as a whole:

After this I did not mind what followed of Garcia's novel, which was a jumble of notes with references and more references, sheets with small slips of paper pinned to them as intended insertions, with red penciled marks and much of "this goes here and this there." I watched him as he tried to assemble all this rough work and make some sense out of it (1990: 228).

This is again the revealing of behind-the-scenes work that is usually hidden from the reader, yet in this instance, the narrator uses this lack of organization as a further critique of Garcia and his work on his manuscripts.

## **6.2 Unreliable Narrator**

One of the most prominent literary techniques used in both novels reflecting Postmodernism is the unreliable narrator. While this aspect has been mentioned previously in this chapter while referencing other structural techniques, it deserves its own category since it is so central to Postmodernism. The invention of this "Alfau," the author's own alter-ego, as the narrator for both of the novels creates a narrator that is, on the reader's first impression, synonymous with the author himself. It is only upon further reading and through attention to the absurd details of this "Alfau's" narration that the reader becomes aware that this is not the author speaking, but yet another character present in the narratives. This particular aspect is essential to the discussion of Postmodernism in the two texts, since the technique of the unreliable narrator is prevalent

in several different literary movements, yet the postmodern movement is renowned for the narrator that is apparently reliable, yet at second glance reveals his inconsistencies and his own ignorance. This is true of the narrator “Alfau” in both the novels *Locos* and *Chromos*.

In the novel *Locos*, the narrator “Alfau” first strays from the norm by stating explicitly his own narrative limitations, creating a self-conscious narrator from the beginning of the novel. One of the clearest examples of this self-definition comes from the story “The Wallet,” when the narrator states: “As I cannot describe any conversation or action, I shall endeavor to set down some thoughts, a bad habit which writers have of trying to convince the readers that they can steal into their characters’ minds” (80). The narrator himself defines what kind of narration the author has granted him, apparently a first person omniscient narration, while under the guise of a limited narration. Another example of the narrator stating what he is and is not capable of in his roles, comes from the story “Identity,” when he follows Fulano to the river and watches the thief steal his identity:

Fulano did not see what happened after he left the bridge but I, of course, saw it, and if a writer had the privilege of interfering or preventing the incidents which he has the misfortune to witness, I would have prevented what took place, for the sake of my poor friend, Fulano. However, if a writer could do that, all stories would end happily and justice would prevail in all literature. As this would create a great monotony, such power has not been granted. Therefore, I had to stand by and see the happenings in a state of utter impotence and indignation (1988: 11).

Again, the narrator states explicitly his own role within the text, identifying himself as the author of the tale, yet hampered by the limitations of literature and genre. At this point, the reader is aware of a strange self-conscious narrator that speaks about his own participation in the action of the text.

As previously stated, in *Locos*, the role of the narrator is also mixed with the role of the characters, creating an ambience of instability throughout the narrative. In reexamining the moments just mentioned in which “Alfau” deliberately chooses to abstain from interfering in Fulano’s destiny, but yet at the conclusion of the novel itself he intervenes in order to bring about Garcia’s death, one finds yet another inconsistency in this narrator who appears to be adjusting the rules of narration to his whim and fancy. Also unique to the novel is the inclusion of the narrator in the manuscript supposedly written by Garcia that “Alfau” includes in the novel itself. “Alfau” exchanges his role as the narrator for the role of character, as is evident when Garcia states in his manuscript, as in this passage previously referenced: “Alfau had the most absurd ideas regarding the cause of her becoming a nun” and then when referencing the boys’ knowledge about the priests in the school, Garcia adds, “Alfau seemed to know the story already” (1988: 174). In this way, the narrator has stooped to the level of a character, yet he still maintains some of his narrative privileges within the manuscript. This adds to the theme of the unreliable narrator since he refuses to establish himself in any particular role, constantly breaking narrative rules.

The subtle unreliability of “Alfau” reemerges in his interactions with Dr. de los Rios, since he refers to Dr. de los Rios with complete trust in his character and in his diagnoses throughout the novel. “Alfau” supports his advice that both Fulano and Doña Micaela should commit suicide, and he accepts the bizarre surroundings at Tia Mariquita’s house with the calming reassurance of Dr. de los Rios’ explanations. There is one point in the novel, however, when “Alfau,” expresses his momentaneous doubt of Dr.

de los Rios, yet in the end “Alfau’s” commitment to Dr. de los Rios becomes even stronger:

So it was Dr. de los Rios, the man whom Garcia had accused of insanity, the same man whose sanity I had doubted for a moment, who had finally taken my friend to the asylum. And I kept on thinking about the strange irony of life while Dr. José de los Rios explained to me the case of Garcia (1988: 192-3).

Therefore, while the reader sees Dr. de los Rios for the absurd and irrational doctor that he is, “Alfau” accepts his prognoses as the highest truth in all situations, giving Dr. de los Rios complete reign over the narrative itself. This adds to “Alfau’s” unreliability, as he is incapable of seeing Dr. de los Rios’ illogicality.

In *Chromos*, the reader finds the same narrator, “Alfau,” governing over the events of the narrative with a haphazard and lazy style of narration that slips even further into chaos than the narration of *Locos*. While “Alfau” in *Locos* reminds the reader that the events cannot be read in chronological order and that the novel is purposefully written in an unorganized manner, the narrator of *Chromos* simply proceeds with his unruly narration and accepts his own disorganization as an inescapable reality:

By now I have allowed these things to fall out of chronological step, but it is just as well. Possibly the order in which incidents happen may not always be as acceptable as the pattern they form when seen in their totality. But be that as it may, I go back now to things I got ahead of in this haphazard account of recollections (1990: 193).

This admittance of the illogical ordering of events in the narrative comes in the middle of the novel, not at the beginning, as one would expect if the intention was to make the reader aware of the lack of organization. This sort of moment repeats itself throughout the novel, with one such occurrence taking place at the café: “It was then, I think, that I realized that the Chink was there” (1990: 253). The reader becomes aware that the narrator’s description of the events in the novel is irrevocably tied to the narrator’s

perception, and, as is revealed throughout the novel, the narrator is not a very attentive one.

This lazy attention paid to the details of the events the narrator is portraying becomes particularly evident when relaying the reading of Garcia's manuscript to the reader. The narrator consistently disconnects himself, and thereby the reader as well, from the reading of these stories:

Although his question did not startle me, I had been listening in a desultory manner, allowing other thoughts to wander in and out, as well as the music from the radio and other noises and disconnected phrases from the café, and I had formed no particular thought (1990: 30).

This lack of attention to the manuscript creates a mood of fragmentation surrounding Garcia's work, emphasizing the imperfect perspective of both the novel as a whole and especially of the presentation of this manuscript within the novel. The reader becomes especially aware of the imperfections of this narrator through his lack of interest in the work Garcia shares with him: "Garcia began to talk to me and although I can't remember what he said and don't think I paid much attention, it created enough of a distraction" (1990: 255). While the reader cannot help but accept the narrator's opinion that this content is not necessary, it again creates a postmodern fragmentation that does not allow the reader a global perspective on Garcia's work.

In regard to the reader's limited access to Garcia's text, the narrator only exacerbates this limitation by providing the reader with his own perspective on Garcia's manuscripts, so the reader cannot objectively decide about the content of Garcia's narrative for himself. As already cited in the previous chapter on *Chromos*, after allowing the reader access to a section of Garcia's manuscript, the narrator then interjects: "I was not impressed. Garcia is given to exaggerations and to speaking

carelessly and claiming that many things, including anecdotes which have been known for generations, have actually happened to him” (1990: 51). While the reader will not trust “Alfau’s” opinion entirely, the mere expression of these sentiments inevitably alters the reader’s interpretation of Garcia’s work, assigning it the stigma already provided by “Alfau.” Therefore, the narrator in *Chromos* presents himself to the reader as the ultimate authority on literary matters, yet the reader knows him to be equally unreliable, creating an uncertainty characteristic of Postmodernism. The intricacy of these interruptions is only heightened when the narrator at times proclaims his own objectivity:

And there you have it. I have transcribed this scene almost literally so that the reader may judge for himself and not accuse me of unfairness. It bears its own and most damning condemnation, evidencing an amateurishness which should only help to increase the sentence. It is obvious that Garcia wanted very much to be the literary enfant terrible with delusions of being classified as one who submerges boldly into the depths of the human soul, behavior and depravity, startling revelations of the abnormal, lurid passages resolving into profound conclusions which are never disclosed and all such things which no one takes seriously and have long been out of date. I could not help saying all this to Garcia but will not report on our ensuing argument because it was only a repetition of previous ones and I have already made my views quite unequivocal. Instead I will go on with his story, which after this becomes less reprehensible, if not from a literary standpoint, at least in content (1990: 223).

The narrator begins with a supposed distance and objectivity that rapidly dissipates as he again barrages the writing with accusations of lacking any real originality or literary acclaim. Therefore, the reader is forced to take “Alfau’s” perspective on Garcia’s work as the frame surrounding the manuscripts themselves, whether the reader trusts “Alfau’s” perspective or not.

The narrator “Alfau” further limits the reader’s access to Garcia’s work by removing certain sections from the reader’s grasp. In certain moments, the narrator abbreviates the plot for the reader in his own words, not allowing the reader to hear the author’s own voice (1990: 110). Upon returning to the manuscript, the narrator states, “There followed another long-winded and pathetic analysis of Julieta’s feelings and

Paco's misbehavior. I select a few paragraphs at random" (1990: 116). This statement from the narrator not only confirms the editing he takes upon himself in his presentation of the text to the reader, but also serves as a confession to the supposed lack of care as to which parts of the manuscript he allows the reader to interact with. These deliberate cuttings take place throughout the entire novel, as time and again "Alfau" asserts his powers to remove sections and comment on their lack of literary worth:

Here followed a scene between brother and sister over which I pass hastily. Their strange relationship had been hinted at clearly enough without having to throw the details in the reader's teeth. It ended somewhat lamely with what Garcia must have thought the palliative of an artistic tableau (1990: 221).

Therefore, the reader is subjected to the whims of this unreliable narrator both in his inattention to the text itself and his own literary interests and perspectives. Even more relevant is the fact that "Alfau" himself references throughout the text his own limitations as a writer, yet when discussing these manuscripts he still forces the reader to submit to his judgment.

### **6.3 The Absurd**

In addition to the ever-present irony so representative of Postmodernism, we also find in the two novels the concept of the Absurd. While the Absurd addresses more specifically the content of the two novels than the form, it will be discussed in this chapter because of its importance to Postmodernism. The Absurd is often associated with Samuel Beckett, another author who wrote on the brink of Postmodernism. This technique forms part of the postmodernist tendency to play amidst the madness of uncertainty, taking the most unrealistic situations to the extreme. In the novel *Locos*, Alfau creates even more irony by making the supposedly rationalistic character Dr. de los Rios the very personification of the Absurd. Some of his more absurd diagnoses and procedures as a doctor have

already been mentioned, especially his tendency to prescribe suicide as a cure for all ailments, as he states: “You know how I believe in suicide as a universal panacea. Well, suicide is also an abortion of death” (1988: 158). These irrational statements are accompanied by the novel’s unreliable narrator reaffirming Dr. de los Rios’ genius: “Dr. de los Rios was a strange physician. Listening to him I was often tempted to believe that medicine was almost a science” (1988: 130). This furthers the irony surrounding the character Dr. de los Rios, since “Alfau” esteems him as the highest regarded professional. The absurdity surrounding Dr. de los Rios extends beyond his obsession with suicide, creating moments of absurdity throughout the text, such as his diagnosis in Tia Mariquita’s house, as previously mentioned: “‘It was not he that time,’ said Dr. de los Rios. ‘That was the house coughing’” (1988: 132). Therefore, this character becomes the most rational character in the novel while at the same time the most absurd, creating new heights of confusion and distrust.

Whatever Alfau’s intentions may be by combining absurdity with the supposed extreme rationality that Dr. de los Rios represents in the text, they seem to rest heavily on his use of Dr. de los Rios as a symbol for one of the Two Spains. Since Dr. de los Rios represents this progressive, liberal and rational Spain, one could read Alfau’s portrayal of this character as a sharp criticism of this national mentality, appearing to be the beacon of light leading Spain into the future but in reality leading Spain to its own death. This is reflected even further through “Alfau’s” undying faith in Dr. de los Rios, despite his absurdity or the danger of his diagnoses. When viewed from this perspective, Alfau not only uses absurdity in a postmodern manner, he also uses the technique of the absurd to add to his criticism of Spain.

However, Dr. de los Rios is not the only element of absurdity throughout the novel *Locos*, since many of the stories use the absurd as part of the playful style. One of the best examples of the absurd aiding the story in the critique of Spain as well as adding a chaotic playfulness is the story “Fingerprints,” as Alfau ironically places so much emphasis on the importance of fingerprints:

The origin of the theory of fingerprints has been claimed by several countries. Spain is among these countries and the man responsible for the discovery was a certain draftsman, very skilled with the pen in all detail work, who is also responsible for one of the series of postage stamps bearing the image of the King (1988: 57).

The importance given to such an insignificant accomplishment, in comparison to discovering America, for example, is yet another example of using the absurd as part of the criticism in the novel, especially focusing that criticism on Spanish society. Further instances of this use of the absurd come with the story of Doña Micaela and her obsession with death: “Doña Micaela considered it purely from an aesthetic viewpoint. She liked death for itself” (1988: 148). Her fascination with death and her own deathlike transformations are yet another example of the absurd in the novel, which Alfau uses as the basis for a criticism of religion. Throughout these examples, Alfau typically uses the absurd in *Locos* in reference to some form of criticism, making use of postmodern technique for his satire, yet maintaining playful absurdity in its pure form.

In the novel *Chromos*, the main example of the absurd as a technique within the text comes, once again, from Dr. de los Rios. In this novel, his moments of the absurd generally come as a result of his own supernatural powers. There are, in this novel, a few references to his reliance on suicide as a remedy, this time spoken by Don Pedro: “‘It is not the Aspcia you are thinking of, but the Society for the Extermination of Men, of which Jesucristo here is president.’ The Moor was bantering” (1990: 136). This aspect of Dr. de

los Rios is an echo of his belief in suicide from *Locos*, but in this novel, it is complemented by his supernatural powers, as in one instance in the text he enables “Alfau’s” ability to read minds: “Dr. de los Rios’s eyes were sweeping from me to Fulano and back again, not focusing upon us but going through, far beyond us, expressionless, cold. His gaze was like a blank abyss upon which we oscillated dizzily” (1990: 139). This mind-reading will be of great importance to “Alfau,” who uses Fulano’s innermost thoughts as part of his novel on the Americaniards. Dr. de los Rios is also responsible for minute miracles within the narrative, such as the incident with the fly:

Then Dr. de los Rios waved his hand over the plate. The fly flew away straight for the ceiling. Everyone heaved a sigh of relief. “This Dr. Jesucristo always to the rescue, but the fly is dead. That is only her soul that has gone to the ceiling, which is the heaven of all flies” (1990: 151).

In this instance and in several others like it in the text, the focus shifts from the ability to perform these supernatural acts to the very absurdity of resurrecting a fly. Therefore, while Dr. de los Rios is granted supernatural powers, they only serve to exacerbate the absurdity surrounding his character.

In a similar fashion as the previous reference to Dr. de los Rios from the novel *Locos*, in this novel, Dr. de los Rios again represents the progressive Spain as part of the theory of the Two Spains, and in a similar way, he is the more powerful of the two, yet he still embodies the same irrationality as in the previous novel, and he is equally absurd since he uses his sovereignty only in the service of furthering the element of the absurd in the text, as we have seen in the previous examples. If there is any difference in the representation of this character between the two novels, it is that in *Locos* he is more active in his work as a doctor, while in the second, his profession remains in the

background during most of the plot as he dedicates himself to the Americaniards, perhaps giving the reader the impression that these are, in fact, his patients.

Similar to the use of the absurd in the novel *Locos*, Dr. de los Rios is not the only element of the absurd in *Chromos*, although he is definitely the most prominent one. Other examples of the absurd do exist, mainly within the stories Garcia shares in his manuscripts. One of these examples is the character Ramos, who is able to travel in time yet finds himself trapped within his own inability to return to the past. Beside these smaller allusions to the absurd, the other principal examples of absurdity dwell in the story of Don Hilarión and his dead self being stuffed by the undertaker in order to maintain his family's pride, as the family takes on the task of preserving this dead body in the apartment:

Vicenta dusted Don Hilarión regularly like another piece of furniture. Once while thus occupied, she noticed that the pen had fallen from his hand. She tried to replace it but the fingers had contracted or separated and wouldn't hold it. She tried to press them together and one of them came off in her hand. Vicenta contemplated this minor disaster stoically. She remained undecided with the finger in her hand looking for an adequate place to deposit the relic. At last she dropped it in the wastebasket (1990: 189-190).

The absurd forms part of the critique in this story, portraying the inability to find space for one's dead ego when deciding to become an immigrant in another country. However, this incident also contains playful dark humor that points ahead to Postmodernism in its laughter over the absurdity of life and death.

## **7 Deconstructionist Tendencies**

### **7.1 Deconstructing Language**

The deconstruction of language is an essential part of both novels, especially relevant in the way Alfau uses the breakdown of language as part of a larger criticism or theme.

This could be another way in which Alfau's work contains echoes of Cervantes, as

Malcolm K. Read has commented on *Don Quixote*:

On a far more fundamental level, a careful reading of *Don Quijote* reveals a striking alienation of man from words, thoughts, and things, and each of these from each other. The gulf which separates Don Quixote from reality scarcely calls for comment. Equally significant, however, is the alienation of man from language implicit in the work (Read 1981: 275-276).

This same alienation is present in *Locos*, in which language is most often deconstructed through the naming of stereotypes and generalizations, as was explained in the previous chapter. In this way, Alfau breaks down the certainty of naming and labels by allowing these stereotypical characters to degenerate throughout the plot of the narrative. This is what Ilan Stavans references when he states that “El vocabulario de Alfau está sembrado de construcciones hipotéticas que expresan incertidumbre<sup>4</sup>” (Stavans 1989: 175). The search for identity pushes this deconstruction of language further as Alfau uses the written word with the goal of breaking down our conception of identity:

Indeed, the reader who takes *Locos* seriously discovers that, for Alfau, individual identity— especially as it is constructed by “papers,” passports, and other textual documents— has a special meaning which resonates throughout the metafictional levels of his novel (Sweeny 1993: 208).

In *Chromos*, as previously discussed, Alfau uses the deconstruction of language as part of his theme of the Third Space, since most of the breakdown of language in that novel has to do with finding a place of hybridity between the “native” and “the Other.” Therefore, both of the novels rely upon the deconstruction of language as a foundation upon which to build the predominant themes in the novels, which further defines the novels as heralding the postmodern.

Little has been written on the linguistic aspects of *Chromos*, which is surprising, especially when considering how language play envelops the entire narrative. Through

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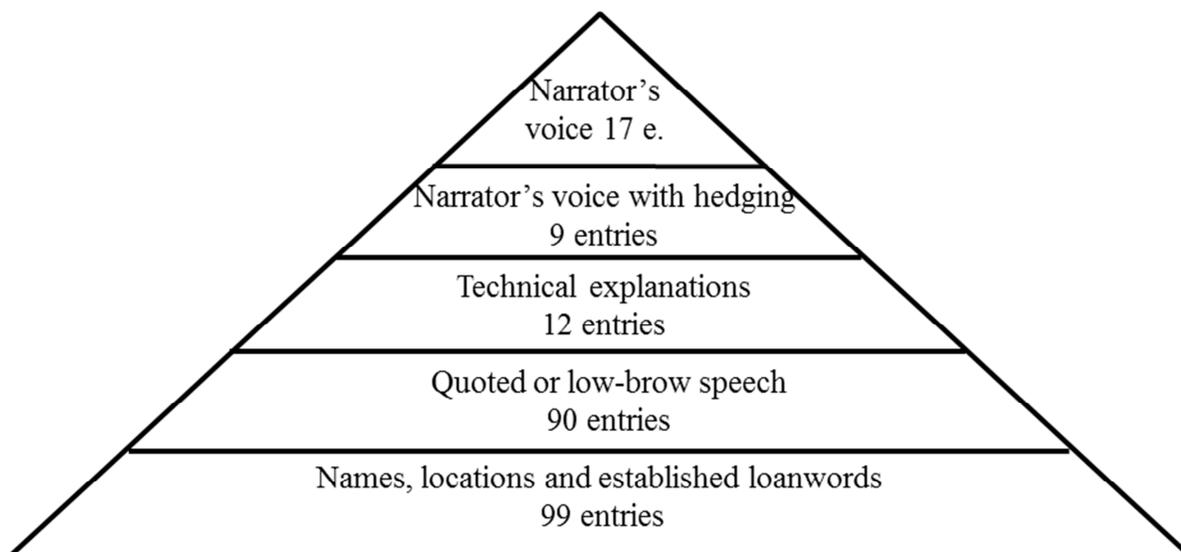
<sup>4</sup> “Alfau’s vocabulary has a sprinkling of hypothetical constructs that express uncertainty.”

close attention to the text, one finds that the novel itself is portrayed as a translation into English from the original Spanish by “Alfau.” On various occasions, the reader is indirectly reminded of this fact, such as when the characters converse with each other, as in this passage I have previously referenced: “‘if we were speaking English, I could say that the drama was not ghostly but ghastly, get it?’” (1990: 48). While the author does not overtly focus on this aspect, the narrator does return to remind the reader that he/she is reading a translation (1990: 76). Therefore, while the author takes great liberties in creating layers of dialogue and reality on a literary level, he also extends this layering to the linguistic world. Callahan differentiates between literature containing artificial code-switching, that is, code-switching clearly created by the author, and authentic code-switching, in which the author portrays actual speech patterns (2001, 2004). *Chromos* fits within the category of artificial code-switching, and, in a more general manner, artificial language play as well, since the narrator assures the reader that the dialogue takes place entirely in Spanish, yet in the text, Alfau renders the experience hybrid by switching codes. This contradiction could be a way of creating a Spanish ambience in the text while marketing a greater English-speaking audience, or, as I suggest, Alfau is using this technique as a way of stating that the most authentic voice available to these immigrants is that of a hybrid. Since language play forms such an essential role in creating this liminal voice in the novel, the next sections will spell out how Alfau achieves this by incorporating the techniques of code-switching and phraseological calques.

### **7.1.1 Code-Switching in *Chromos***

While Alfau's use of code-switching in a novel written in 1948 is revolutionary in itself, by using code-switching as a fundamental aspect in the creation of hybrid identity he pushes the limits even further, opposing the national rhetoric of the United States in that day, in which Nativists campaigned for English Only policies, hoping to maintain their power and prestige by suppressing the masses of immigrants accumulating in cities like New York. By incorporating code-switching in all the layers of the narrative, from the stories depicting lower classes to the language of the educated intellectual main characters, it becomes evident that the novel is, in fact, endorsing hybrid speech. Therefore, in this section, the examples from the text will be organized from the most common and acceptable categories of code-switching, progressing toward the most innovative and provocative forms. By arranging the data in this manner, it becomes clear that there is abundant foundational code-switching from the categories of places, technical terms and low-brow speech, while the examples of the more questionable forms, mainly the well-educated narrator's own speech, are rarer. This reveals a hesitation to include code-switching in high-brow speech, yet a prevailing insistence to do so.

**Figure 1.**



The first fundamental category of code-switching, therefore, comes when Alfau chooses to leave the Spanish names and places in the original language. According to Lipski's tiers of code-switching, these examples would be included on the first level, as they provide a foreign flavor within the text (1982). However, even this most basic form of alternating linguistic code is significant when examined closely. Alfau's half-translations of streets in Madrid sometimes follow the English structure of the adjective preceding the noun, "Alcala Street," while in other moments he reverts to the Spanish structure, "Street of Jardines" (1990: 226, 64). The same inconsistencies emerge when referring to locations and ethnicities, for when referring to Seville he prefers the Spanish spelling, "Sevilla," yet when describing something from the Basque country he avoids the Spanish "vasco" or Basque "euskara," and instead continues with the English word "Basque" (1990: 313, 315). However, in yet another case he inserts the Spanish: "the parents of both were gallegos," instead of using "Galician" (1990: 11). Most of these cases also fit well with Clyne's theories, which claim that the similarity of words in both

languages can trigger code-switching, as could easily be the case for words such as “jardin”<sup>5</sup> or “Sevilla” (1980, 2003). Additionally, traditional foods are usually left in the original: “gazpacho,” “turrón”<sup>6</sup> and the authentic Spanish names are stressed through the traditional use of the diminutive “Ricardito” and “Jacintito” as opposed to “Ricardo,” “Jacinto” (1990: 315, 165). As stated previously, this level of code-switching would have been the form most likely to be accepted in society at the time Alfau was writing, perhaps based on the tradition of travel writing and its domestication of the exotic. However, the rebellion in Alfau’s use of the technique is already present through his own inconsistency in usage, switching freely between syntaxes and languages at his own whim.

Similarly, throughout the novel Alfau establishes several consistent loan words, usually in the case of describing a characteristic that is, by definition, Spanish. These examples follow what Aikhenvald has found in her study in Tariana in the Amazon, that lexical borrowing often takes place when the other language lacks an adequate substitute for the concept the speaker is trying to relay (2002). The first and most obvious of these examples emerges through the repetition of the word “castizo,” in English meaning pure or authentic, yet in the text it always functions as a self-defined word, with no translation provided. The use of this word as an established loan is logical since its definition in English makes it seem broad and applicable to many situations, yet in Spanish its connotation is intimately interwoven with Spanish history and Spain’s long-enduring pursuit of “la limpieza de sangre,” in English, cleanliness of blood. By using the Spanish, Alfau maintains the richness of the reference to tradition that does not exist in

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<sup>5</sup> Jardin: garden

<sup>6</sup> Gazpacho: tomato soup served cold. Turrón: nougat candy.

the translation. Another similar case is the word “caballero;” repeated several times in the text, as in this example, “a real and perfect caballero” (1990: 92). The argument for establishing this word as a consistent loan is also based on Spanish history, since it represents a long-lasting tradition of Spanish chivalry, communicated to the world through Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615). Other established loan words focus on cultural artifacts such as food and drink, examples of which are found in the repeated use of the word “porrón”<sup>7</sup>, for a story from the Basque Country, or “tapitas,”<sup>8</sup> also consistent throughout the narrative (1990: 37, 254). An English equivalent is never sought for these words, yet their widespread use could warrant such a translation, hinting toward Alfau’s intentionality in leaving certain words beyond the grasp of the monolingual reader.

Still within the bounds of acceptable code-switching, abundant use of this technique emerges from certain “folk” fragments Alfau weaves into his multi-level narrative. These fragments generally represent a low-brow population, and the examples resemble the popular stereotypes of code-switching from the time in which Alfau was writing, relegating hybrid speech to the impoverished and the ignorant. The fragment from the novel that contains the most intricate and consistent code-switching emerges from the mind of Garcia, the least regarded of the characters, and the story takes place in the North of Spain in a place Alfau calls “Vizcaitia,” an apparent version of “Vizcaya” in the Basque Country. The degradative story portrays a wife’s demise at the hands of her husband’s lover through the scene of a bar brawl. Multiple incidents of code-switching can be found in a single sentence: “he hit it way over the wall of the frontón and onto his

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<sup>7</sup> Porrón: a typical Spanish wine glass with a spout for drinking.

<sup>8</sup> Tapitas: light hors d’oeuvres served to accompany drinks.

wife's heredad'<sup>9</sup> (1990: 38). The technique becomes especially prevalent for the use of profanity within the story: "You can go and give your perros chicos to some cheap puta"<sup>10</sup> (1990: 222). As previously stated, the code-switching does not represent the characters' actual speech, since all the conversations would be taking place in Spanish, or perhaps even in the Basque language, therefore this heavy code-switching is intentionally added as a sign of degradation.

Apart from this specific story fragment in which code-switching adds to the baseness of the events being portrayed, in other moments in the narrative, Alfau uses different literary techniques to distance himself as an author from the code-switching. One of the main examples of this is the exaggerated use of code-switching in the fragments from Garcia's manuscripts, which, as previously discussed, represent, according to the narrator, an inferior text than his own. Invariably, this "novel within the novel" contains more frequent unannounced code-switching than the main plot. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 2, the fragments from the inner manuscript are labelled as "cursi," in English, corny. The exaggerated use of code-switching as part of a text labeled as inferior also aligns with the dominant disapproval of code-switching as a literary or linguistic technique.

When the narrative attempts to explain specific cultural events such as bullfighting, a technical use of Spanish emerges. The fusion of Spanish and English in these cases is validated by the specificity of the vocabulary: "He mentioned that he had seen a moving picture of a bullfight in Mexico and that the part when the torero kills the

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<sup>9</sup> Here we have an additional example of a technical use of Spanish, since the term "frontón" comes from the Basque game "Pelota." There is also a potential play on words in "heredad," which at first glance looks like "head" in English, while the word actually means inheritance or estate.

<sup>10</sup> Perros chicos: literally translated as small dogs and meant as an insult toward the men in the group. Puta: bitch.

bull as well as the placing of picas and banderillas has been suppressed, but not the part where a bull gored and killed the torero”<sup>11</sup> (1990: 136). However, while the use of technical terms such as “torero,” “picas” and “banderillas” may seem justified, Alfau pushes the limits by extending the code-switching beyond the essential technicalities: “I never saw one of them break one of the three fundamental laws of bullfighting and get away with it for long. Those laws are basic and ineludable: parar, templar y mandar” (1990: 143). The infamous laws are left in Spanish, “to stop, to moderate and to command.” While technical speech is still an excuse for including code-switching, the low-brow degradation of the speech disappears in these instances.

Alfau takes yet another step closer to endorsing code-switching within the text when he begins to implement the technique in quoted speech. Within Lipski’s framework, these examples pertain to a secondary level of code-switching, moving beyond a simple contribution to the ambience of the narrative, to an active, although still secondary, participation in the content of it (1982). Gumperz, in his study on discourse strategies, names quoted speech and exclamations as being fertile ground for code-switching, and while this is the case in *Chromos*, once again, Alfau is artificially using code-switching for dialogue that should take place entirely in Spanish (1982). Several examples can be found of code-switching for exclamatory purposes: “Caramba, sir! I’d love it,”<sup>12</sup> or, “Doña Dolores put her hands to her head. ‘Ay Dios mio! Vicenta! Listen to what this man says’”<sup>13</sup> (1990: 28, 192). Terms of endearment are also frequented grounds for tag code-switching: “‘Do they keep you working very hard, preciosa?’”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Torero: Bullfighter. Picas: lance or spear. Banderillas: Decorated barbed darts.

<sup>12</sup> Caramba: wow, good heavens.

<sup>13</sup> Ay Dios mio: Oh my God.

<sup>14</sup> Preciosa: beautiful.

and, “I did not mean to frighten you chavales”<sup>15</sup> (1990: 42). Finally, Spanish is again clearly the preferred language for both name-calling and the use of profanity: “That chulo, that thief is carrying on with that French girl,”<sup>16</sup> or, “And your darling Paco has brought that puta and the Celestina of her mother to live right here in the apartment two flights up”<sup>17</sup> (1990: 153, *ibid.*).

Moving past these episodes of “warranted” code-switching to moments in which the technique does infiltrate the narrator’s own speech, the very innovative nature of such a move is evidenced by a noted hesitation when the barriers separating the narrator from the text are removed. Inside the narrator’s own speech small explanations are included for the code-switching: “El Cogote was what is referred to in Spain as a winter bullfighter and wore the badge of his profession: the coleta, a pigtail that when seen in profile made him look like the old lady Doña Felisa” (1990: 130). While within the manuscript, fragments similar to this detail would have gone untranslated, here the narrator indulges the reader with the word in English. At another moment, when the English translation is inadequate, the narrator takes liberties to explain it at length: “Don Hilarión was a notario, not a notary, mind you; that does not quite convey the meaning, but a notario. A notario in Spain, at least in Don Hilarión’s day, was a title given to a man having achieved the summit of his career in the field of law” (1990: 173). From these instances, then, it would seem that the narrator has every intention of accompanying the reader with helpful translations along the way; however, in view of the novel as a whole, these instances of translation and explanatory notes are scarce.

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<sup>15</sup> Chavales: kids, boys.

<sup>16</sup> Chulo: pimp.

<sup>17</sup> Puta: bitch. Celestina: matchmaker.

Finally, in certain moments in the text, the layers of distancing and rationale for using code-switching dissipate and the reader is confronted with a direct switched code. These examples would fit into Halliday's concept of an anti-language since the meaning of the linguistic code is only available to readers fluent in both English and Spanish (1976). At times the narrator reaches this point of anti-language in a state of frustration and defeat: "The man who had spoken the castigating line was middle-aged, very happy and antipático—I can't find another word"<sup>18</sup> (1990: 129). At other moments, the arrival at a true impasse is portrayed as sincere and inevitable, as in this statement previously mentioned: "The word 'cursi' is difficult to translate, its meaning almost impossible to convey with any other word, and the closest I can find to it in English is the word 'corny.' I told him that I knew what he meant and he went on" (1990: 56). At other times, the buffering around this anti-language disappears and the reader is directly confronted with phrases such as "After having turned the gathering into an open juerga"<sup>19</sup> with no attempt at translation or explanation (1990: 323). These examples emerge from the highest level of code-switching available in the text, in which the author offers no apologies for the mixing and blending of speech. This level is also the rarest in the text, reaffirming my argument that the author uses the code-switching in the novel hesitatingly, a probable consequence of the disdain for such speech in the United States at that time.

Therefore, while it is clear that *Chromos* does not embrace code-switching with the same fervency as many of the Chicano novelists of today, such as Junot Diaz or Margarita Cota-Cárdenas, Alfau's cautious assertions of code-switching are none the less innovative since they emerge from a much more hostile and closed environment. At a

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<sup>18</sup> Antipático: mean spirited or nasty.

<sup>19</sup> Juerga: loud and out of control party.

time in which the majority of immigrant narratives spoke of adoption into a new homeland and passionate new-found loyalty to the Nation, Alfau's linguistic creativity reveals a very different agenda. By allowing code-switching to infiltrate the novel on all levels of discourse and by even daring to remove the distance between the well-educated narrator and this supposedly inferior form of speech, Alfau creates an argument for the inclusion of hybrid language in the academic world as well as the irrevocable essentialness of hybridity in identity. Indeed, the narrative's insistence on providing glimpses of hybrid speech is a subtle yet significant rebuttal of linguistic homogeneity, and asserts a breakdown of the traditional concept of language as a simple one-to-one relationship between signifier and signified.

### **7.1.2 Phraseological Calques in *Locos* and *Chromos***

Turning from the more straightforward and well-known linguistic technique of switching codes, a further and more complex linguistic feature found in both *Locos* and *Chromos* is the use of phraseological calques. For the purposes of this section, a phraseological calque will be defined as figurative speech that has been translated literally into another language. While phraseological calques could refer to many types of figurative speech, this study will focus primarily on those classified as idioms. Therefore, when considering which phraseological calques will be accessible to those who do not speak the original language of the idiom, in the case of Alfau, Spanish, the linguistic terms decomposable and nondecomposable will be helpful. Decomposable idioms can be deduced, since the idiom is composed of words directly related to the meaning, i.e., playing with fire (Cieslicka 2010: 150). However, with nondecomposable idioms, the meanings of individual words do not seem to point to the overall significance (i.e. kick

the bucket). Researchers also reference the oligosemic nature of some idioms, acknowledging the central role of cultural background in understanding idioms, an additional illuminating aspect for studying the comprehension of calques, for even if the language is accessible, there may be cultural barriers for non-native speakers (Catford, 1965; Agar 1991).

In order to provide a clearer picture of these phraseological calques from the two novels, I have included several tables highlighting different aspects, separating the calques from *Locos* and *Chromos* in order to compare the two novels. In Table 1.1 and 2.1, I contrast the calque from the novel with the original Spanish idiom, for the purpose of examining how Alfau transposes the grammatical structures from the original. The other tables, 1.2 and 2.2, classify these calques according to their defining characteristics, and for the purposes of this study, I have focused on decomposability and oligosemy. While some of the calques are on the borderline of phraseology (e.g. Table 1.1 #4, 5), they are included in order to provide a full picture of this technique. Also, I recognize the subjectivity involved in labeling a calque as “oligosemic” or “nondecomposable,” and surely some of these labels are inevitably debatable, therefore these tables only serve as a preliminary visual representation of the use of this technique in the texts.

**Table 1.1 Phraseological calques in *Locos* and their translation**

Phraseological Calque	Original Spanish Idiom
1. “If poor Gil <b>should lift his head</b> ” (32).	Si levantara la cabeza
2. “ <b>we only have one mother</b> ” (43).	Madre, solo hay una
3. “ <b>you cannot refuse me that pleasure</b> ” (50).	No me niegues el placer
4. “ <b>The hour of acknowledgement has arrived</b> ” (53).	La hora de reconocimiento ha llegado
5. “ <b>The hill of January</b> , as they call this part of the year, is always bad” (63)	La cuesta de enero
6. “ <b>That breeze from the Guadarrama, which will not put out a candle but can kill a man</b> ” (63).	El Guadarrama sutil, que mata un hombre y no apaga un candil
7. “She said that she would stand for no cheap puta <b>placing horns on her</b> and all that kind of thing” (86).	Ponerle los cuernos
8. “No mother has yet borne the man who will <b>have enough pantalones</b> to hold me up” (87).	Tener bien puestos los pantalones
9. “They speak so much about <b>that famous breeze from the Guadarrama</b> ” (148).	El Guadarrama sutil, que mata un hombre y no apaga un candil

**Table 1.2 An analysis of the calques in *Locos***

Phraseological Calque	Overtly Oligosemic	Decomposable/ Nondecomposable
1. "If poor Gil should lift his head" (32).		Decomposable
2. "we only have one mother" (43).		Decomposable
3. "you cannot refuse me that pleasure" (50).		Decomposable
4. "The hour of acknowledgement has arrived" (53).		Decomposable
5. "The hill of January, as they call this part of the year, is always bad" (63).	Oligosemic	Nondecomposable
6. "That breeze from the Guadarrama, which will not put out a candle but can kill a man" (63).	Oligosemic	Decomposable
7. "She said that she would stand for no cheap puta placing horns on her and all that kind of thing" (86).	Oligosemic	Nondecomposable
8. "No mother has yet borne the man who will have enough pantalones to hold me up" (87).	Oligosemic	Nondecomposable
9. "They speak so much about that famous breeze from the Guadarrama" (148).	Oligosemic	Decomposable

**Table 2.1 Phraseological calques in *Chromos* and their translation**

Phraseological Calque	Original Spanish Idiom
1. “It is told that he once said: ‘ <b>Horns are like teeth; they hurt when they come in, but after, they are good to eat with</b> ’” (57).	Los cuernos son como los dientes, al salir duelen y luego comes con ellos.
2. “This then was the chap who could always get Garcia a job as a dishwasher whenever Garcia suffered an attack of pride and decided to leave the house with phrases such as ‘ <b>pride is more pressing than hunger</b> ’” (73).	El hambre tira el orgullo me levanta (¿)
3. “ <b>An old hen makes good broth</b> , as they say” (94).	Gallina vieja hace buen caldo.
4. “ <b>Don’t be such a donkey</b> ” (99).	No seas burro.
5. “one could say that, at most, <b>their ignorance has lagoons</b> ” (124).	Tiene lagunas de ignorancia.
6. “Have some more paella. Why don’t you help yourself? Go ahead; <b>you are in your house</b> ” (138).	Estás en tu casa.
7. “I could not help quoting from Fray Luis de León: ‘ <b>As we were saying yesterday—</b> ’”(198).	Como decíamos ayer
8. “ <b>My Lord, I am not moved to love you by the heaven you have promised, Nor am I moved to fear you because of the hell by all so dreaded</b> ” (300).	No me mueve, mi Dios, para quererte el cielo que me tienes prometido, ni me mueve el infierno tan temido para dejar por eso de ofenderte.

**Table 2.2 An analysis of the calques in *Chromos***

Phraseological Calque	Overtly Oligosemic	Decomposable/ Nondecomposable
1. “It is told that he once said: ‘Horns are like teeth; they hurt when they come in, but after, they are good to eat with’” (57).		Decomposable
2. “This then was the chap who could always get Garcia a job as a dishwasher whenever Garcia suffered an attack of pride and decided to leave the house with phrases such as ‘pride is more pressing than hunger’” (73).		Decomposable
3. “An old hen makes good broth, as they say” (94).		Decomposable
4. “‘Don’t be such a donkey’” (99).		Nondecomposable
5. “one could say that, at most, their ignorance has lagoons” (124).		Decomposable
6. “Have some more paella. Why don’t you help yourself? Go ahead; you are in your house” (138).		Decomposable
7. “I could not help quoting from Fray Luis de León: ‘As we were saying yesterday—’”(198).	Oligosemic	Nondecomposable
8. My Lord, I am not moved to love you by the heaven you have promised, Nor am I moved to fear you because of the hell by all so dreaded” (300).	Oligosemic	Decomposable

Even though the two novels were written twenty years apart, the information from the tables confirms that both novels contain a variety of calques, showing little to no shift in technique from the first novel to the second. Some of the calques are more easily interpreted, since they are not overtly oligosemic and they can be decomposed through the meaning of the individual words. However, nondecomposable calques can also be found in both novels, and the inaccessibility of these examples will become essential to interpreting the role of calques in the greater scheme of the novels. Also relevant is the oligosemic nature of many of the phraseological calques, as previously mentioned,

distancing the reader from the meaning not just through language, but through the necessary lens of culture as well.

Analysing the syntax of each calque reveals a similar lack of substantial patterns, for some emerge from a more literal translation while others contain variations. Examples of directly translated text come in Table 1.1 #3, 4, especially with the inclusion of “hour” instead of “time” in #4, and in Table 2.1 #3, 7, the structures are also held intact. However, there are other examples of more loosely translated passages, such as Table 1.1 #8, in which the author uses the word “enough” in reference to “pantalones,” in English, “enough trousers” a grammatically awkward combination, or in Table 2.1 #2, in which the translation is so vague, one cannot be entirely certain of the corresponding original idiom. Once again, the search for trends in the linguistic aspects of these calques is frustrated by the author’s seemingly haphazard approach. This could be a sign that the calques emerge out of a more intuitive process, a probable conclusion given Alfau’s notoriously capricious style as a novelist.

Narrowing the focus to the calques from *Locos*, one distinctive feature is the code-switching within the calques (e.g. #7, 8) while in *Chromos* the loan translation is almost always entirely in English. *Locos* also relies heavily on one repeated idiom (e.g. #5, 6, 9), and even at one point includes a short explanation, granting the reader more of an opportunity to become familiarized with its meaning. Additionally, this novel contains more of the calques that were previously mentioned as pertaining to the borderlines of phraseology. Also important to note, the calques are not restricted to certain characters’ speech or a limited number of short stories, but take place during a variety of moments throughout the narrative. However, as one final caveat, the calques

never come from the narrator's speech, only from the characters themselves, an important detail considering the various levels of distance created in this text.

In contrast, in *Chromos* the calques are more clearly idiomatic, as opposed to simply figurative language, perhaps a sign that the author is more intentional in their use. Furthermore, some of these idioms fall into the category of translated archaisms (2.1 #7, 8), a curious discovery considering a study by Meng Ji on the translation of archaisms in *Don Quixote* (Ji 2009). While Alfau denied having read many of the authors with whom he has been associated, one correlation he never denied was his alleged echoing of Cervantes. Indeed, Don Quixote even makes an appearance in *Locos* and his name is mentioned in both texts (1988: 5, 83; 1990: 9). Therefore, the use of a mystic poem from the sixteenth century (attributed to Saint Teresa of Avila) or the famous statement by Fray Luis de Leon, also from the sixteenth century, could be references to this cervantine tradition. As a further point of interest, in contrast to *Locos*, the narrator of *Chromos* is the voice relaying these calques to the reader; however, some distance is still maintained through the repeated phrase "it is said," with slight variations (Table 2.1 #1, 3, 7).

Turning to Alfau's reasons for the use of phraseological calques, if his goal were simply to allow Spanish flavor to permeate the text, the reason for using nondecomposable calques in the novels remains enigmatic. This is especially true of *Locos*, since hybridity is not a main theme of the novel and in some cases Alfau does not even palliate the calque for the reader through hedging or explanations (Table 1.1 #7, 8). One reason could be that these calques reveal a subconsciously liminal author, unaware of the inaccessibility of his language use. This option, however, appears to be highly unrealistic given the linguistic control Alfau displays throughout his work. A second

hypothesis could be that Alfau, aware of removing meaning from the grasp of his monolingual readers, was already developing an intentional liminal language use. This would fit well with Bakhtin's explanation of the inexorable creation of authentic language: "the language of the poet is *his* language, he is utterly immersed in it, inseparable from it, he makes use of each form, each word, each expression according to its unmediated power to assign meaning (as it were, 'without quotations marks'), that is, as a pure and direct expression of his own intention" (1981: 285, emphasis in the text). This creation of language goes beyond adding foreign exoticisms to texts; it instead actively participates in representations of identity. Considering the unlikeliness of Alfau haphazardly including such confusing elements as translated idioms, this option seems the most logical explanation for these instances of nondecomposable calques in *Locos*. Also, purposefully creating an ambience of chaos and apathy toward all teleological understanding fits well with what other scholars have already defined as Alfau's tendency toward the coming postmodern (Sweeny 1993: Coates 1990). Therefore, perhaps these nondecomposable phraseological calques in a novel written in 1928 are yet another technique confirming Alfau's prodigy.

These difficulties of interpreting the nondecomposable phraseological calques in *Locos* dissipate when considering the calques in *Chromos*, since in this text, the main theme is liminality and variation on language contributes to this motif. The Americaniards constantly qualify actions and thought patterns as either American or Spanish, as they attempt to forge an authentic identity encompassing their experiences, old and new alike, as previously discussed in Chapter 2. Therefore, as these phraseological calques explicitly fuse two languages and two cultures, they parallel this

coalescing of identities. Schneider, albeit on a more general level, has remarked on this correlation between shifts in language and performing culture identity: “speakers keep redefining and expressing their linguistic and social identities, constantly aligning themselves with other individuals and thereby accommodating their speech behavior to those they wish to associate and be associated with” (2007: 21). Including idioms in the text reinforces the idea of a secret language, only available to those of the in-group, but offering a richness that would otherwise be lacking. However, by incorporating the idioms as calques into the characters’ speech, Alfau forms a complex hybrid that chooses to associate with neither the Spanish nor the American, but instead creates a new secretive language only available to fellow hybrids.

Additionally, the very untranslatable nature of idioms works exceedingly well within the theory of hybridity since it relays the *experience* of liminality to the reader. While the calques are written in English, sudden shifts in language structures from the English to the Spanish jar the reader, creating the same jarring effect as hybridity, since certain aspects of life never feel expected or normal in the new culture. The phraseological calques also communicate an unsettling awareness of an infiltrating sentiment or tradition, yet the reader lacks understanding as to its meaning or origin, and therefore experiences something similar to “othering” and the tension of liminality while reading the text. Even more so, as the reader attempts to attain an intuitive understanding of the calques, he is forced to grapple with language in a similar manner as someone communicating in a second language, since the *lemmas* are understandable and yet, at the same time, the *superlemma* remains beyond his grasp. Joseph Coates, while in this passage describing the novel *Chromos* in general, speaks poignantly on this struggle:

“‘Chromos’ is about a disparate group of expatriate Spaniards in New York City trying to hang on to their ethnic identities while acknowledging the comic futility of that attempt, and of trying to understand their new land” (1990). His use of the word “futility” encapsulates the sensation experienced by the reader when stumbling upon these calques. In this way, the novel not only expresses themes of liminality through the medium of language, but uses linguistic techniques in order to allow the reader to experience it for himself.

However, perhaps the same sentiment of futility and frustration could have been accomplished by leaving the idioms in the original language, but by recreating them as calques, much more is at stake. The combination of the two languages could be an example of what Christina Higgins has called “multivocality” (2009: 7). She explains: “Multivocality refers to the different ‘voices’ or polyphony that single utterances can yield due to their syncretic nature.” Calques communicate with different voices at the same time: continuing one oral tradition through the medium of another language, resulting in a new hybrid of the two. This multivocality of the calque mirrors the schizophrenic nature of hybrid identity: involving both the new and the old in a combination that is at times bizarre. Derek Walcott explains: “the only way to re-create this language was to share in the torture of its articulation. This did not mean the jettison of ‘culture’ but, by the writer’s making creative use of his schizophrenia, an electric fusion of the old and the new” (1998: 16). When seen from this perspective, the calques in *Chromos* reveal Alfau as pursuing an authentic voice for his Americaniards, even if the voice is incomprehensible to outsiders. Given that “incomprehensible” fiction was not in vogue at the time he was writing, let alone in the genre of immigrant narratives, perhaps

his boldness in this area is an outward sign of his decision to never pursue publication for this novel. This makes *Chromos* the creation of a Third Space through literature and language without concern for the audience. And perhaps for this reason it is all the more an authentic representation of Third Space literature.

## 7.2 Deconstructing Experience

The deconstructionist tendencies in the two novels do not end simply with the breakdown of language, as deconstruction also occurs on the level of experience. Alfau appears to play more with the idea of deconstructing experience in *Locos*, since it is constantly breaking down the supposed reality created in the text. Within the novel, several different planes of experience exist, however, Alfau does not allow these different planes to remain constant, as he consistently breaks the barriers between them to the supposed confusion of the characters, and the confusion of his readers as well. One such character, Gaston Bejarano, who has been allowed to become a first-person narrator in “A Character,” suffers as a result of this plane jumping, as he explains his own perplexity regarding his situation:

Had I truly been unfaithful to her? She could not deem my fault so great with a being that belonged to another plane, to another world and different standards. An actor on the stage cannot feel jealousy because his stage lover steps out between the acts and falls in love with a spectator. But was I coming back to go on with the next act of our eternal comedy? And a mere puppet does not allow himself to step out and live and love like a human being between the acts. No, he must sink back into nonentity (1988: 25).

Such a struggle within the plot itself opens up a discussion as to how one can know with certainty one’s own reality. While this passage ends with the character begging the author for his assistance in order to resolve his predicament, he receives no answer and fades off into the distance. This conclusion to the story becomes essential to the discussion of the postmodern aspects of the text, since the idea of searching for an exit in

the questioning of one's own identity is representative of Modernism, just as Virginia Woolf's own answer of an exit to her existential dilemma has become forever interwoven with the search for meaning found in her last novel, *Between the Acts* (1941). However, in this case, the character is left with his predicament, and will reappear in other stories without this conundrum hanging over his head. This chaotic lack of resolve is more representative of Postmodernism, in keeping with the general style of the novel.

The space between reality and dream is a repeated theme throughout *Locos*, again casting doubt over the reality of experience. This occurs in the story "A Character," as the narrator comments on the loss of reality: "For that which is reality for humans is a hallucination for a character. Characters have visions of true life—they dream reality and then they are lost" (1988: 25). The differentiation between the characters and real humans in this passage is contrasted from the rest of the novel in which the characters and the supposed humans are constantly mixed. Later in the narrative, Dr. de los Rios presents another moment in which the division between reality and dreams is blurred:

"Yes," he continued. "All this is absurd. Do you see all these hungry people? They all have been influenced by this environment and this fantastic woman. They do not exist, they are but shadows of her, they are the perfect family as seen from the viewpoint of one of its individuals. Just a shadow, something to give the individual a relative position socially. They are waiting impatiently for her death, for the day when she will shed her identity and her inheritance among them" (1988: 132).

Beside the direct mention of the absurd in the passage, the existence of the other characters is only a figment of the imagination of Tia Mariquita, suggesting the power of the individual's mind over the perspective of reality.

Joseph Scott, in his argument that *Locos* is indeed a modernist novel, still cannot resist acknowledging the construction of identity prevalent throughout the text. What is striking is that Scott does not recognize the use of the word "construct," especially when

in relation to identity, as an undisputable reference to Deconstructionism. This is especially true in *Locos*, as Alfau reveals the construct behind the various notions of identity in the novel and therefore renders them as mere illusions. Scott, without mentioning scholars such as Derrida or the movement of Deconstructionism, agrees with this idea: “One of the most striking features of *Locos* is its insistence on the instability and constructedness of individual identity” (2005: 16), yet he fails to recognize this central aspect of the novel as part of its participation in Deconstructionism and therefore as one of its postmodern qualities. Indeed, throughout much of the argument of his thesis, he even uses the word “difference” in terms of identity, without, again, referencing the centrality of this word to the Deconstructionist movement, and instead he tries to link it to Modernism (2005: 36).

*Chromos* casts a similar doubt over the existence of reality and the tainting of reality through perspective; however the strategy in representing experience is much more subtle. Antonio Caudau has discussed the element of deconstruction in the very story that frames the entire narrative:

The scene of the dark room in the apartment reminds us of the Platonic cave, with the chromos that hang on the walls barely illuminated by the light of the match acting as weak copies of the true objects, places, and peoples they represent, of the figures and scenarios from the narrator’s past, the only images of a Spain lost in space and time (1993: 225).

Instead of a simple one-to-one relationship between object and representation, as Plato argued, the light is dim and cannot allow for the artist to create a clear picture. This example again reminds us of how the immigrant experience lends itself to Deconstructionism since it naturally calls so much into question. In another instance, when Dr. de los Rios allows “Alfau” to read Fulano’s mind, he references the lenses of his glasses: “I caught sight of Dr. de los Rios beaming with cheerful benignity. His eyes

swept over the scene and then, almost unseeing, over me and Fulano and for one moment it was as if a very tenuous cloud had passed over the sun. Instinctively, I looked at the thick lenses” (1990: 324). Beside the idea of seeing the experiences of someone else through this mind reading, there is also the change in perspective from one person to another, represented in the text by the thick lenses of Fulano’s glasses. Another similar experience comes a few pages later in describing the atmosphere surrounding Dr. de los Rios:

For a few moments I could see nothing but that face hanging in front of me and then the countenance of Dr. de los Rios floated in and out of cigarette smoke clouds, radiating infinite clemency and understanding, and I could only hear the conversation all around growing dim, as if it were receding and then returning and becoming banal (1990: 329).

This time, as the narrator is transported into Fulano’s mind, the very cigarette smoke serves as a magic drug in order to lift “Alfau” out of reality. There is also an inkling of abandoning high culture and education in exchange for the basic and primitive, contrasting Dr. de los Rios with Fulano. Once more, reality mingles with the surreal, blurring the lines between the events in the novel portrayed as reality and the events portrayed as fiction, which achieves the deconstructionist goal of casting doubt over the individual’s ability to objectively see reality through experience. Peter Christensen has referenced how these moments in *Chromos* lead to a deconstructionist theme:

Alfau has told us that in the world of fiction, the laws of space and time do not have to be obeyed. Through the self-reflexivity of his story and the dizzying, amusing identity changes of characters, we come to an increased awareness of the artificiality of all fiction, including the kind which would like to pretend to be mimetic (1993).

Therefore, even the subtle markings of the constructed experience in *Chromos* become reminders of the uncertainty of reality.

### 7.2.1 Alfau, Unamuno and Pirandello

These examples from Alfau's texts demonstrate a deconstruction of experience that reminds us of other authors who undertook the same task, writing just slightly before Alfau's time. Carmen Martín Gaité, in her article "The Triumph of the Exception" makes reference to Miguel de Unamuno's *novela, Niebla* (1907), and the striking similarities to Alfau's work in the way that he deconstructs experience (1993: 178). Ana Shapiro in her own article, "Sixty-one Years of Solitude," compares Alfau's style to that of Luigi Pirandello (1993: 205). Another author, Franco Zangrilli, would go so far as to claim that Alfau must have read Pirandello in order to write the novel, *Locos*. Zangrilli states:

In fact, Alfau, who decided to write in English to gain a large reading audience, could not have written his first novel, *Locos: A Comedy of Gestures*, published in 1936 (the year of Pirandello's death), without a firm knowledge of Pirandello's universe (1993: 216).

Indeed, just as these scholars claim, there is an undeniable link between Alfau, Unamuno and Pirandello. However, we will never know with certainty if Alfau had actually read these authors prior to writing *Locos*, or if his relationship with the two authors would resemble Unamuno's own discovery of Pirandello, an unknown contemporary:

Es un fenómeno curioso y que se ha dado muchas veces en la historia de la literatura, del arte, de la ciencia o de la filosofía, el que dos espíritus, sin conocerse ni conocer sus sendas obras, sin ponerse en relación el uno con el otro, hayan perseguido un mismo camino y hayan tramado análogas concepciones o llegado a los mismos resultados. Diríase que es algo que flota en el ambiente. O mejor, algo que late en las profundidades de la historia y que busca quien lo revele<sup>20</sup> ([1923] 2012b: 290).

Therefore, it remains possible that these authors, while never coming into contact with each other's work, simply inhabited and wrote from the same mood and moment in history, discovering and dwelling upon the same themes.

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<sup>20</sup> It is a curious phenomenon and one that has been repeated many times in the history of literature, art, of science or philosophy, that two spirits, without knowing each other or knowing each other's works, without having formed a relationship with each other, have pursued the same path and have created analogous ideas or arrived at the same results. You could say that it is something floating in the atmosphere. Or rather, something that beats in the deep heart of history and is seeking someone to reveal it [my translation]

Since these three works share such unique similarities, a short review of these semblances must be discussed. First, all three works contain protagonists that usurp the authority of their authors. In *Niebla*, the concept is first discussed by one of the characters, Victor, as he informs Augusto, the protagonist: “Es muy frecuente que un autor acabe por ser juguete de sus ficciones<sup>21</sup>” ([1907] 2012a: 176). The idea of “play” and a power reversal is closely related to Alfau’s playful chaos found in *Locos*. As the *nivola* progresses, Augusto makes Victor’s sentiment the basis of his plea to the author, Unamuno, whom he not only visits, but even challenges and threatens:

—No sea, mi querido don Miguel —añadió—, que sea usted y no yo el ente de ficción, el que no existe en realidad, ni vivo ni muerto... No sea que usted no pase de ser un pretexto para que mi historia llegue al mundo...<sup>22</sup> (2012a: 255, ellipsis in the text).

Claiming to possess more reality in himself as a character than the author as a live human being is a theme that would also appear in Pirandello’s work, “Six Characters in Search of an Author” (1921), whose title bears a striking similarity to Alfau’s work, as Abigail Lee Six has commented in that *Locos* is “the reverse of the characters in search of an author” (1990: 86). Pirandello’s characters dispute the reality of the actors and insist on the fact that they are engaged in a game:

Father: No, no. This is not really what I meant to say. I would like, rather, to invite you to step out of this game [*looking at the LEADING LADY as if to anticipate her*] of art! Of art! Which you are accustomed to playing here with your actors and seriously reconsider the question: who are you?” ([1921] 1995: 55, emphasis and brackets in the text).

This time, both the characters and the real actors are submerged in the text, but the reality of the actors is again called into question by the characters. Alfau also joins in the

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<sup>21</sup> “It often happens that an author ends by becoming the plaything of his own inventions” (*Mist or Niebla* 2013: 85).

<sup>22</sup> “Couldn’t it be, my dear Don Miguel,” he continued, “that it is you and not I who are the fictitious entity, the one that does not really exist, who is neither living nor dead? May it not be that you are nothing more than a pretext for bringing my history into the world?” (*Mist or Niebla* 2013: 149).

dialogue when his characters usurp the author's control, as the narrator in *Locos* recognizes his own limited power: "I also want to thank my characters in general for their anarchic collaboration, seldom being disdainfully obedient to my will, often going off on their own track and doing things, I regret to admit, much better than I could have done them" (1988: xi). "Alfau" even allows the characters more skill and knowledge than himself. Therefore, all three authors, each one living in a separate country, contain these renegade characters, an idea uncommon at the time in which they were writing, though of course with reminiscences of Cervantes and even Shakespeare.

The three authors also express the idea of a lost reality, or at least an inability to recognize reality as being such, creating three possible precursors from literature to Derrida and his deconstruction of experience. Augusto, upon having met his creator and discovered his inability to commit suicide because he does not exist, replies: "¡Parece mentira! –repetía--. ¡Parece mentira! A no verlo no lo creería... No sé si estoy despierto o soñando..."<sup>23</sup> (2012a: 254, ellipsis in the text). This ambiguous existence between illusion and reality is then echoed in Pirandello's play, "Six Characters in Search of an Author," as the characters try to incur this sense of a loss of reality upon the actors:

DIRECTOR [*not having understood well and astounded by the specious argument*]: And so what? And what are we supposed to conclude from all this?

FATHER: Oh, not a thing, sir. It was merely to show you that if we [*again he indicates himself and the other CHARACTERS*] have no other reality beyond the illusion, it would be also a good idea for you not to trust in your own reality, the one you breathe and feel today within yourself, because – like that of yesterday – it is destined to reveal itself as an illusion tomorrow" (1995: 55-6, emphasis and brackets in the text).

This blurring of reality and illusion is the basis of Alfau's short story in *Locos*, "A Character," in which Gaston Bejarano, against the author's wishes, falls in love with a

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<sup>23</sup> "It's a lie," he kept repeating, "it's an illusion. I shouldn't believe it if I had not seen it. I don't know whether I am awake or dreaming ..." (*Mist or Niebla* 2013: 148).

real person, Lunarito: “For that which is reality for humans is a hallucination for a character. Characters have visions of true life— they dream reality and then they are lost” (1988: 25). Therefore, the theme of breaking down the boundaries of reality and illusion can be found in all three authors’ works, each one wrestling with an existential crisis.

However, while it would appear that the three authors are mirrors of one another, each in their own genre, the conclusion of each work speaks volumes into the unique endeavor of each particular author. In *Niebla*, Unamuno’s conclusion to the *nivola* becomes a prescription for suicide and death. Since Augusto’s existential crisis has no solution, both the author and the character see Augusto’s death as the escape, and Augusto, in his rage against his creator, prophesies Unamuno’s own death as well:

—¡Usted también se morirá! El que crea se crea y el que se crea se muere. ¡Morirá usted, don Miguel; morirá usted y morirán todos los que me piensen! ¡A morir, pues!— Este supremo esfuerzo de pasión de vida, de ansia de inmortalidad, le dejó extenuado al pobre Augusto<sup>24</sup> (2012a: 261).

Therefore, Unamuno’s solution to the existential crisis seems to be death. In Pirandello, this existential crisis is avoided by the Director turning on the lights and stopping the play:

FATHER [*getting up and shouting among them*]: What make-believe! Reality, sir, reality! [*And he too disappears in desperation behind the backdrop.*]

DIRECTOR [*no longer able to put up with it all*]: Make-believe! Reality! You can all go to Hell, every last one of you! Lights! Lights! Lights! (1995: 65, emphasis and brackets in the text).

Pirandello’s play therefore concludes with the choice to escape instead of confronting the crisis of reality and illusion. In *Locos*, however, the tone changes dramatically. The

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<sup>24</sup> “Well, you too are to die! He who creates creates himself, and he who creates himself dies. You will die, Don Miguel, you will die, and all those who think me [sic], they are to die too! To death then!” This supreme effort of the passion of life... of the thirst for immortality... left poor Augusto physically wasted (*Mist or Niebla* 2013: 154).

reader notes Gaston's desperation in his situation, trapped as a character and in love with reality, but the author's tone is one of lackadaisical apathy:

If Gaston insists on becoming a real being in order to attain his ideal beyond the boundaries of his own world, I regret to admit that I shall not be able to help him. It is not in my power as a writer to create real beings, but only characters and that quite badly (1988: 27).

Even more curious is that the reader never discovers the end to Gaston's story, as "Alfau" concludes: "The whole thing has not come to a proper ending: it has been dissolved rather than solved for lack of adequate interference" (1988: 26). While Unamuno and Pirandello must conclude their work with some form of escape, Alfau simply allows for the dissonance to linger and makes no attempt to resolve the dilemma. This again reveals Modernism as an inadequate label for his work, since his playing amidst the chaos is characteristically postmodern.

### **7.3 Deconstructing Spain and Society**

Returning to *Locos* and *Chromos*, both novels continue the deconstructionist tendencies on the level of society. In *Locos*, one finds a conglomeration of these comments on society; however, they do not align into an overriding criticism of the construction as a whole, and are only momentary glimpses. One such instance comes at the beginning of the novel *Locos*, in the description of Toledo:

It was absurd. With all useful justification of its existence gone, the city sat there like a dead emperor upon his wrecked throne, yet greater in his downfall than in his glory. There lay the corpse of a city draped upon a forgotten hill, history written in every deep furrow of its broken countenance, its limbs hanging down the banks to be buried under the waters of a relentless river (1988: 15).

This is one of many comments throughout the novel on the deconstruction of Spain through a comparison to its prior glory. This sentiment of a fallen Spain, no longer a world leader as a result of the loss of the colonies and the failures of its army, deconstruct

the nation by revealing its own lack of importance. These moments reappear throughout the rest of the novel, as in this one particularly ironic reaffirmation of the decline of Spain as a nation: “He was a novelistic character and I can’t help admiring him. With more men of his caliber, perhaps Spain might not have lost the Philippines to the United States when it did” (1988: 111). The irony deepens with the knowledge that the character being referenced is in fact the Chinese man referred to as Chinelato, as if to affirm that Spain has reached such a dismal state that it can only be rescued through resources outside of itself. Toward the conclusion of the novel, the narrator states more clearly these sentiments on the breakdown of the nation: “Spain had produced too many forgotten glories, too many unrecognized geniuses” (1988: 61). Therefore, within the stories of *Locos*, Alfau indirectly breaks down Spanish society on many levels. On a political level, he states that Spain has lost its position as a world power. On the level of the characters themselves, these representative characters of Spain that together compose the society, are defined by the author as madmen, *locos*, once again revealing the breakdown of society as each one loses himself to madness.

While in *Locos* these comments are on a secondary level of relevance to the plot itself, in *Chromos* the deconstruction of society, space and nation are of foremost importance, as was the center of the discussion in the previous chapter on the content of that novel. Carol Iannone expresses this overriding theme of deconstruction in *Chromos* through her use of the word “failure,” as she describes how this sentiment permeates the multiple layers of discussion in the text:

The novel is in a large sense about failure: the failure of a transplanted Spaniard to render his experience in English, the failure to be both American and Spanish, the failure of art to transmute reality beyond the level of crude sentimentalities, or *chromos* (the Spanish word for calendar art), the failure of love (1991: 53).

The main technique used to show this breakdown of society comes through Alfau's creation of the Third Space; however, there are other moments of deconstructionism in *Chromos* that refer to this societal level of breakdown. One particular moment, emerging from Garcia's manuscript and therefore taking place in Spain, shows one of the only glimpses of the author's awareness of the events taking place in Spain at the time he is writing:

"Listen, Paco: Madame Gerard is going to revolutionize France all over again. She wants to wear a Spanish shawl to the Opéra. What do you think of that for asserting one's freedom in a republic?"

Paco was aware of the sharpness of her words and decided to smooth out the situation by taking it lightly.

"One does not have to live in a republic in order to wear what one likes where one likes. Next year, when I go to America, I will return with an Indian costume and wear it to a bullfight" (1990: 95-96).

First, while the tone is light, this seems to be a gentle opposition against the supposed gains and advances for Spain under the Second Republic. While this novel was officially written in the year 1948, it would be impossible to know the exact date in which Alfau was writing this particular passage. Therefore, it seems to fit better with an almost pre-Spanish Civil War perspective from the author. The idea of the mix of cultures and disassociating cultural and artistic symbols from the countries themselves fits well with this idea of deconstructing society.

Another such moment comes with the discussion of bullfighting in the United States, which turns into a discussion of Spain's difficult economic situation: "He claimed that Spain was saved from this fatal error because of its lesser degree of industrial development, but that the true salvation of the human race must lie in the opposite direction, by becoming smaller and smaller in size" (1990: 141). This is similar to the primitivist claims made by postcolonialists, that a return to one's roots is a cure for many

evils, and yet also similar to the Romantics' *costumbrista* literature, which proclaims that the rural and primitive is the beacon of light for a society. However, the conclusion of this discussion in the novel leads to the absurd: "“But what about so many other dangers?” I think this was Garcia speaking: ‘People would be proportionately weaker, and any animal, even domestic ones, would become a terrible monster, a source of continuous danger’” (1990: 142). Carrying this idea through to its consequences only leads the characters further into the absurd, reminding the reader of Postmodernism once more, and these attempts to use Spain as a pioneer for saving the human race are quickly discarded as not only futile but ridiculous. Even the usually serious and disengaging Dr. de los Rios this time participates in the satire unfolding:

“Wait a moment.” This was Dr. de los Rios: “Now that you mention bulls, and I am confident El Cogote will back me up, how could we have bullfights without also decreasing the size of bulls? And we don’t know how this shrinkage might affect their other characteristics. We all know that the smallest changes in breeding may affect their fighting qualities. You started all this claiming that Spain would be saved from the horrible fate of countries developing big human beings because of its lesser industrial facilities, and now we are led to a Spain without bullfights. The death of Spain! We cannot attempt to save the human race at the expense of our country. We would be the hardest hit people by this policy, and as the well-known foreign black legend would put it, Spain rises again to hinder progress and block your brilliant solution of the problems of mankind, but dispense with bullfights? Never! Or not so long as there is a drop of Moorish blood in us, eh, my friend?” (1990: 142).

The satire from this Dr. de los Rios, once more stepping into his role of representing the progressive Spain, shows not only a criticism of the traditional elements of Spanish society, but also a criticism of any attempt to resolve the problems of the world at all. Therefore, even the semi-serious political discussions in the novel deconstruct into the absurd. María DeGuzmán coins the term “postmodern picaresque” as a way of describing Alfau’s style of combining both critique and absurdity (2005: 288). In this way, postmodern picaresque works can forge some uncomfortable attempts at entering into ethics, yet safely back away through the distancing of postmodern techniques.

## 8 Playing in the Chaos

### 8.1 A Search for Meaning

Not entirely unrelated to these deconstructionist tendencies in both the novels, there is also a strong sense in which Alfau is simply playing amidst the chaos of this inability to find a solution to the existential crisis resulting from the lack of external authority since everything breaks down. However, before coming to Alfau's reaction to this lack of a solution, first one must verify that he is indeed engaged in this search for meaning. In the novel *Locos*, Alfau expresses this search for a sense of significance in several different ways, one of which being in the very literary techniques he engages within the text. One of the main techniques he uses is the inclusion of images associated with searching, for example, the labyrinth: "The narrow, crooked, tortuous streets fled from him, denying his path, mocking, snarling, like snakes in a jungle of bizarre structures; he staggered from one surprise into another, carried by this immense and irresistibly suggestive strength" (1988: 10). This example comes from Fulano, on his way to the river to commit his official suicide and surrender his identity. This reminds the reader of Borges, as this is a representative image from his work. As Susan Elizabeth Sweeny has stated, Alfau only offers "parodies of 'official' solutions to the riddle of being," with no true remedy given (1999: 254). In the story, "A Character," Alfau plays with the image of shadows to reflect the jeopardized existence of the two characters: "Our shadows were shrinking and gaining on us and as we passed the light they slipped under our feet and advanced ahead, blending into one, growing larger, immense" (1988: 22). While the two are merely walking along past the lampposts, the image plays with the plot of the story,

as at times their existence is larger than life, and yet a moment later it is as if they no longer exist at all.

Within the novel *Locos*, several specific characters embody this search for identity and significance. The first example is the character Fulano. Fulano's problem is that he is entirely obscure and insignificant, which is perhaps why he is called the equivalent of "Mr. No Name":

Poor Fulano's unimportance had arrived at the degree of making him almost invisible and inaudible. His name was unimportant, his face and figure were unimportant, his attire was unimportant and his whole life was unimportant. In fact, I don't know how I, myself, ever noticed him. Sure enough that he crushed my hand, dislocated my arm and kicked me on the shin when I met him (1988: 4).

Within the creation of this character Fulano, Alfau represents the existential crisis of a search for meaning, while at the same time he parallels this character with the current situation in Spain of having lost its identity as a world power. As Fulano engages in his search for meaning and significance, his situation only worsens, when he discovers, through a twist of fate, "I do not exist" (1988: 12). This sudden realization that he no longer officially exists, leads to a further crisis: "And I am nothing, I am absolutely lost, looking for some loose identity in order to find myself. But every identity has its owner and I am nothing, nothing. I do not exist" (1988: 13). This search for an identity leads Dr. de los Rios to offer him the only identity without a soul attached to it, the one at the bottom of the river. This desperate searching for an identity, for significance, leads only to death and futility. In the case of Fulano, however, Alfau does not leave the existential crisis in this dire state; he gives Fulano the life of a character. The use of the literary as a form of existence again reveals this playful inability to find a solution, leaving no choice but to enjoy the chaotic madness.

One further character that exhibits this search for meaning and significance is Don Gil, who pursues a name for himself through his father's invention of fingerprints. Don Gil is yet another character who searches for more than mediocrity for himself and his family, forever seeking to attain fame and fortune through inventions and innovation. However, Alfau has this character find his demise as a direct result of his dedication to this advancement of his family:

Don Gil had regained his composure. He thought of his wife and the children. He also thought of Don Benito and then he thought of his father and of the work to which he had dedicated his life, on which all his hopes of lifting his name were founded and which now threatened to sink him farther, away from mediocrity, yes, but into something worse... Was it really worse than mediocrity? (1990: 73, ellipsis original to the text).

Alfau, in his deepest irony, suggests the idea that Don Gil has finally achieved his status of significance, only as an infamous criminal. This is yet another example from the novel in which this incessant search for meaning results in the demise of the character. However, the demise of the two characters, while dark, is still playful as a result of the irony in their own role in bringing about their destruction.

In the novel *Chromos*, the same search exists on a different level as the Americaniards search for meaning after their identity as Spaniards is slowly taken from them as a result of the passage of time and space. One comment repeats itself throughout the entirety of the novel, emerging from almost all the characters as they interact with each other and the new society in which they find themselves: the idea of knowing what it's all about. In the passage in which the Americaniards confront the Green Man about his assimilating behavior, they find that he believes he has truly discovered the meaning of life: "I still think that Spain is a country of darkness and I feel what every Spaniard with common sense must feel when leaving: that he has come into the light," to which his compatriots respond: "That's it; into the light and turn green—" (1990: 133). Therefore,

in this search for meaning and identity, the Americaniards find themselves confronted with their past identities, their current situation of in-between and their new country and new identity. In the ongoing debate, Don Pedro continues the discussion over who indeed understands the meaning of life: “The moment you left Spain is when you were plunged in total darkness and you don’t know what it’s all about” (1990: 134). He seems to be claiming that the simplest and purest form of identity comes when one inhabits the place which he is from, and that leaving that place puts inevitable strains on one’s identity.

Even within the main theme of the novel, the image of these “chromos,” faded and tainted with time and lack of care, reflects the search for meaning in the novel. These images begin and end the novel, and they remain latent with the reader throughout the entirety of the plot, reemerging in the final pages with a synopsis of this search for meaning when “Alfau” enters Fulano’s mind:

But the chromo persisted. It had faded somewhat under the veil of his more abstract considerations, but now it came back as bright and there was a burro erupting with madroños and two more figures added to it. One was a dashing soldier, complete with mustache, sideburns, epaulets and shiny boots. The other a rosy-cheeked and jovial priest inspecting the divertissements and behind, like diffuse clouds to animate an otherwise limpid blue sky, the colossal inescapable shadows of Don Quixote, Columbus and the Gran Capitán. This was too much. It was grotesque and the very picture pointed out a way to escape the emotional by running into the critical and avoid this foreign infection of his fancy weakened by so many years abroad, by thinking more like a Spaniard, which at least he was by birth and right. He considered that while his countrymen have been depicted as flashingly bemustached, the members of the two most significant callings in Spain, priests and bullfighters, were clean-shaven, with the irrelevant consideration that while one boasts the coleta, the other bears the tonsure— His thoughts scattered (1990: 313-314).

While the entourage of images in this passage begins clear and simple, soon the narrator in Fulano’s mind contaminates these simple images with personal feelings that these images serve as a misinterpretation of their country. Also, the idea of the chromo persisting reveals that the narrator feels he must do battle with these images that will not

allow a displaced person to be at rest. The passage also demonstrates that the narrator recognizes this criticism as a potential way out of the tension in which he finds himself, trapped between two identities, since, as he puts it, by critiquing these images he can distance himself from the nostalgia instead of allowing it to transport him to the past through his emotions. The final words of this confrontation with the chromos show the narrator then falling into his own blundering and lack of clarity, revealing the postmodern in that the deeper and more philosophical thoughts break off as fragments, never to be resolved.

In the final pages of the narrative, the entire genre shifts to a philosophical conversation between Dr. de los Rios and Don Pedro as the two debate the ideas of mathematics and music, yet the conversation inevitably returns to the search for meaning. In this particular moment in the discussion, as “Alfau” reflects on Don Pedro’s conjectures on the formation of a stable identity, he recalls Dr. de los Rios’ thoughts:

Yet, when I left the Moor’s house that day, I was not altogether convinced in the broader sense. Perhaps I had not understood him well. I fear that now, or perhaps I hope for it. There is such a thing as preferring to be fooled when it suits our purpose. I think it was Dr. de los Rios who said once: “Reason pursues the truth whether convenient or not. Common sense finds the convenient whether true or false.” And that day also, de los Rios had summed things up quite well. He said that whether it was motion or extension, or time or fourth coordinate, it was only a matter of names and what we meant came down to the same thing, as I remember the Moor himself had implied in his notes. “Whether we call a certain color a rate of vibrations or simply red, we mean the same thing; the vibrations strike us as redness even as the fourth dimension strikes us as time and the inclinations in it as motion or as all simultaneous universes, existences or identities appear to us only as possibilities. It was not only a matter of names but of thinking of things in different terms which made our concept of reality more clear,” and then Dr. de los Rios said: “And what is reality?” and the Moor looked at him with mocking, glaring eyes and said cryptically: “Someone asked you a similar question about two thousand years ago. What was your answer then?” (1990: 278-9).

In this text, imbued with deconstructionist language, “Alfau” doubts if this simplified manner of achieving a consistent and stable identity is in fact possible, to which he seems to reply that it is indeed a euphemism and an idealistic way of perceiving identity. As he

continues with his argument, vicariously through Dr. de los Rios' thoughts, the conclusion reached is that identity is indeed itself a construct, and then the argument only further digresses to an even more foundational level when Don Pedro asks about the existence of reality. This downward spiral in the discussion embodies the search for meaning found both in Modernism and Postmodernism, as the intent to know anything with certainty always eventually falls apart, because, to quote the poet W.B. Yeats, "the centre cannot hold" ([1920] 2000: 124). For, if one is uncertain of something as basic and foundational as reality, it is impossible to gain insights into identity or significance.

## **8.2 No Need for an Escape**

As previously stated, the fact that both novels contain this search for meaning does not necessarily make the novels postmodern, since this search for meaning is emblematic of both Modernism and Postmodernism. The point of separation comes then, in the novels' reaction to this search for meaning and significance. Both the novels respond to the search with a hopeless form of play instead of the despair associated with Modernism, again aligning both the novels more with Postmodernism than the prior movement. In *Locos*, the reaction to this search takes the form of playfulness surrounding the plot itself, especially within the thoughts of the narrator and the characters' interactions. The narrator, as with the example of Fulano in the first story "Identity," speaks of his role and of his desire to create literature worth reading even at the expense of his friends or characters, and allows Fulano's identity to be stolen (1988: 11). Another example of this playfulness comes from the characters as they negotiate with the rules of the narrative: "But I am growing impatient of waiting and as the author is not present, I shall take the liberty of upsetting the laws of logic and simply eliminate these two men" (1988: 20).

Without any reason for the action except the pure whim and fancy of the character, the plot continues forward in the direction the character desires. This emphasis on the directionless nature of the novel itself reflects this playfulness amidst the chaos.

In *Chromos*, a similar playfulness occurs on several levels in the text, one of which being among the characters in the narrative. Even within Garcia's manuscripts this inability to achieve an objective perspective of reality results only in failure time and again: "Garcia had intended to make this character healthy and normal and a regular guy, but he had only succeeded in making him vulgar and rampant and unconvincing. In short, a fraud" (1990: 229). The word fraud used to describe even Garcia's characters refers to this sense of inability to arrive at any representation of reality. On a deeper level, in the story of Don Hilarión, in which his whole existence in New York City serves as an attempt to prove his own significance, the absurdity of his final resting place falls into a sort of dark humor:

A tramp was rummaging through and came upon a bundle of dark clothes covered with dirt and dust. He picked it up, shook it and more dust dropped from it, mixing with the other. Having found the clothes acceptable, he walked away still brushing and shaking from them the last traces of dust, without bothering to think whether it was the stuff houses are made of, or the stuff men are made of (1990: 192-193).

Don Hilarión's search for meaning ends with the ultimate level of insignificance as his funeral clothes lend themselves to the use of a tramp.

This lackadaisical outcome of the search for meaning repeats itself as the narrator confronts the theoretical debate over his own existence, again slipping into a state of haphazard passivity that fits well with the postmodern reaction to such a question:

At any rate, I felt that I was going back to the comfortable reality of my dreams or illusions and that this idea of no motion and higher dimensions was, if anything, quite the thing for a lazy world. No effort required except to condition the mind to realize that one is there already, that one is everything one can possibly be (1990: 279).

The narrator reveals his own tendency to slip into the surreal as a result of the lack of solution to the questioning of his own identity and existence. He seems to imply that he knows the downward despair this sort of questioning can lead to, reminding the reader of Modernism, but he chooses to avoid such uncomfortable truths and instead simply relaxes and dreams. He seconds this sentiment at another moment in the narrative when he states: “I don’t know what all this proved, but it certainly was convincing” (1990: 294). This reflects the same apathetic character from the prior statement, who refuses to summon up the effort to wrestle with these existential thoughts, so he avoids it altogether.

Another divergence from this existential search for meaning and significance found among the Americaniards is to slip into nostalgia. This takes place at several moments in the narrative, especially through the use of music (1990: 293). Again, the music does not bring about a resolution to this existential crisis, it is simply an escape much in the same way a drug would be. As the narrator reflects back on the moment of trance brought on through the music, Don Pedro voices their shared nostalgic feelings:

“[...] the place is empty now but the recollections of the day still reverberate here and in our memories. We all pass, go home, sleep, but the scene remains here entangled in the corners. The great music of Cáceres echoes and he rises in our minds still omnipotent when all the rest has fallen, making us create recollections of things which perhaps never took place but might have been if life were as we want it, to build up a past that dissipates our feeling of futility. Even I don’t know what it’s all about and yet it all must be so simple— but I know that the scene still lives here and I want to move along with it into time.” His head fell forward and he regarded the two flowers in front of him: “Wine for the pretty Spanish flowers grown in another land” (1990: 343).

He speaks of the lingering nostalgia in his mind as a constant companion that will not let him rest. The inability to either return to the past and retrieve his old identity and the impossibility of finding an entirely new one leaves him in an uncomfortable place, and so his solution, in this passage, is to dwell in the nostalgia, to opt out of the search and just to enjoy that one particular moment over and again in his mind. The last sentence of the

passage references the fact that this nostalgia is a source of alimentation for the Americaniards, a way of coping with their inability to find a place of identity and meaning, as a comparison, it almost resembles what music would accomplish for inmates of a prison in that it gives the hope of some other day and other moment past or yet to come.

In a similar way, in each moment that the narrator or Don Pedro attempts to tackle this issue of identity, they lack the desire, or the ability, to reach the solution or the culmination of their thoughts, as they inevitably digress and lose their train of thought.

Another example comes from Don Pedro:

We Spaniards are preoccupied with ourselves as individuals and as a race. We know that we are isolated, don't belong to the civilized world. We are in Europe but are not of Europe— half Moor, half Oriental and half I don't know what— we have more halves than make one whole— Paradoxical, you know? That's us. Look at me. Look at the Chink. Look at the shawls. Foreigners call them Spanish shawls— utterly confused. We call them what they are, or what they were originally anyway— let's not overdo our national habit of splitting hairs— We call them shawls of Manila, of the Orient. There you are and that's what we are, because we know how to use them as we know how to use the cloak. That is our country: the cloak and the shawl, the mixture of Occident and Orient, nobility and exoticism, a land of contrasts and organized inconsistency, Don Quixote disguised as Don Juan in a harem in order to deliver the odalisques, Calderón eating angulas with chopsticks because it is more castizo, adaptable and Roman Catholic, conceptualist and brachistological, traditional and cosmopolitan— So we have thirst for understanding. What can we do? We have conquered lands and want to conquer minds now that we have lost the lands and that our spirituality has asserted itself more with age— the devil fed up on flesh. We must talk of ourselves of the fine points. That is our obsession, points, points of honor, points of view, points, points— All right, we are has-beens and this is our only consolation, the fine point which is all that remains and at any rate a has-been is better than a has-not-been or never-will-be. A good point, see? Points again (1990: 297-8).

What begins as an interesting discussion of the element of the foreign embedded in Spanish culture and how that is applicable to the situation of the Americaniards since they follow in the steps of the traditional “conquistador” Spaniard, then digresses as Don Pedro becomes caught up in his own repetition of the word “point,” becoming utterly distracted from his original discussion, digressing before ever reaching his conclusion.

Soon after this digression from Don Pedro, as “Alfau” enters Fulano’s thoughts, he encounters an echo of the same level of distraction when attempting to speak on matters of philosophical importance:

If the game itself was nothing, its implications of futility were frightening because, after all, there were but two possibilities. This was like the result of Spanish involved thinking that had burned the brains of Don Quixote. It was the super-Calderonianism of which Don Pedro spoke. He recalled the Moor speaking once along similar lines. He had mentioned a mathematical series that ran plus  $m$ , minus  $m$ , plus  $m$ , minus  $m$ - Was it converging, or diverging? He did not recall, but what did one get at the end,  $m$  or nothing? (1990: 300).

What begins with the possibility of having important implications for the discussion of identity ends with an entirely removed digression about the mathematical equation. This is yet another technique of Postmodernism, to leave arguments only half resolved and dangling in fragments throughout the whole of the narrative, as if the narrator could not make the effort to bring them about to their conclusion.

One further mention of this playing amidst the chaos is necessary before considering the conclusions of the two novels. Since the novel *Chromos* uses the creation of the Third Space as such a primary theme, the lack of solution available through this hybridity is yet another way of ending the search for meaning or significance with a third solution to dwell between the two extremes. One further articulation of this lack of solution found in the in-between comes from the moment in which the narrator jumps from the conversations in the café to Fulano’s thoughts, and back to fragments of Don Pedro’s participation in the café conversation:

—Of course, it is Góngora with something of the humanism and mockery of Quevedo, culteranismo and conceptismo— national system. The moment of death held and sustained for an eternity. The identity and assertion of a country; not before dying, certainly not after, but exactly at the moment of dying. Puzzling, irritating point; the same thing that worried Newton when endeavoring to explain his fluxions. He must have known the despair that all our people know. To conceive of something that cannot be explained. To be convinced of the truth of something which on explaining becomes

obscure to the alien mind, absurd, full of contradictions, and will always remain unbelievable but convincing— (1990: 309).

In this fragment, Don Pedro speaks of the “despair” of being caught between two truths and the inability to fully inhabit either one. Here, the mood of despair envelops the Third Space as Don Pedro states that to dwell in the Third Space is to live a contradiction. In another situation, Garcia has the character Ramos speak out in his manuscript, once again revealing the life in the in-between:

“Yes that is right,” he answered my mind. “I also had this time a dull memory of things lived between both moments of consciousness. It was like awakening and knowing one has dreamed, but being unable to remember the dream, except for some dim flashes. Some of the visions took definite aspects but always like objects sensed in the dark, or seen in very poor light” (1990: 80).

These passages reveal the connection between Postmodernism and the Third Space, since the characters inhabit this Third Space when they realize there is no escape route out of their predicament of being trapped between two identities. The Third Space, therefore, along with the breakdown of “the Other” through the creation of that Third Space, while typically associated with Postcolonialism, also align well with the postmodern movement.

Perhaps this is yet another moment in which it is necessary to engage with Joseph Scott, who insists on Alfau’s modernist treatment of identity. Scott contrasts Alfau’s ideas with those of Judith Butler, whom he uses as the single reference point in defining Postmodernism (Scott 2005: 25). While Butler’s work is more directly related to feminist literary theory, her push to break down the binary oppositions of identity does speak to Postmodernism, as well as to Alfau’s work. However, Scott’s claim that Butler’s postmodern performativity does not align with Alfau’s theatricality does not take into account the fact that Alfau’s characters, both in *Locos* and *Chromos*, actively and

subconsciously participate in (perform) the roles allowed to them by society, yet, especially in the case of *Chromos*, express a preference for a self-defined hybridized identity. What Scott interprets as theatricality, is, in fact, Alfau's treatment of these characters, which he exaggerates in order to ridicule the roles society prescribes, yet this treatment is external to the characters themselves, for whom these societal roles are very real. Therefore, Butler's ideas of performativity and the breakdown of binary opposition only serve to reiterate what I have already argued, that Alfau is, indeed, a precursor to Postmodernism.

### **8.3 Open Ending**

One final aspect of Postmodernism reflected in both the novels is the open, unresolved ending instead of either a contrived exit that is unrealistic or the deep despair that would be representative of modernist writing. Within the novel *Locos*, many of the short stories contain this open ending, including the stories "Identity" and "The Beggar," but particularly the story "A Character," which speaks directly and purposefully about this open ending. The conclusion of the story begins with a plea from this perturbed character: "I appeal to the author to solve a problem which is beyond me" (1988: 26). With what this chapter has discussed thus far, this plea is an appeal for an exit to the search for an identity and significance, however, the narrator's reaction to this plea contains the postmodern element of the inability to solve the problem: "The whole thing has not come to a proper ending: it has been dissolved rather than solved for lack of adequate interference" (1988: 26). The idea of the plot "dissolving" since there is no solution is yet another characteristic of Postmodernism. One final statement from the narrator confirms his own refusal to slip into the despair typical of Modernism: "It would

be a puppet who, by falling in love with a person in the audience, brought real life onto the stage, broke loose from all the threads which moved him and made a tragedy out of a comedy” (1988: 27). This is the second time in the novel that the narrator has referenced tragedy and comedy in contrast, and twice he states that the novel will remain a comedy, true to its title. While there exists the possibility that the author pens these words ironically, it seems that the characters and the stories themselves show humor amidst the unresolved crises, maintaining the comedic aspects that reveal the playfulness of Postmodernism.

Beyond the intentionally disappointing resolution of some of the stories, the ending of the novel itself also reflects this open-ended characteristic of postmodern literature. However, before jumping ahead to the end of the novel, the narrator does offer a projection of this open-endedness of the novel itself in the Prologue: “Sometimes the threads of the book break suddenly and hang limp from my fingertips upon an abyss of futility; at other times they are joined together, strengthened and then bound about my subdued wrists into some sort of fate and inevitable finality” (1988: xii). The idea that the novel itself will not serve the “author’s” own purposes but is both futile and incriminating at the same time, reflects this idea of the open ending. The novel concludes with the coming of spring, simultaneously portraying resurrection and return to life along with the death of one of the characters, Garcia. Keeping in mind the moment previously discussed when “Alfau” himself brings about the death of this character by opening the window and allowing spring in, the ending of the novel seems to be a steady submission to the fate of this character, also symbolizing Romanticism, however, the ending is not one of despair, yet of simple progression forward in time. The ending also leaves the plot

unresolved, to be tied together by the reader as to what would become of Garcia and the others in this moment.

In the novel *Chromos*, the open ending is more elaborate than in *Locos*, since in this novel the author returns to the metanarrative in order to end the novel. While María DeGuzmán has stated: “Similarly, Alfau’s text, in its attempt to create closure, falls back on an elegiac mode, a mode of lamentation about something irremediably tarnished,” I find that Alfau takes the open-ending yet another step further, past lamenting and fully embracing the dissonance (2005: 283). The open, unresolved nature of the conclusion is reflected in the very language used:

“You see? Now it is all done and it did not take long. One knows these things— one knows—” He held me when I turned to close the door:

“Leave it open, man; that way they can escape more easily, come out into the open, mix with the other Americaniards. Get me?”

We started walking and then heard the door banging in the wind as we went (1990: 345).

The frame story that has remained in the background of the plot for almost the entirety of the novel reemerges in the final moments of the narrative as “Alfau” has accomplished the task set before him by Don Pedro in sharing the stories of these Americaniards. Don Pedro reiterates the importance of leaving the door open at the conclusion of this work, not allowing what “Alfau” has written to become fixed or generalized, but a real living text. The door banging in the wind as the final image of the Americaniard experience again reiterates the inability to escape from the predicament, and just to allow the chaos and the in-between to exist.

The novel itself finishes only with an image, resisting an attempt to resolve the contradictions presented in the text, as the three primary Americaniards sit together in mass:

Sitting there next to Dr. de los Rios, I felt confidently safe and looked at the surroundings in the candlelight and, considering the other things I had seen from the heights in the light of day and in the lights of night and the other things I had remembered or imagined in the depths by the light of a match turned into an Aladdin's lamp, decided that I could do nothing about it. I had seen only a kaleidoscope of fancies materialized by forgotten chromos, dirty, discolored chromos. This is what the possible visions of greatness suggested by the conquistadores had finally come to: rhapsodic, nomadic incidents with hanging tarnished threads of past splendor out of time and out of place. Chromos in disrepute (1990: 348).

In this passage, which was previously cited in the chapter on the Third Space, the narrator first portrays a scene of safety and comfort because of the company kept in this moment, as if this playing amidst the chaos becomes more easily obtainable through true community. The rest of the passage offers the surreal as the only concluding thought. There is no search for a solution, just the remembering of visions, some good and some bad, along with the inability to alter any of them, and so the narrator remembers them as if he had seen them in dreams. This slipping into the surreal at the conclusion of the novel is not a technique of modernist searching or despair, it is a quiet and passive acceptance that there is no solution; what is left is to play amidst the mess of existing.

## **9 Conclusions**

The discussion of the two movements, Modernism and Postmodernism, at the beginning of the chapter reveals the proximity of the two movements as well as the intricacy involved in defining and separating them. Both movements place a heavy emphasis on the search for meaning and identity, focusing on the inability to truly perceive objective reality or experience. The two movements are also characterized by the breakdown of roles and structures within the novel, disrupting the reader's experience and allowing for constant fragmentation that dominates the works. They also grapple with a similar existential crisis, and tend toward a sort of despair that comes with dwelling in uncertainty. These shared characteristics are also shared in the two novels, initially

opening up the possibility of the novels fitting with either the modernist period or the postmodern.

However, through the close assessment of the motives in using these structural techniques in both the novels, one discovers that they both express themes of Postmodernism, opening up the possibility of both these novels being precursors to the postmodern movement. The use of the metanarrative in both narratives serves the purpose of breaking down the guise of reality, revealing the constructed nature of the texts. The loss of genre within the novels through the use of fragmented manuscripts and unresolved short stories reflects the breakdown on all levels of fiction writing. There is even more fragmentation as the characters in the novels shift roles and remain inconstant, and moreover, the unresolved endings of the novels themselves materialize the sentiment of being incapable of achieving any objective perspective on experience.

The literary techniques also remind the reader of Postmodernism, especially through the emphasis on play in Alfau's use of such techniques. The first of these is the unreliable narrator present in both *Locos* and *Chromos*, being "Alfau," who fits this postmodern frame of the unreliable narrator since he seems, at first glance, to represent the author himself, yet he himself is another character, and an unreliable one at that, offering a warped, twisted and at times inadequate narration. The use of the absurd and the ironic in the novel also show this reveling in uncertainty as both techniques are used in such a playful and light manner that even the most biting criticism takes on a tentative tone. Finally, both novels rely heavily on the idea of laying bare the device, revealing the supposed mechanisms behind the writing of the text in order to show its constructed nature.

On a philosophical level, the themes and the ideas proposed through the ironic quality of the text display a postmodern assertion of subjectivity, especially in the areas of truth and experience. One of the central themes throughout the two novels is deconstruction. Alfau uses many different techniques to reveal this theme, many of which have already been mentioned, such as the use of the unreliable narrator, laying bare the device and the use of fragmentation. All of these techniques reveal the idea that language, identity and society at large are all constructed. While the novels do serve to further this theory of deconstructionism, the tone of the writing is one of uttermost playfulness, as the events are portrayed with humor, no matter how disturbing the content. One final element of this philosophical side of Alfau's writing is the use of the open ending to further the idea that there is no solution to this existential crisis, with the only solution available being to wallow in despair or play in the madness.

While defining the two novels within these literary theories is helpful because it gives the reader a framework from which to read the novels, especially given the complex techniques Alfau uses in both novels, this categorizing of the novels leads to a much more significant discovery. Given solely the dates when the two novels were published, they both, chronologically speaking, should fit perfectly within the modernist period. Hence the debate mentioned on the markers for the modern and postmodern periods, since these two novels, while chronologically in line with Modernism, given their content, style, tone and themes fit much more appropriately within Postmodernism. This classification of Alfau's work as belonging to the postmodern movement makes Alfau an author before his time, revolutionary in his groundbreaking use of what would become known as postmodern techniques similar to Vladimir Nabokov, another

“immigrant” to the United States. Therefore, Alfau remains an anomaly within literary theory, an example of an author whose failing to be published reflects his own misunderstood revolutionary work.

There is one further implication of these works, especially related to *Chromos*: Alfau’s novel representing the immigrant experience through a postmodern perspective is a rarity amidst the immigrant literature being written at that time. Alfau did not simply use postmodern techniques that were ahead of his time, he actually went one step further as he harnessed those techniques in order to portray an immigrant experience in a different light. Therefore, at a time when most immigrant narratives abounded in language of sacrifice, progress and deep gratitude to the host country, Alfau’s narrative shows the breakdown of identity under the strain of immigration, combining a Third Space narrative with the postmodern in an original rendering of the challenges and discomfort of being an immigrant. This places additional weight on the issue of identity, already important in the postmodern period, but through Alfau’s work it is amplified since identity is called into question.



## Chapter 5: Thematic and Formal Analysis of *Old Tales from Spain* and *La poesía cursi*

### 1 Introduction to the Short Stories and Poetry

In the study of an author with only four published works, each one takes on heightened significance since the author has produced so few examples of his literary style and themes. In considering the works of Felipe Alfau, they seem to be easily dichotomized into two groups: his two novels, *Locos* and *Chromos*, which are both cast in an innovative postmodern style as we have already discussed, and his book of poetry, *La poesía cursi* along with his book of children's stories, *Old Tales from Spain*, which seem antiquated and more associated with Romanticism than Modernism, and definitely bear little resemblance to Postmodernism. The fascinating part of this division of Alfau's works is that it is not based on a chronological progression from the prior movement in literature to the newer and more experimental style, since his poetry was not written first, but over the entirety of Alfau's adult life, while *Old Tales from Spain* and *Locos* were written almost simultaneously, according to the author, since he finished *Locos* in 1928 and published *Old Tales from Spain* in 1929. However, from the variety of styles and themes of the short stories, one wonders if the stories from the collection were written over a longer period of time as Alfau came to maturity as a writer. Carmen Martín Gaité also finds this simultaneous writing of the two very different works to be curious:

Resulta llamativo que acometiese sucesivamente dos intentos tan dispares como *Locos* y el libro de cuentos que ahora intento prologar. Si es verdad que se metió en las letras con la pretensión de ganar dinero (pretensión, dicho sea de paso, un tanto quijotesca, como todas las suyas), eso explicaría que probara fortuna con dos géneros diametralmente opuestos. De hecho, tuvo más suerte con el segundo<sup>1</sup> (1998: xxii).

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<sup>1</sup> It is surprising that Alfau would make two successive attempts at writing that turn out to be so disparate as *Locos* and this book of stories that I am now supplying with a prologue. If it is true that he became involved in literature with the aspiration of earning money (a rather Quixotic aspiration, I might add, as were all his aspirations) this would explain why he wanted to try his luck with two diametrically-opposed genres. In fact, he had better luck with the second. [My translations for texts from *Old Tales from Spain*]

Perhaps, then, the difference between these two sets of writings simply arises out of an attempt to find a way into the competitive field of literature, similar to the struggle of the characters of *Chromos*, as they find that the trends and preferences within the fine arts in New York City vary from those in Spain.

Another possible rationale for this vast difference in style among the works of Alfau could be the multi-faceted persona of the author himself, who, we have seen, has a scattering of split characters across all his works that seem to point back to himself. Martín Gaité also claims that this concept of a divided-self author extends to the book of stories as well, stating:

En una palabra, sobre los despojos de la patria abandonada, fecundadas por fragmentos de olvidadas lecturas, están germinando las hazañas del Salvador, El Príncipe Vanidoso, Urruchu, Rolando, el Maestro, Juanín y todos los poéticos *alter ego* de nuestro héroe, ese adolescente catalán de ojos negros y pensativos que acaba de llegar a Nueva York con su familia<sup>2</sup> (1998: xx-xxi).

While these portraits of the author seem less realistic and more idealistic, they could very well be included with the likes of Garcia, Dr. de los Rios and Don Pedro from the two novels. Keeping in mind the entire oeuvre of Alfau, these stories and poems seem to emerge from the Garcia self of Alfau, the Romantic writer presenting his stereotypical narratives to his friends in hopes that someone will claim them to be brilliant. The traditional Spanish quality of the stories in particular also aligns itself with the discussions that take place in the novel *Chromos* as to how to bring the old culture aspect of their hybrid self into a place of relevance in the new space.

In moving in closer to focus on these two works, *La poesía cursi* and *Old Tales from Spain*, one finds striking resemblances between these two lesser works. However, at first glance the two works seem separate and even opposing, for example, *La poesía cursi* was never

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<sup>2</sup> In a word, from the dregs of the abandoned homeland, fertilized by fragments of half-forgotten readings, we see the germination of the deeds of Salvador, El Principe Vanidoso, Urruchu, Rolando, el Maestro, Juanín and all the other poetic alter egos of our hero, that Catalán adolescent with pensive black eyes who had just arrived with his family in New York.

published by Alfau, instead, when he was rediscovered in the 1990s, the poems were collected, organized and translated into English, making the publishing date 1992. *Old Tales from Spain*, however, was Alfau's first published work. Also, *Old Tales from Spain* was, during Alfau's day, his most successful work, with *Locos* being a very small success and *Chromos* not being published until 1990 (Martín Gaité 1998: xxii) (Stavans 1992a: xi). Another unusual and noteworthy aspect in comparing these two works is that the poems, written originally in Spanish, are now published in a bilingual edition with the translation by Ilan Stavans, while *Old Tales from Spain* was originally written and published in English, but that version is now both out of print and unavailable, except for three of the stories, republished by *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* (Spring 1993), and the only available version of the entirety of these stories is the Spanish translation by Carmen Martín Gaité (1998). For this reason, I quote from the Spanish and offer my own translation as a footnote. Thus I hope to offer a more homogeneous treatment of the collection. This issue of translation in Alfau's works shows how he not only wrote about the difficulties of inhabiting a Third Space in the lives of his characters, but he lived out these difficulties first as a translator at the bank, and then as he struggled to determine which language to publish in, only to find his own decisions reversed with the passing of time.

With all of these factors to distinguish these two works, there remain several substantial similarities making these two books more alike than different. First, both of these works differ dramatically from the style in the two novels. While there are moments of irony in both *La poesía cursi* and *Old Tales from Spain*, irony is not the main technique used in these works, creating a contrast to the abundant irony inundating the pages of *Locos* and *Chromos*. Another similarity is the change in characters, as many of the characters are repeated from the first novel

to the second, although with different peculiarities added to their personalities, yet none of these characters reappear by name in either the short stories or the poetry.<sup>3</sup> Finally, and perhaps most importantly, both of the works are predominantly marked by Romanticism, with the majority of the stories or poems within them explicitly displaying Romantic characteristics. This is of significance when considered within the oeuvre of Felipe Alfau, since he spends many pages in the novels refuting the very idea of Romanticism, using the character Garcia as the stereotypical Romantic writer trying to live out the past in the present.

## **2 The Stories: *Old Tales from Spain***

As Carmen Martín Gaité, the author of the introduction and the translator of *Old Tales from Spain*, stated upon the republication of this work, this book of short stories has had little to no critical review, which has remained true after its republication in Spanish. According to Martín Gaité, this lack of criticism on the work must be rectified, since the book is a notable literary achievement, as she states: “Lo único que no me explico es que de este libro, para mi gusto el más original de los tres de Alfau, nadie hubiera dicho hasta hoy ni una palabra”<sup>4</sup> (1998: xxii).

While other writers, such as Stavans and McCarthy, have alleged the very opposite, that the two most original works and most worthy of critical acclaim are *Locos* and *Chromos*, this opinion from Martín Gaité brings the possibility of finding more within the pages of *Old Tales from Spain* than first meets the eye. Martín Gaité seems to base her assertion to the originality of these stories on the very Romanticism found in them, the use of narrators and the ability to create fairy tales of the likes of “The Ugly Duckling” or “Cinderella” (1998: xxiii). While these are accomplishments worthy of mention, they are not particularly innovatory, since many authors have written in those styles. The originality of the book, as this chapter will propound, comes

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<sup>3</sup> With the exception of the quotation from Garcia on the dedicatory page of *La poesía cursi* (1).

<sup>4</sup> The only thing that I cannot explain to myself is why no one has said anything until today about this book, which is, in my opinion, the most original of the three books by Alfau.

then from the moments in which Alfau breaks the norms of the genre within which he is writing, or when one can see the emergence of the novelist Alfau that will speak on issues of politics and identity through irony and metaphor.

One further observation on the whole of this book of short stories is the kind of success it found in the New York publishing scene. Little is known as to the reasons why this book was selected to be published, as Martín Gaité explains, and the information available on this book is extremely limited:

No tengo la menor noticia de la repercusión que tuvo este libro en los Estados Unidos ni del precio que le pagaron por él. Pero a la vista de esa primera edición de 1929, parece deducirse que el texto debió interesar a los asesores literarios de la casa Doubleday. Es una edición muy cuidada, dentro de la colección juvenil Junior Books, y está enriquecida con diecisiete primorosas ilustraciones de corte modernista de Rhea Wells, que aquí se reproducen<sup>5</sup> (1998: xxii).

The very fact that this book of short stories was published in a juvenile literature section means that the stories were interpreted, on the whole, as simple children's fairy tales, with an exotic twist in that they were from Spain. The double meaning clearly evident in some of the stories, which this chapter will discuss later on, seems to have evaded the publishers, who might, had they realized this interpretation of the stories, have found a critique of the monarchy or political metaphors for Spanish culture less relevant for children. Therefore, while Alfau attained success with these short stories, he did not effectuate recognition for the author he truly was; instead, he was only a teller of infantile tales.

As a final comment, despite the disparities between the works by Felipe Alfau, separate critics writing on each of his books have all compared him to Cervantes. In the case of this book

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<sup>5</sup> I haven't found the slightest indication as to the impact this book had in the United States, nor the price paid for it. But going by the first edition of 1929, we can deduce that the text must have been of interest to the literary assessors of Doubleday. It had been carefully produced within the Junior Books collection for young readers, and it is embellished with seventeen fine illustrations in the Modernist style by Rhea Wells, which we reproduce here.

of short stories, Martín Gaité makes this comparison when directly discussing these stories, not only Alfau's work at large:

Felipe Alfau ha declarado orgullosamente en muchas ocasiones que se dedicó a la literatura de forma autónoma, y que no había leído (y ha seguido sin hacerlo) a ningún novelista español posterior a Galdós. Frente a esta manifestación, insiste en cambio en reconocer su deuda con la literatura española del Siglo de Oro, y sobre todo con Cervantes. En los cuentos aquí se publican queda clara dicha deuda<sup>6</sup> (1998: xxvii).

Therefore, even within such diverse works as Alfau's two novels, his poetry and his short stories, the influence of Cervantes is present in many different ways. In this book of short stories, just as Cervantes coalesced stories from medieval times with a criticism of his own society, brimming with humor and yet morality as well, so Alfau maintains a Romantic style but he also incorporates criticism through the use of a gentle irony or metaphor. The debt to the Golden Age is present in most of the stories through the humorous presentation of morality and an indirect criticism of society, not unlike the plays written by Lope de Vega.

In *Don Quixote*, Cervantes creates a character who was an idealist and who looked back to the medieval period for inspiration, and both of these attributes were picked up by the Romantic writers. However, Cervantes' use of irony and social criticism through ridicule looks forward to the satirists of the Enlightenment. Alfau similarly focuses his attention on the Romantic past of Spain, to both reveal its glories and make fun of the ineptitudes of the pseudo-Romantics.

One of the aspects of Romanticism that will be most relevant to the discussion of Alfau's short stories is the idea of individualism. During the Romantic period, there was special importance placed on the individual, especially on those individuals that would rise above the

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<sup>6</sup> Felipe Alfau has proudly declared on many occasions that he has been autonomous in his career as a literary author, and that he had not read (and had carried on without doing so) any Spanish novelist after Galdós. In the face of this statement, he insists, on the other hand, on recognizing his debt to the Spanish literature of the Golden Age, and above all Cervantes. In the stories that are published here this debt becomes clear.

norm to accomplish great feats, carrying the society forward. This form of individualism also encourages and places greater emphasis on the individual's imagination, also, in turn, elevating the importance of individual experience. When one considers the exaggerated emotions that are usually associated with the Romantic Movement, it is essential to recognize that these emotions are held as important since they form part of the individual's experience, making this emotional hyperbole, of which Romantic literature is sometimes accused, a technique used to draw the reader's attention back to the individual.

As one further area of background knowledge on Romantic literature before moving to the stories themselves, it is of interest to note the specific characteristics of the Spanish Romantic movement, since the Spanish writers from this period had their own perspective on this trend that swept across the literature of Europe in the early nineteenth century. Alfau, as a recent emigrant from Spain, would have been influenced by this strand of Romanticism. Spanish Romanticism added special emphasis on the aspect of destiny, which would be less prominent in other Romantic literatures from Europe. The Duque de Rivas would be the great example of this Spanish Romantic literature, directing his characters through the plot but blaming fortune and destiny as the culprits for the difficult lives they would lead. The idea of star-crossed lovers would also be prominent in this Romantic literature, making a happy ending unlikely for these Spanish Romantics. Other relevant aspects of Spanish Romanticism for the discussion of Alfau's work would include the element of the exotic in Romantic literature, especially making use of Andalusia's Arabic influence (Wallhead 2008: 278). This reminds the reader of Washington Irving's *Tales of the Alhambra* (1832), a Romantic work that uses the setting of this Moorish palace in Granada as a framework for his stories.

Another important aspect of Spanish Romanticism relevant to the theoretical framework of this study is the use of references back to the medieval times, especially significant for Spanish authors, since the late medieval period in Spain, as it merges into the Renaissance, carries utmost importance for the country. This period envelops fundamental historical moments in Spain such as the voyages of Christopher Columbus, the Reconquering of Moorish Spain, and the religious fervor of the Catholic Monarchy of Isabella I and Ferdinand (Wallhead 2008: 162-164). One historian, Derek Flitter, speaks of the particular relevance of these Spanish medieval themes to poetry by referencing José Caveda's speech on Medievalism, as he took up his seat in the Spanish Academy in 1852: "concuerta admirablemente con el carácter de la época, y recibe su carta de naturaleza de la lealtad castellana, del misticismo religioso, del entusiasmo guerrero, y del respeto y el apoyo concedidos a la beldad inocente y desvalida"<sup>7</sup> (Flitter 1992: 25). These characteristics from the Spanish medieval period mirror the emphasis on the enigmatic, the transcendent and the mythic that are all synonymous with the Romantic period. Therefore, while this reaching back to the medieval is characteristic of Romanticism in general, the importance of this aspect is only multiplied in Spanish Romanticism, based on the centrality of late medieval times to Spanish history.

## **2.1 Examples of Romanticism in *Old Tales from Spain***

Of the ten stories that make up *Old Tales from Spain*, most of them reflect the Romantic literary movement, with little room for irony or breaking the Romantic framework. Four examples of these typical Romantic stories are "El Trebol," "El Canto del Cisne," "El Sauce y el Ciprés," and

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<sup>7</sup> "[The romance] is admirably attuned to the character of its age, its distinctive credentials being Castilian loyalty, religious mysticism, enthusiasm for the warrior life, the respect and assistance offered to beauty and innocence in their distress." [Translation by Celia Wallhead]

“Barcos de Vela.”<sup>8</sup> Martín Gaité offers an insight into the Romantic nature of these stories when she claims:

Felipe Alfau en 1916 es casi un niño. Seguro que sus ensoñaciones de futuro, al llegar ese día a la ciudad de los rascacielos, estaban imbuidas de idealismo, del mismo enfoque romántico ante la vida que presidirá luego la conducta de los héroes de *Old Tales from Spain*, el tomo de cuentos que hoy publicamos aquí en versión española<sup>9</sup> (1998: xx).

This fits well with the previous conclusion that perhaps these stories reflect the time period from 1916 to their publication in 1929, and could actually be Alfau’s stories of coming of age.

Whether this conjecture is true or not, these four stories contain this idealism and Romanticism discussed here by Martín Gaité.

### “El Trébol”

The first of the stories in the collection that reflects this pure Romanticism is “El Trébol.” The story shows many signs of being Romantic, the first of which being evident in the first lines, as the story begins with a traditional song:

*A coger el trébole,  
el trébole, el trébole.  
A coger el trébole  
la noche de San Juan*<sup>10</sup> (1998: 29).

With the help of the translator, the reader becomes aware that this song was printed in Spanish in the original edition, and that the translator has fixed the spelling to fit with the original pronunciation in the song. While not relevant to this particular discussion of Romanticism, this is yet another example of Alfau not only writing on the Third Space, but himself being a writer

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<sup>8</sup> “The Clover,” “The Swansong,” “The Willow and the Cypress” and “Sailboats.”

<sup>9</sup> Felipe Alfau in 1916 is almost still a boy. Of course his daydreams of the future, when he arrived that day in the city of skyscrapers, were infused with idealism, of the same romantic focus on life that would later guide the conduct of the heroes in *Old Tales from Spain*, the volume of stories that today we publish here in Spanish translation.

<sup>10</sup> Pick the clover  
the clover, the clover.  
Pick the clover  
on St. John’s Eve.

within his own Third Space, removed from the culture he attempts to describe. Returning to the Romantic qualities of the story, however, the song reminds the reader of the *costumbrista* literature that gained in popularity during the Romantic Movement. This reference to legends combined with reaching back into the medieval period of Spain in search of explanations is one of the characteristics of Romantic literature Alfau employs. Beyond the use of the song and the explanation of the legend, the events of the story take place during the *Reconquista*, the Reconquest of Spain in 1492, as Alfau chooses this monumental backdrop from medieval times as the setting of his story.

The story offers even more elements reminiscent of the Romantic Movement than just the historical setting alone. The element of the exotic is typical of Romanticism, especially evident in the descriptions of the Alhambra as experienced by Juanín: “El interior de la habitación estaba iluminado por una sola lámpara y decorado al estilo moruno. Las paredes eran de muchos colores, y bajo aquel débil resplandor, los azulejos y las inscripciones en árabe desprendían un brillo apagado”<sup>11</sup> (1998: 33). The focus on dimness of the lighting gives an ambience to the scene of the foreign and unknown within Spanish borders. Also, the story places emphasis on the individual, since the action focuses on Juanín, the most unlikely candidate for a hero, who, however, is capable of rising above his circumstances to become a national hero who rescued the young lady. Once more, the individual reigns in this story, since Alfau decides not to have Juanín marry the young lady he becomes enamored with and rescues, again elevating the concept of the individual above even that of love. This story has reminiscences of some of the tales in Irving’s *Tales of the Alhambra* (1832), translated into Spanish as *Cuentos de la Alhambra*. It especially bears a resemblance to the story of the “Legend of the Three Beautiful Princesses,” in

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<sup>11</sup> “The inside of the room was lit by one solitary lamp and decorated in the Moorish style. The walls were multi-colored, and under that faint illumination, the tiles and the inscriptions in Arabic gave off a weak glimmer.”

which the princesses are locked away in the Alhambra but fall in love with Christian men from outside the palace. Both authors use the backdrop of the Alhambra as the setting for a love story involving a damsel in distress, adding a Romantic touch of the exotic to a traditional tale (Wallhead 2008: 296).

### **“El canto del cisne”**

Another story that exudes many qualities of Romanticism is “El canto del cisne,” in English “The Swansong.” One of the main ways in which it reflects the Romantic Movement in literature is, once again, through the use of a medieval story. The story is a fairy tale complete with castles, princes and princesses, but in reverse, for there is also a contrast between the poor and the rich that is often associated with Romanticism, especially in cases, such as this story, in which the poor are praised for their simplicity, the purity of their desires and their general contentment. This is evident in the story through the final scene with the little girl and her mother who finally succeed in teaching the spoiled prince about love. But the story also offers a critique of the rich, or perhaps even of industrialized cities, in which no one and nothing is ever good enough, and in the end, the person that is found lacking is the prince himself, since he is incapable of love for anyone else. This is another Romantic characteristic, focusing on the egocentrism of the prince, a quality that many of the characters in the short stories share, as Martín Gaité explains by beginning with a look at the author’s own situation:

Refugiado él mismo en una especie de tierra de nadie, desde la que parece estar haciendo señales de humo a un público inventado o, en todo caso, ajeno a su naufragio, Felipe Alfau nunca ha exhibido tanto su predilección por los personajes ebrios de solipsismo como en estos *Cuentos españoles de antaño*<sup>12</sup> (1998: xxiii)

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<sup>12</sup> As he himself was sheltered away in a sort of no man’s land, from which it seems as if he is making smoke signals to a concocted audience or, at least, one that is unaware of his own shipwreck, Felipe Alfau has never before shown such predilection for these characters drunk on solipsism as in these *Old Tales from Spain*.

Therefore, there seem to be autobiographical tendencies in these young male protagonists that are prevalent in *Old Tales from Spain*. Within the framework of Romanticism, these self-centered protagonists represent the elevation of the individual.

Upon the conclusion of the story, Alfau again reaffirms his tendencies toward the Romantic style since the story does not have a happy ending. In contrast to the true Golden Age literature, one of the styles which Alfau is also emulating, the magic of the witch does not dissolve in the moment the prince learns his lesson, and the punishment is carried out through his death. Considering that this book is supposedly categorized as children's literature and that Alfau is writing at the time when Walt Disney's children's cartoons would become the standard for children's entertainment, this unhappy ending creates an even more drastic contrast between Alfau's stories and the style of the day. The death of the prince therefore becomes another marker of the Romantic style in Alfau's short stories, while the necessity of including a moral in the story reflects medieval and Golden Age literature.

#### **“El sauce y el ciprés”**

One further example of Romanticism comes through the story of “El sauce y el ciprés,” in English, “The Willow and the Cypress.” Martín Gaité marks this story as having an element of surprise since the reader suspects the true identity of the two characters, but Alfau only reveals that information at the conclusion (1998: xxvi). While there is a small element of suspense, this story is, once again, so representative of the Romantic Movement that there is little room for surprise as the plot plays itself out in a very typical manner. This said, the story reflects the characteristics of the love stories that were stock material during the Romantic period. The story begins with two lovers that destiny separates since the parents disapprove. The themes of destiny and fortune run throughout the story as well as the theme of star-crossed lovers that can

never be united. The conclusion of the story, as the trees reveal their true identities, is once again Romantic in the bittersweet manner in which the lovers will forever be together and yet apart. Therefore, while this story lacks originality, it is one more example of Romanticism played out in this collection of stories.

### **“Barcos de vela”**

While the story, “Barcos de vela,” in English “Sailboats,” is also representative of Romanticism as are the stories we have just seen, in this particular story, the Romanticism reaches a much more exaggerated and dramatic level, placing it in a category of its own. A long list of characteristics representative of Romanticism are present in the story. The first of these characteristics is the elevated sense of nation. This is one of the defining characteristics of Romanticism, since the emphasis on local customs and culture soon gives way to growing feelings of nationalism. This is, in fact, exactly as it takes place in the story, since the village wishes to unite with other villages around the Mediterranean Sea in order to become unified under one flag. This sort of conquest is not the same as the violent take overs of the traditional Spanish “conquistadores,” instead it is the expansion and unity of culture among peoples that share one key factor, in this case, the sea. Alfau’s elevation of the nation includes the clever detail in which the very flag of this new nation becomes the sail that both saves the seamen and becomes an awe-inspiring invention:

La misión ha sido cumplida. Llegará un día en que los hombres inventen otros métodos de navegación, pero ninguno podrá ser tan hermoso. La vela vivirá para siempre en el corazón de los auténticos marineros, como bandera que es de su patria común. Adornará para siempre el horizonte de los recuerdos marinos, y por siempre se reflejará sobre las aguas como el verdadero y genuino estandarte del mar<sup>13</sup> (1998: 60).

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<sup>13</sup> The mission is completed. The day will come in which men invent other methods of navigation, but none will be as beautiful. The sail will live on forever in the hearts of the true seamen, as the flag of what is their common homeland. It will forever adorn the horizon of the memories of the sea, and forever will be reflected over the waters as the true and genuine symbol of the sea.

While the concept of the nation as described in this passage is more abstract, the idea of localism and culture rising to the level of nationalism is present here, making this is one of the strongest characteristics of Romanticism present in the story.

This story is yet another example of the protagonist being the individualistic hero as is so predominant in Romantic literature. This hero, however, fits this profile in a much more dramatic way than the other heroes presented in the stories. First, his name is “Salvador,” in English meaning Savior, and the narrator describes him repeatedly as being the most attractive, the strongest, and the best seaman in the entire village. However, even as the village selects Salvador as the leader of this expedition to unify the sea villages, his own endeavor within this mission is much more individualistic:

Salvador, que se había quedado absorto en la contemplación de la bandera, despertó al oír su nombre devuelto por el eco del mar, como si las olas le estuvieran llamando. Todo el mundo volvió la cabeza hacia donde él estaba, y le abrieron camino<sup>14</sup> (1998: 46).

Salvador is not motivated by the betterment of his people or the economic gains to be had by unifying the villages, his motivation is entirely personal and egocentric. It is his very name that is echoed by the sea, and the whole world is, according to the narrator, watching him lead the way. This is the sort of individualistic hero that characterizes Romanticism, reminding the reader of the famous painting, “Wanderer above the Sea of Fog” by Caspar David Friedrich, as the eye is drawn to the protagonist of the painting while he, the focus of the painting, ignores the gaze of the observer and stares out into the unknown.

Yet another way in which this story reveals Romantic tendencies is through the protagonist’s mysterious origins. Alfau has this character wash up on shore and be raised by the village itself, immediately accepted and loved by those around him. This reminds the reader of

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<sup>14</sup> Salvador, who had remained absorbed in his contemplation of the flag, awoke to hear his name coming back to him from the echo of the sea, as if the waves were calling to him. Everyone turned their heads to where he was, and they made way for him.

other protagonists from Romantic literature who also have mysterious origins, such as Don Álvaro in the Duque de Rivas' play, *Don Álvaro o la fuerza del sino* (1835). By creating a character with mysterious origins, the role of destiny comes to the foreground of the story by revealing that some greater force has orchestrated these events. Also, when the author reveals Salvador's true origins in the middle of the story, it summons up references to epic literature such as *The Odyssey* (750 BC) in Salvador's sea travels or even *Oedipus the King* (429 BC) in which a young child is exiled from his homeland with a prophecy speaking of his return, similar to Salvador's mysterious arrival on the shores of the village he had unknowingly left behind, already expectant of his return. Martín Gaité draws one further comparison between this protagonist and the protagonist of the story "Arco Iris," in that both find their way to the villages without any given explanation as to their origins in the text (1998: xxiv). Considering that these two characters reveal autobiographical overcasts, one could say that this is Alfau externalizing his own mysterious origins, as he has washed up on the shore of a distant land at a young age, and his writing would become the attempt to unify the land he has left behind with the land in which he lives at that moment (Martín Gaité 1998: xxiv).

Therefore, an additional characteristic of Romantic literature is the emphasis in the story on destiny. It is destiny that brings the child to the beach of the village, and even the way that the narrator describes the scene gives credit to destiny:

Nadie alcanzó a entender cómo había podido llegar vivo a la playa. Parecía como si el mar lo hubiera traído *ex profeso* hasta allí, y los más viejos de la colonia dijeron que un niño que llega al mundo de una manera tan extraordinaria y además un domingo por la mañana, es porque lo envía la Providencia y que no cabía duda de que había nacido para llevar a cabo grandes hazañas<sup>15</sup> (1998: 44).

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<sup>15</sup> No one could understand how he had made it to the beach alive. It seemed as if the sea had brought him *ex profeso* to that place, and the oldest in the colony said that a child who arrives in the world in such an extraordinary manner and even more so, on a Sunday morning, does so because Providence sent him and there was no doubt in that he had been born to achieve great deeds.

It is destiny that the protagonist is named Salvador, and that he becomes the captain of the expedition to other lands. It is destiny that the flag he carries becomes the first sail, and destiny that he would return to his homeland. The idea of destiny in this story is not simply a literary technique employed in order to smooth the joints of the writing. Indeed, so many coincidental situations in one short story would seem excessive without the idea of destiny becoming a theme within the text. Therefore, the story not only uses destiny as a technique, but dwells upon it in a way that eventually converts it into a trope, reminding the reader of Spanish Romantic literature that uses the idea of destiny in an equally prominent role.

Within this story based on the invention of the sail, it only follows logically that nature would also be one of the strongest images, especially the part of the story taking place in the storm, which exemplifies the image of nature held by Romanticism, since it represents nature as the sublime: wild, untamed and worthy of respect and awe, even at times of terror. The descriptive passages when the seamen lose hope of reaching their destination also reflect this same perception of nature: “Allí estaban, lejos de todo, abandonados a su suerte, en medio de aquella inmensa soledad y negrura, a merced del mar enfurecido”<sup>16</sup> (1998: 50). The choice of words in this text exemplifies once again the Romantic character of the story, first from the idea of fortune, and then being at the mercy of the sea, as Alfau presents nature as being powerful and merciless. Even earlier in the text, one can see the sort of awe associated with nature, and especially with the sea, as Salvador, not once taken with the women of the village, declares to his friend, “Mi corazón no está en la tierra; está en el mar, al otro lado del horizonte, preguntándose que habrá allá,” and when he continues, he states, “Estoy enamorado” and to the great

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<sup>16</sup> “There they were, far away from everything, abandoned to their fortune, in the middle of that immense lonesomeness and darkness, at the mercy of the enraged sea.”

disappointment of his friend, he adds, “De la aventura”<sup>17</sup> (1998: 45). This love of the sea and adventure overrules any other desire, even romantic love.

One final curious aspect of this story, which is also reflected in many other stories in the collection, is the obsession with creating mythical legends in explanation of the origins of inventions. Martín Gaité links this repeated theme throughout the collection with one of the characteristics of Romanticism: “los atributos fascinantes que distinguen al nómada del sedentario y oponen lo exótico a lo convencional”<sup>18</sup> (1998: xxiv). Therefore, the invention of basic things such as sails for boats contrasts the melodramatic myth behind the story with the practicality of the sail. Martín Gaité also equates this focus on the origin of inventions as part of Alfau’s surrealist tendencies which would become much more evident in his novels (1998: xxvi), like, for example, the invention of fingerprints in *Locos*. Therefore, this obsession with showing the origins of things could be part of the Romanticism in the stories because it adds the exotic to the everyday, but it could also be the return to localism: to show the supposed origins of culture and to reach back into the roots of identity.

## **2.2 Glimpses of Alfau the Novelist in the Stories**

### **“La rivalidad”**

Having discussed the stories that best demonstrate a pure form of Romanticism, the next set of stories falls into the category of being, as a general rule, Romantic, but with glimpses of the innovative Alfau who would soon forge his own creative literary style. The two stories are “La rivalidad,” in English, “The Rivalry,” and “Entre dos luces,” loosely translated as “At Dusk.” At first glance, the story “La rivalidad” fits well into the style of Romanticism since it opens with a

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<sup>17</sup> “My heart is not on the land; it is in the sea, on the other side of the horizon, wondering what is out there.... I am in love... with adventure.”

<sup>18</sup> “The fascinating attributes that distinguish the nomadic from the sedentary and set up the exotic against the conventional.”

grandfather telling a story to his grandchild, again reaching back into medieval times for the actual plot of the story. Martín Gaité comments on this introduction to the narrator who frames the plot of the story: “La introducción de narradores accesorios, que apuntalan el relato central y lo enriquecen –muy cervantina también, por otra parte— adquiere en esta colección de relatos diversas modalidades”<sup>19</sup> (1998: xxv). While this additional narrator does create a form of metanarrative within the story, it does not achieve the same ambiguity that Alfau would achieve in the novels through his narrator “Alfau,” since this frame narrator in the story still fits well within the paradigm of traditional storytelling. There are more details in the story that remind the reader of Romanticism, for example, the witch who goes on to govern the outcome of the story itself, putting magic on a level higher than social class. Even the fact that these two protagonists find themselves turned into animals for the rest of their lives reflects the sovereignty of nature over human effort.

However, while the structure, style and literary techniques Alfau uses in the story are clearly Romantic, the larger message of the story shows the rebellious satirist of *Locos* and *Chromos*. The difference first comes through a few comments from the narrator within the story that distance the reader from the medieval content. In the other more conventional stories, the narrator gives the events little to no framework to separate the present-day reader from the medieval culture and society. In this story, the first instance of the distancing comes from a generalization by the narrator about the people living in medieval times: “Entonces Don Pero se enfureció. Por aquel tiempo la gente era dada a reacciones un tanto turbulentas. Así que, anhelante de venganza, sediento de la sangre de Don Nuño, se escondió detrás de un árbol, a la

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<sup>19</sup> “The introduction of complementary narrators that support the central tale and enrich it- very much in the style of Cervantes as well— also takes on different modes in this collection of tales.”

espera de acontecimientos”<sup>20</sup> (1998: 64). While keeping in mind that the narrator is, supposedly, an uncle, who seems to have folkloric or even superstitious tendencies, the effect of separating the present day narration from the events taking place in another less real and more stereotypical time, still remains. The second example of this distancing takes place when describing how Don Nuño comes across a woman locked away in Don Pero’s castle: “En aquel tiempo, y por razones que serían muy largas de exponer, los hombres del tipo de Don Pero siempre tenían encerradas a las mujeres en su casa con llave y candado”<sup>21</sup> (1998: 71). This is not the only example of a woman being locked away, since in “El Trébol,” Juanín rescues a girl locked away in the Alhambra, however, in this story, the narrator feels the need to create a generalization about the treatment of women in those times, again creating a separation between the reader and the events portrayed. This use of distance as a promoter of irony is a technique that will become typical of Alfau the novelist, showing one instance of the satirist Alfau otherwise unrecognizable in most of these stories.

Moving further into the use of satire in the narrative, the supposed moral of the story on the level of the metanarrative is another source of irony. The information given to the reader from the narrator at the beginning of the story, linking a child to inventors, makes the reader suspect an ironic tone: “A Pepe, un estudiante muy despejado, que estaba veraneando con su familia en los montes de Aragón, de algún tiempo a aquella parte le había dado por aplicar su brillante ingenio a los inventos”<sup>22</sup> (1998: 61). The irony comes to us through the frame narrator, as would become a typical technique for Alfau, and the exaggerated emphasis on the child’s

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<sup>20</sup> “So, Sir Pero became enraged. In those times people tended to react quite violently. Thus eager to take his revenge, thirsty for Sir Nuño’s blood, he hid behind a tree, waiting for action.”

<sup>21</sup> “In those days, and for reasons that would be very lengthy to explain, men like Sir Pero always kept the women of the house under lock and key.”

<sup>22</sup> “Pepe, a very bright student, who was spending the summer with his family in the hills of Aragon, had for some time been applying his brilliant ingenuity to inventions.”

genius raises the reader's suspicions as to the element of satire present in the narrative, which is quickly confirmed by the irony of the following dialogue in the story: "—Mira, Pepito, tu invento es absurdo y no tiene nada de práctico. Si me atiendes un momento, te explicaré por qué"<sup>23</sup> (1998: 61). With these harsh words from the uncle, the story thus begins of the two lords with their multi-generational feud. At the end of the story, the uncle returns, this time with the irony from the author all the clearer: "—Y con esto habrás quedado convencido —continuó el tío de Pepe— de lo absurdo y poco práctico que sería cruzar palomas mensajeras con loros. La vieja rivalidad ha sido transmitida a la progenie de ambas especies y jamás podrían llevarse bien entre sí"<sup>24</sup> (1998: 77). Clearly the legend and the logic behind this conclusion are absurd, the one having nothing to do with the other. The irony continues with the moral of the story: "—Lo cual también te enseñará, Pepito —concluyó el tío—, a no meterte en cualquier tipo de inventos, porque algunos, como habrás podido comprobar por este cuento, resultan desastrosos"<sup>25</sup> (1998: 78). The moral of the story is, then, never to invent and never to step out of the norm. This is clearly an ironic message, but perhaps Alfau could be critiquing the role of society in directing youth away from innovation and progression into the future, a position that fits well with Alfau's criticism of the traditional Spain in his allusions, in other stories, to the Two Spains. Therefore, this story steps away from the traditional Romantic style through the irony of the moral of the story, creating what could perhaps be a criticism of education in Spanish society.

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<sup>23</sup> "Look, Pepito, your invention is absurd and not at all practical. Listen to me for a moment and I'll explain why."

<sup>24</sup> "And with this I think I will have convinced you, continued Pepe's uncle of how absurd and impractical it would be to cross carrier pigeons with parrots. The old rivalry has been transmitted down to the offspring of both species and they would never be able to get along together."

<sup>25</sup> "Which will also teach you, Pepito- his uncle concluded- not to get involved in any sort of invention, because some, as you will have learned through this story, turn out to be a disaster."

## “Entre dos luces”

The title of the story “Entre dos luces,” in English, “At Dusk,” but literally “between two lights”— the bright light of sunlight in the daytime and the twilight of sundown and darkness of moonlit nighttime— has a play on words, developed later in the internal story “The Garden of the Two Lights.” While very different in style, it also reveals aspects of the Alfau one would expect from his works *Locos* and *Chromos*, only this time not through the aspect of satire, but nostalgia. Once again, this story fits the Romanticism of the other stories, especially through the stress placed on the individual location of Seville. Apart from the aspect of myth in the narrative within the story, the story itself is an ode to Seville, describing the local and traditional as paradise: “Cuando estaba acercándose a la ciudad, el sol iba ya muy bajo. Vio las hermosas *vegas*, los suaves contornos aterciopelados de los cerros, primero verdes, luego rosa y por fin azulados”<sup>26</sup> (1998: 27). This elevation of the primitive simplicity of villages in years gone by is one of the defining attributes of Romanticism. Within the narrative of “The Garden of the Two Lights,” the message of the story is that destiny cannot be forced, and the idea of “star-crossed lovers” takes on a new and more literal meaning as the Sun and the Moon simply cannot be united. Even when the old man reveals the message behind the legend of the garden, he ambiguously declares that the garden is what comes to mankind to bring “romanticismo y paz,” in English, “Romanticism and peace.” The very word Romanticism is mentioned in the text, again revealing the intentionality behind the style of these stories.

The story, therefore, is very Romantic in style and even in message, but when considered within the oeuvre of Alfau, it connects well with his greater, more representative works, especially in the sense that this story seems to be a step toward literature from the Third Space.

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<sup>26</sup> “When he was nearing the city, the sun was already very low in the sky. He saw the beautiful meadows, the smooth velvet contours of the hills; first green, then pink and finally blue.”

The very fact that the story takes place in Seville reminds the reader of scenes from the end of *Chromos*, when “Alfau” enters into the mind of Fulano, finding him lost in a train of nostalgic thought:

Knowing that she had really been there only made him feel worse. He was Spanish also and felt entitled to as much regret as the others. Sevilla was not only a town. It spread out to all of Spain as an invented symbol of a desirable way of life, of a dreamed way of being, but he had never been to the real Sevilla. Even this had been denied him. He would have wanted to say something about Sevilla or Madrid, or anything acknowledged as Spanish, but he would have felt like an imposter. If he had uttered a set phrase, he would have been a traitor to himself. If he had uttered a word with fresh meaning, he would have been a traitor to his people (1990: 313-314).

First there is the apparent autobiographical root behind this sentimental connection to Seville, and given that Alfau was from the north of Spain and moved at a very young age, this could very well be true of himself. However, beyond the possible autobiographical content, in both stories Seville becomes more than a town; it is a symbol of something deeper. In the novel *Chromos*, Seville is a symbol for Spanish culture, and is represented as an epicenter of Spanish society. In the short story, Seville becomes a symbol, on one level, of the same idea:

El corazón le dio un brinco de alegría y se sintió muy feliz. Porque en toda aquella belleza que le rodeaba, en aquella paz, en aquella región española de incomparable hermosura que vive la vida como una novela, había reconocido al fin, entre la oscuridad del pasado y el resplandor del futuro, el jardín Entre dos Luces<sup>27</sup> (1998: 27).

Therefore, in one sense, the two accounts of Seville reflect the same sentiment of it being a symbol of what it is to be Spanish, a sort of Spanish paradise.

However, both passages reveal it to be true that Alfau does not speak of Seville as just a location, and that Seville in itself is paradise, instead, Seville is a place of the mind. This adds to the aspects of the Third Space when one compares this short story with the novel *Chromos*. The boy in the story has already achieved this sense of “Romanticism and peace,” or in other words, nostalgia, because he has been to Seville, not only the town Seville, but the “Seville” of

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<sup>27</sup> His heart leapt for joy and he felt very happy. Because in all of that beauty that surrounded him, in that peace, in that Spanish region of incomparable beauty that lives life as if in a novel, he had finally recognized at last, between the darkness of the past and the gleam of the future, the Garden of the Two Lights.

recognizing and contenting oneself in the beauty that surrounds the present. However, Fulano from the novel *Chromos* bemoans the fact that he has never been to Seville, implying more than the fact that he had never set foot in the town, but that he had never known this contentment, or this “dreamed way of being” that comes with recognizing the beauty of the present, instead of dwelling in the past or the future. One possible conclusion is what the narrator states throughout *Chromos*, that to know oneself and thereby obtain contentment and peace is possible in one’s own country, as is the case in the short story, but to step away from one’s own identity is to lose one’s equilibrium, and therefore fall into a tragic nostalgia for a place where one has never been, seen in the character Fulano from *Chromos*. This concept of nostalgia is both a depiction of the Third Space as well as representative of Alfau’s style as a writer of Third Space literature.

### **2.3 The Outsider Represented**

#### **“El arco iris”**

With the theme of the outsider, referred to as “the Other,” in Third Space theory, being so prominent in Alfau’s writing, the story “El arco iris,” in English, “The Rainbow,” gains relevance as much more than a traditional tale. The marks of Romanticism are present in this story as well, from the mysterious origins of the protagonist to the tragic ending. However, the main characteristic that stands out as original in the story is Alfau’s critique of the treatment of “the Other,” although the style he chooses in this critique differs drastically from the fragmented ironic critique he offers in *Locos* and *Chromos*, since he leaves the traditional form of the story in place. The setting of the village becomes the perfect metaphor for society at large, and the artist becomes the equivalent of all those who dedicate themselves to the fine arts.

Alfau therefore uses the image of the artist as a metaphor for the difficult position of being an artist in society. This idea of the artist being removed from society in order to gain a

different perspective could come from the likes of Lord Tennyson and *The Lady of Shalott* (1842), as the artist must either die a creative death in order to associate with those below, or remain solitary in order to gain the gift of perspective and insight. With this literary tradition in mind, the comments from the artist on his own work seem to fit well with idea of the artist as the prophet to the common people, one such example coming from his visions of rainbows, invisible to everyone else:

Tú no lo ves por falta de costumbre. Pero un artista siempre lo puede ver. La gente normalmente sólo lo ve cuando llueve y sale el sol, porque el arco iris está cubierto de polvo y la lluvia, al lavararlo, lo desempolva y le saca brillo a sus colores. Pero el arco iris está siempre ahí, y los artistas nunca dejan de verlo<sup>28</sup> (1998: 8).

While the style of the writing is one of childlike innocence, the idea remains that the artist is capable of seeing beyond the ordinary. His downfall and demise comes when he tries to share his visions with the village, especially when he feels that his work has attained supernatural levels: “El maestro estaba desesperado. Corría enloquecido de unos a otros, tratando de explicarse”<sup>29</sup> (1998: 12). The artist deemed crazy by those around him because of his success in uniting his work with reality forms a perfect metaphor for the work of the writer, who tries to merge the literary world with the reality he finds around him. Alfau chooses to deliver this message directly when he has the nobleman at the end of the story explain: “Muchas veces, créame, el genio es muy difícil separarlo de la locura”<sup>30</sup> (1998: 14). Such a statement is altogether appropriate coming from an author whose other simultaneous project is named *Locos*, and whose own style would be fragmented, confused and misunderstood by his audience.

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<sup>28</sup> You do not see it because you are not in the habit. But an artist can always see it. People normally only see it when it rains and the sun comes out, because the rainbow is covered in dust and the rain, when it washes it, removes the dust and brings out its brilliant colors. But the rainbow is always there, and artists never stop seeing it.

<sup>29</sup> “The teacher was desperate. He ran about crazily, from one villager to the next, trying to explain himself.”

<sup>30</sup> “Believe me, genius is often very difficult to distinguish from madness.”

Apart from the idea of the artist in the story, there is also a running commentary on the treatment of the outsider. From the first entrance of the artist into the village, it becomes immediately clear that the villagers treat him as “the Other”: “Según iba andando por la calle, todo el mundo se volvía a mirarle, porque –hay que reconocerlo— la gente de aquella apacible aldea era francamente chismosa<sup>31</sup>” (1998: 3). Soon the artist begins to accumulate labels that concrete his role as “the Other” as the people begin to call him “Maestro,” meaning “Master or “Teacher” in English, rather like Christ, and they allow him to coexist within the village in his role of “Other”:

Representaban diferentes barrios del pueblo o bocetos de gente, pero sobre todo paisajes tomados en la campiña de los alrededores. Al final, cuando ya todo el mundo sabía que era pintor, remitió la curiosidad en torno a su persona y la gente acabó acostumbrándose a su presencia<sup>32</sup> (1998: 7).

While the painter remains in his role of offering the village a service without achieving too much success or changing the mentality of his students too drastically, he is allowed to live within the village peacefully, although, from this passage, it becomes clear that while the village tolerates his presence, he is not accepted as one of their own. As the story progresses, they later call him “un muerto de hambre,” in English meaning, “One dying of hunger,” and their distrust of the artist grows as the villagers feed into one another’s fear by sharing their own suspicions (1998: 10). In fact, the very labels they give him cause them to begin to fear him, creating more distance between the two groups, until they have entirely isolated him and left him desolate, even incarcerating him as a form of protecting the in-group. Seen from the perspective of the theory of the Third Space, this is precisely what the nation does with those to whom it assigns the role of “Other,” thus creating a distanced adversary under the guise of maintaining social purity.

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<sup>31</sup> “As he walked down the street, everyone turned to look at him, because, one has to admit, the people from that peaceful village were frankly gossips.”

<sup>32</sup> They represented different neighborhoods of the village or sketches of the people, but above all, the landscapes taken from the countryside in the surrounding area. In the end, when everyone knew he was a painter, the curiosity surrounding his persona died down and the people ended up getting used to his presence.

Therefore, Alfau could be reflecting on the experience of immigrants in New York City, tolerated at a distance when fulfilling their role as “the Other,” since they contribute to the stability of the city itself, but also feared as insurgents who might gain too much power and success, an anxiety that would prompt the majority to drive these outsiders into isolation.

The ending of the story offers another glimpse of Alfau’s style that would later define the novels of *Locos* and *Chromos*. The moment comes from the scene of the artist’s death, as it contains characteristics of the Biblical Passion narratives:

Pero a medida que avanzaba el cortejo, estalló una breve tormenta y se puso a llover copiosamente. La lluvia duró poco, y en seguida el sol volvió a salir y a brillar con más esplendor que antes.

Y entonces todos pudieron contemplar un espectáculo extraordinario. Contra el cielo, de una cima a otra, se podía ver un arco maravilloso de colores resplandecientes desplegados en rayas paralelas. Era el arco del que el maestro les había hablado<sup>33</sup> (1998: 14).

The fulfillment of prophesy through nature at the very moment he dies reminds the reader of the narrative of the crucifixion of Jesus in which the weather changes violently at the moment of His death. This use of religious metaphors and symbols reminds the reader of the story of “The Necrophil” from *Locos*, which abounds in religious symbolism, or the religious discourse Alfau uses to describe both Don Pedro and Dr. de los Rios in *Chromos*. Therefore, in his other works, Alfau uses religious references as part of a larger criticism, similar to his use of a Christ-like artist in this story.

Another glimpse of Alfau’s innovative style in this story comes at the very dénouement, when the reader discovers that the story is, in fact, just a dream. Alfau achieves this illusive metanarrative by separating it from the rest of the story through the use of one of the illustrations in the book, so the reader must literally turn the page, expectant of the beginning of the next

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<sup>33</sup> But as the procession advanced, a brief storm erupted and the rain started to pour down. The rain lasted only a little while, and immediately after, the sun came back out and shone with even more splendor than before. And then everyone contemplated an extraordinary spectacle. Against the sky, from one peak to the other, one could see the most marvelous arch of shining colors unfolding in parallel rays. It was the rainbow that the teacher had told them about.

story, only to find that the story has not ended. While this is not the only case of Alfau using a metanarrative in his short stories, this particular use of the metanarrative is once again more similar to the ironic Alfau of *Locos* and *Chromos*, since it appears out of nowhere, with no indication from the text as to when it began. It also aligns itself more with the picaresque Alfau, since it adds a surprise to the ending not unlike what one would expect from O. Henry. This moment of playfulness and surprise is an imperfect attempt at what would abound in Alfau's novels through different layers of reality and the use of the surreal in line with Magic Realism. In the struggle of the artist or intellectual against society, there may be reminiscences of D.H. Lawrence's 1915 novel *The Rainbow*. While banned for several years in Britain, it was available in the U.S., so perhaps Alfau heard of it or even read it.

Before moving ahead to the next story, while drawing concrete conclusions will forever be impossible when discussing the autobiographical nature of Alfau's works, this particular story reflects so many levels of Alfau's own experiences that it is impossible to ignore. First, Martín Gaité has already drawn attention to some of these autobiographical details in the text. As she states, the painter, as he sits in the plaza with the boys, mentions some of the stories from *Old Tales from Spain* as his own (Martín Gaité 1998: xxiv) (Alfau 1998: 12). This is the first clue that equates the author Alfau with his character, the artist. Also, the artist is never named throughout the story, having the effect of broadening his experience to all those under the label artist, or even making it possible for this artist to be Alfau himself. Martín Gaité also mentions the use of the word "locos," and the possibility of the double meaning surrounding the word when she deciphers that Alfau is stating: "los locos son los que no han sabido apreciar el valor de su obra"<sup>34</sup> (1998: xxv). This again reaches back into Alfau's own experience with his difficulty in getting his works published. As one final autobiographical possibility, the surprise ending of

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<sup>34</sup> "The crazy ones are those that have not been able to appreciate the value of his work."

the story seems to be the author himself debating the dangers of success as opposed to the comfort of mediocrity, as the majority of people in society are friendly to the mediocre “Other,” but defensive to the point of violence when “the Other” gains success or even usurps the natives.

## **2.4 A Critique of the King**

### **“El gusano de oro”**

Moving away from the stories that are more Romantic and traditional in style to those that have a stronger sense of double meaning, one of the best examples of this is “El gusano de oro,” in English, “The Golden Worm” (or “The Worm of Gold,” or even “The Gold Worm” by analogy with the silkworm). In this allegorical story, the parallel between the gold worm and the political situation in Spain regarding the exile of the king is clear. This is not a question of a traditional or previously-existing tale; indeed, all Alfau’s stories here are original. So to establish these parallels, Alfau sets them up in the form of an animal fable in order to criticize both Spanish politics and Spanish society. The relevance of this story to Spanish politics becomes clearer when one considers the delicate situation of the Spanish king at the time when Alfau was writing this book. These stories were published in 1929, with King Alfonso XIII’s exile from Spain coming in the year 1931, along with the establishment of the Second Republic. However, while Alfau wrote this story in the years prior to the Civil War, the great dislike for the king was building up during the final years of his reign, especially since he was no longer leading the country, having already succumbed to the demoted role of supporting the dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera. What is perhaps surprising is that in this book of supposed children’s tales, one finds Alfau’s direct criticism, even though still an allegory, of Spanish politics and society at large.

The first moments of criticism come as Alfau begins to describe the insects in the story. The fact that he has chosen the insect kingdom to represent Spain, especially since within the

story there are human characters as well, reveals a biting criticism toward the intellect of Spaniards or even the political importance of Spain. Within the insect kingdom, Alfau chooses the moths to represent the aristocracy, moths that are infamous for destroying things by eating away at them, creating a comparison with a social class that does nothing to contribute to society, but instead tears apart what others have or have built. Even more cutting is that these moths dedicate themselves to eating books from the royal library instead of reading them, another attack on the aristocracy's intelligence or the desire to learn and progress. Alfau even attacks the very existence of the aristocracy when he states,

Aquellos insectos se consideraban a sí mismos los aristócratas de su gremio, porque vivían en un palacio real, mientras los demás se veían obligados a vagabundear por los campos, los bosques, los jardines de la gente plebeya o los parques públicos donde a todo el mundo le estaba permitido entrar, sin distinción de clases, lo cual era efectivamente una vulgaridad. Total, que los insectos que vivían alrededor del palacio miraban por encima del hombro a todos los demás insectos<sup>35</sup>(1998: 129).

Their true status simply comes from the proximity between them and the royal palace, eliminating the potential of any real criteria for being aristocrats. This is yet another criticism Alfau lodges in the direction of the Spanish aristocracy, that there is no solid reason to support their supremacy.

The reasons, then, in the short story, for having a king come as an extension of this search for a support to the aristocracy's claim of superiority. The realization of their own weakness in this area comes from one of the aristocrats, hoping to ensure his position of superiority, and with it, a life of ease:

Una polilla había declarado sentenciosamente que no podía existir verdadera aristocracia sin tener un rey. Hay que advertir que las polillas eran juzgadas como el sector más ilustrado dentro del mundo de los insectos. Tenían la costumbre de deslizarse furtivamente dentro del palacio y de pasarse las horas muertas en la biblioteca real, literalmente comiéndose los libros. Aquella

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<sup>35</sup> Those insects considered themselves the aristocrats of their class, because they lived in a royal palace, while the rest were left compelled to wander through the fields, the woods and the gardens of the common people or the public parks where everyone was allowed to enter, without any distinction of classes, which was indeed a vulgarity. In sum, the insects that lived around the palace looked over their shoulder at the other insects.

polilla, como es natural, sabía muy bien lo que decía cuando emitió aquella desconsoladora opinión que castigó el orgullo de sus congéneres y cayó sobre ellos como una acusación. Si no existía verdadera aristocracia sin un rey, estaba claro que ellos no eran aristócratas, porque rey no tenían ninguno<sup>36</sup> (1998: 129).

Therefore, the desire for a king does not come with the hopes that he would, in fact, fulfill any real duties, but that his existence would ensure their own. This again reflects the dilemma of the aristocrats of Spain who were left without a figurehead when the king was forced to submit to the rule of the dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera in 1923, leaving the aristocracy in a vulnerable position with no claim to their own social class. Alfau carries on with this very same argument, stating: “Y era una cosa muy triste, como le comentaba una abeja a otra amiga confidencialmente mientras estaban libando de la misma flor, porque una aristócrata que duda de su aristocracia es como una persona normal que duda de su identidad o incluso de su propia existencia”<sup>37</sup> (1998: 129-30). Once again, the irony is obvious as Alfau attacks the existence of the aristocracy in Spain as well as the reasons for the return of the king to power. Another glimpse of the existential writer in Alfau emerges through the mention of doubting one’s own identity or existence, both of which, as previously discussed, would be themes in his later novels. Also, claims to power and authority are linked to identity and existence, another theme that would become especially prevalent in *Chromos* when considering the immigrant’s loss of identity.

Alfau’s attacks on Spanish politics only continue when the insects begin to discuss the attributes of a king. The first line of criticism comes from the insects’ observations of the real human King as he appears in the garden. Their impressions of him show their ineptness in

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<sup>36</sup> One moth had declared gravely that a true aristocracy could not exist without having a king. One has to point out that the moths were judged as the most illustrious sector within the world of the insects. They had the custom of furtively slipping into the palace and spending hours on end in the royal library, literally eating the books. This particular moth, as is natural, knew very well what she was saying when she proclaimed that disconcerting opinion that hurt the pride of her fellow moths, which fell upon them as an accusation. If a true aristocracy didn’t exist without a king, it was clear that they were not aristocrats, because they had no king.

<sup>37</sup> “And it was a very sad affair, as one bee commented to her friend and confidant as they were sipping from the same flower, because an aristocrat that doubts her own aristocracy is like a normal person who doubts her identity or her own existence.”

understanding the true function of the king, having no idea of his work, and observing him only for a matter of minutes. In fact, much of the erroneous judgment these insects make reflects Alfau's criticism of the Spanish king: "—Es enormemente importante— exclamó una mosca—. No hay nada que parezca merecer su atención. No creo que se dé cuenta de nada ni vea a nadie que no sea él mismo"<sup>38</sup> (1998: 133). Alfau's criticism of the Spanish king's egocentrism and his lack of involvement in matters of state seem to be reflected through this insect version of kingship. This ties in thematically with the story "El canto del cisne," in which the prince there could be a fledgling Alfonso XIII. Alfau's criticism carries on to the public reaction to the insect king, with a critique not only of the king's behavior, but of society's worship of the king as well:

—¡Qué guapo es!  
—¡*Qué simpático!*  
—Es lo que se dice un rey. A él tenemos que tomarlo como ejemplo.  
—¡*Olé tu mare!*—exclamó un escarabajo andaluz  
—¡Es tan *chic!*—dijo una mariposa que acababa de volver de Francia.  
—Sí, sí, pero muy elegante<sup>39</sup> (1998: 134, emphasis in the text).

The outright worship of a being that serves, according to the opinion portrayed in the story, no apparent purpose, is the criticism pursued here through the insects' reaction to seeing a real king, which, in the end, only spurs on their endeavors to find their own king. This creates a parallel critique of the Spanish nobility, unmindfully praising the monarchies of other countries without really understanding their function, yet nonetheless wanting to adopt these fashionable forms of government as their own.

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<sup>38</sup> "—He's extremely important— exclaimed a fly—. There is nothing that seems to deserve his attention. I don't think he pays attention to anything or sees anyone except himself."

<sup>39</sup>—How handsome he is!

—*How nice!*

—That's what you call a king. He is the one we must make our example.

—*Bravo to your mother!*— exclaimed an Andalusian beetle.

—He's so *chic!*— said a butterfly that had just returned from France.

—Yes, yes, so very elegant.

As Alfau's critique continues through the arrival of the insect king in the story, Alfau turns to the naivety of the Spanish people in their strong belief in the king. The idea of faith enters the story as the insects pray for their king, and even upon his arrival, Alfau has a single sound announce the coming of the king: "¡Chist!" in English, "Shush!" sounding all too similar to "Christ," which embellishes his critique as to the absurdity of using religion as the basis for choosing the monarchy (1998: 136). His criticism seems directed towards a long-held belief that the kings have always been appointed by God, evident when the narrator states, "De repente sucedió el milagro"<sup>40</sup> (1998: 136). Even the fact that the king is a worm reflects the negativity this story expresses toward the monarchy. Also relevant is that because the insects are so misinformed and uneducated in the criteria they create for the king, they are incapable of recognizing the fact that their "miracle" is not even alive. This again creates a clear attack not only on the monarchy itself, but on the role that the monarchy would play in Spanish society, being one of superfluous irrelevance.

As the story continues, the satire through anthropomorphism carries on as the insects meet their own demise as a result of their infatuation with the king. In this sense, Alfau is not simply criticizing the idea of the king because it fulfills no practical role in society, he also believes that obsession with the monarchy will lead to the demise of the people. The narrator thus relays how the insects bring about their own destruction:

Pero como estos visitantes no eran aristócratas y no estaban versados, por lo tanto, en los exquisitos usos de la vida palaciega, se portaban de una forma grosera y escandalosa, ante la irritación y censura de la corte insectil. Querían fisgar por todas partes, y entraban en el palacio real en tales bandadas que hubo que disponer un ejército de criados para echarlos fuera. Pero no se lograron resultados apreciables, porque no había insecto en el mundo que no ansiara ver a su rey, y siguieron llegando en nubes sobre el palacio. Hasta que la familia real, ya desesperada, optó por trasladarse a una de sus residencias veraniegas<sup>41</sup> (1998: 139).

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<sup>40</sup> "And suddenly there occurred a miracle."

<sup>41</sup> But since these visitors were not aristocrats and were not, as a result, used to the exquisite manner of palace life, they behaved in a rude and scandalous manner, to the irritation and rebukes of the insect court. They wanted to snoop about everywhere, and they entered into the royal palace in such droves that the palace had to arrange

This obsession with the monarchy means that the insects stop their work entirely to come and see the king, once again disrupting the entire society for something that would hold little realistic change or significance for the lives of those insects. Apparently, this is one of Alfau's concerns for Spain as well, that the presence of a king distracts the citizens of a nation from matters of true importance. This negligence eventually leads to the insects' destruction, and the disappearance of the king:

Uno de los criados salió al jardín a rociarlo con un producto químico para exterminar la plaga. Cuando pasó cerca de los arbustos que había enfrente de la escalera principal vio brillar algo en el suelo a la luz de la luna. Se agachó a cogerlo y se quedó atónito al encontrarse el broche de la princesa metido en una cáscara de nuez. Entonces se acordó de que ella lo había perdido la tarde de su cumpleaños. Entró en el palacio y se lo entregó al mayordomo<sup>42</sup> (1998: 139).

Therefore Alfau's critique is not just of the irrelevance of having a king, but also that the presence of a king opens up the nation to outside attacks by distracting the people. After the "king" disappears, the insects still do not become wise to their own folly as they spend all their time in search of the king instead of carrying on with their own lives (1998: 139). Alfau's critique of the need for a monarchy in Spain reaches the level of a prophetic warning as he speaks of the supposed dangers of wanting or seeking out the king's restoration to power.

As the conclusion of the story reaches back to the metanarrative and the situation that brought on the storytelling, this is yet another moment in which Alfau dramatically exchanges the traditional storytelling style for an ironic and dry final twist to the plot:

—¿Crees, papá, que por fin encontrarán algún día a su rey de oro?  
—Claro que no, hija mía.

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for an army of servants to kick them out. But they did not achieve appreciable results, because there was not an insect in the world that did not long to see the king, and they continued arriving in clouds above the palace. Until the royal family, already desperate, opted for moving to one of the summer residences.

<sup>42</sup> One of the servants went out into the garden to spray a chemical product in order to exterminate the infestation. When he passed close to the bushes that were opposite the main staircase he saw something shining on the ground in the light of the moon. He bent down to pick it up and was struck speechless when he saw the princess's brooch placed in a nutshell. Then he remembered that she had lost it on the afternoon of her birthday. He went into the palace and gave it to the butler.

—¿Y por qué?  
—Porque el cuento que te he contado no es verdad<sup>43</sup> (1998: 140).

In stark contrast to the other stories in which the legends and myths presented are held intact to the very end, in this case the fairy tale is not upheld. The irrelevance of telling such a story to a child, and what is more, not even bothering to conclude the story, again reveals Alfau's use of the story as a façade to critique Spanish politics. Even more so, the very fact that the narrator claims the story is not true reinforces the reality of the message behind the story, alerting the reader to the irony of the statement. This intentional diminishing of the importance of a text becomes a recurring theme in Alfau's writing, found in the Prologue from *Locos* or the manuscripts in *Chromos*.

## 2.5 “The Two Spains”

The final story left for discussion is “La leyenda de las abejas,” “The Legend of the Bees” in English, and it is pivotal as it comes exactly at the halfway point of the book. It also stands out for being the most directly political story in this collection, and perhaps in all of Alfau's work. Martín Gaité comments on the direct symbolism inherent in this story: “Y el resultado es un cuadro simbolista, muy en consonancia con las descripciones que el autor, en otros textos suyos, nos ofrece de Madrid y Toledo”<sup>44</sup> (1998: xxvi). While the story presents the difference between the two villages as being one from the North and the other from the South, it seems that the actual comparison Alfau is after is much more complex and also more in line with Spanish literature, being that of “the two Spains.” In this way, the comparison becomes not just of the North and South, although traditionally, they have encompassed each one of these two Spains,

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<sup>43</sup>—Do you believe, Daddy, that they will finally find their king of gold some day?

—Of course not, my dear.

—And why not?

—Because the story that I told you is not true.

<sup>44</sup> “And the result is a symbolist painting, very much in agreement with the descriptions in other texts of his in which he shows us Madrid and Toledo.”

but two different mentalities which separate Spain into two very different, almost opposing sides, as previous explained, one being the progressive, international and innovative Spain and the other being the traditional, cultural and emotional Spain. In fact, in the very text itself, Alfau lays out the symbolism he wishes the reader to appreciate in this comparison: “Me estoy refiriendo a dos pueblos que encarnaban respectivamente sendos ideales de la más elevada civilización y que un buen día entraron en la Península por extremos opuestos. No se sabe de dónde venían ni sus razas han logrado determinarse con certeza”<sup>45</sup> (1998: 79). His portrayal of the two Spains is also fascinating, revealing what he holds to be their origins, the traditional Spain coming from the Moors and the progressive and innovative from Europe.

As Alfau moves into a description of the two villages, the characteristics of each one are a depiction of the representative traits of the two Spains. First, he enumerates the beneficial aspects of the North:

Tan pronto como se instalaron en España, emprendieron el desarrollo del país bajo las estrictas órdenes de su caudillo. Trabajaban con inexorable disciplina de sol a sol, sin tregua, constantemente. No quedó campo sin cultivar, se construyeron hermosos caminos y fueron levantados los edificios más prácticos y funcionales. Ni el tiempo ni el espacio fueron desperdiciados. Todas las casas eran muy parecidas y estaban diseñadas con la intención de proporcionar la mayor cantidad posible de estancias útiles gastando la menor cantidad posible de material. Ninguna decoración ni adorno superfluo podía encontrarse en ellas. Todo estaba planeado con arreglo a criterios científicos y, una vez llevado a cabo, satisfacía exigencias de orden material<sup>46</sup> (1998: 79-80).

Besides the lists of all of the accomplishments of these Northern villagers, Alfau seems to be referencing the Roman civilization in Spain, speaking of their abilities to create roads and

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<sup>45</sup> “I am referring to the two villages that incarnate respectively the two ideals of the most elevated civilization which one day entered onto the Peninsula from opposite ends.”

<sup>46</sup> As soon as they established themselves in Spain, they set about the task of developing the country under the strict orders of the commander. They worked with inexorable discipline from sun up to sun-down, without ceasing, constantly. There was no field that wasn't farmed, they constructed beautiful paths and they erected the most practical and functional buildings. Neither time nor space was wasted. All the houses were very similar and were designed with the intention of proportioning the highest amount of useable space while spending the least possible amount of material. Neither decoration nor superfluous adornment could be found among them. Everything was planned in accordance to scientific criteria and, when they were finished, they satisfied the demands of the material order.

buildings. However, his praises of the North extend beyond the material outcomes of their labor, reaching into the impact such hard work has on the society:

Las personas más honradas y laboriosas colaboraban entre sí hasta el límite de sus fuerzas, ayudándose siempre unas a otras. Ningún individuo de aquella sociedad tan bien organizada pensaba nunca en sí mismo, poniendo, en cambio, su existencia entera al servicio del bienestar comunitario<sup>47</sup> (1998: 80).

The attributes of this society receive from the narrator the highest praise, showing perhaps a partiality toward the North, especially as the basis for the advancement of society and of the nation as a whole.

In what appears to be a most objective account of the two villages, and respectively the Two Spains, the narrator then turns to the beneficial aspects of the South, focusing on the deep cultural richness of the South as one of its best attributes:

El otro pueblo a que antes hice referencia llegó a la deriva costeano el Mediterráneo y se asentó en la zona meridional de España. Sus gentes estaban a favor de todo lo que significara placer y cultura, y fomentaban todo lo tocante a cosas del espíritu. Adoraban las flores como símbolo de lo más exquisito de la naturaleza. Una vez que se aposentaron en España, no volvieron a ocuparse de nada que oliera a negocio o a deber y se dedicaron por entero a las bellas artes y a pasarlo lo mejor posible<sup>48</sup> (1998: 80).

However, while the description of the beneficial aspects of the North also reaches into the positive outcomes for society as a whole, the description of the South ends with a listing of cultural products, from wine, to endless orchards, to the fine arts (1998: 81). This seems to be a bias on the part of the author, in that while he seeks to portray the two Spains equally, which becomes evident through the conclusion of the story, the positive aspects of the South seem

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<sup>47</sup> The most honest and industrious people collaborated among themselves to the limit of their strength, always helping one another. No individual in that highly organized society ever thought about himself, on the contrary, placing his entire existence at the service of the well-being of the community.

<sup>48</sup> The other people to which I referred drifted down along the coast of the Mediterranean and settled in the southern part of Spain. These peoples were in favor of everything that meant pleasure and culture, and promoted everything related to things of the spirit. They adored flowers as a symbol of the most exquisite in all Nature. Once they were settled in Spain, they no longer occupied themselves with anything that smelled of business or obligation and they devoted themselves entirely to the fine arts and to enjoying themselves as much as possible.

limited to the products it produces, and it appears Alfau praises of the benefits of the advancing and modern Spain over the benefits of the traditional Spain.

As the critique of the two villages continues, the narrator turns to the negative aspects of the progressive Spain. Here Alfau seems to create his critique around the idea that the North is more prone to existential crises as a result of its outlook on work and pleasure, which reminds the reader of the existential crises among the characters of *Locos* and *Chromos*, except that this time, the reason for such a crisis is the lack of leisure:

Sin embargo, y a despecho de la aparente prosperidad de aquel pueblo, en el alma de cada individuo anidaba una profunda insatisfacción. Algo estaba fallando en cada una de aquellas vidas. No hacían nada a lo largo del día aparte de trabajar y dormir con objeto de recuperar las fuerzas precisas para trabajar más al día siguiente. Además, muchas noches ni siquiera dormían; se quedaban despiertos preguntándose por el sentido de sus vidas. No conocían placer alguno, no sabían lo que era un rato de ocio o de diversión, todo se reducía para ellos a trabajo y más trabajo. ¿Qué objetivo perseguían? ¿En nombre de qué se atareaban así? ¿A qué les llevaba todo aquel progreso si no tenían tiempo para saborear el fruto de su labor?<sup>49</sup> (1998: 80).

This critique of the North viewed as a symbol for the progressive Spain aligns well with what other authors have stated about this particular Spain: the progress that is its advantage is also its destruction. Alfau also points to the repercussions of such an outlook on life, which parallels the critique Spaniards have always made of the Northern character:

Y el sumo caudillo de aquel pueblo empezó a ver que sus súbditos se dirigían al trabajo con cara malhumorada, sin entusiasmo, y como quería mucho a aquella gente y no se explicaba lo que le estaba pasando, también él empezó a sentirse muy infeliz<sup>50</sup> (1998: 80).

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<sup>49</sup> However, in spite of the apparent prosperity of that people, in the soul of each individual there dwelled a profound dissatisfaction. Something was missing in every one of those lives. They did nothing in the whole day apart from work and sleep with the objective of regaining strength to work even more the next day. Furthermore, many nights they couldn't even sleep, they remained awake asking themselves what was the meaning of their lives. They hadn't experienced any pleasure, and they didn't know what it was to have a time of leisure or enjoyment, everything, for them, came down to work and more work. What objective did they pursue? In the name of what did they work like that? What was the end goal to all that progress if they didn't have time to enjoy the fruit of their labor?

<sup>50</sup> And the high commander of that village started to see his subjects going to work with grumpy faces, without enthusiasm, and since he loved those people very much and couldn't explain to himself what was happening, he himself also started to feel very unhappy.

The dry and serious characteristics usually associated with the North are explained in the story as consequences of their very outlook on life, in focusing too much on production and materialism.

In depicting the negative characteristics of the South, the narrative contains equally as tough a critique on the South as on the North, perhaps only with the consequences of the South's weaknesses being greater than the North's. It focuses, above all, on the lack of planning for the future among these Southerners: "Vivían sólo para la belleza, pero estaban malgastando su tiempo y consumiendo sus reservas de felicidad sin ninguna previsión para el futuro. No tenían ni la más remota idea de lo que significaban las palabras obligación o trabajo; sólo tenían tratos con el bienestar y la indolencia"<sup>51</sup> (1998: 81). The critique of the South, however, also goes deeper into the character of these Southerners, as Alfau even labels them as selfish: "Aquella gente sin planes de futuro no se ocupaba más que del propio bienestar. Ni se ayudaban ni se molestaban unos a otros. La comunidad se mostraba absolutamente indiferente a las necesidades de sus miembros, y vivían en un estado de anarquía casi total"<sup>52</sup> (1998: 81). Associating this way of life with anarchy alerts today's reader to the difficulties the political Left were to have in the Civil War as it attempted to organize the anarchists who resisted all authority. Alfau's critique again seems to be an attempt to be fair to both sides; however, his own leanings seem to be toward the North, since he speaks of the North's support networks while referencing the South's selfishness. His final statement reiterates a more biting criticism toward the South: "Se encaminaban hacia la ruina más absoluta. Al fin y al cabo, sus logros artísticos no iban a

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<sup>51</sup> "They lived only for beauty, but they were wasting their time and eating up their reserves of happiness without any provision for the future. They didn't have even the remotest idea of what the words obligation or work meant; they only had commitments to well-being and laziness."

<sup>52</sup> "These people with no plans for the future were only concerned about their own well-being. They neither helped nor hindered one another. The community was completely indifferent to the needs of its members and they lived in a state of almost total anarchy."

proporcionarles comida ni abrigo el día de mañana”<sup>53</sup> (1998: 81). The lack of care for one another and the lack of responsibility are the arrowhead of his criticism of the South.

Within this somewhat typical retelling of the two Spains, there are a couple of mentions of interesting characters, which, when compared to the political events of Spain in the 1920s, take on new significance. The first of these mentions is the “caudillo,” in English, the commander, who represents the government of Spain at the time. From what we can assume as to the span of time in which Alfau might have been writing these stories, the reference to the “caudillo” is most likely a reference to Miguel Primo de Rivera, the military leader turned dictator at the time Alfau was writing, undermining the Spanish Constitution in 1929. There of course exists the possibility that Alfau is describing a different political leader, or that his reference is unspecified, but the inclusion of the word, “caudillo,” seems to make this unlikely, since this term aligns well with the dictatorship Spain was experiencing at that time, and would be an anachronism were we to think it referred to Franco. This particular leader in the story had the backing of the political Right, of which Alfau would consider himself a participant, and considering the depiction of the “caudillo” Alfau presents in the story, his image of this leader is not one of extreme negativity: for, as seen in the previously-stated depiction in the story, Alfau describes him as a leader concerned with the morale of his people (1998: 80). However, Alfau does have the “caudillo” take responsibility for the idleness of the South, or at least for having allowed them to reach such a state:

Y su caudillo, que les había dado alas para seguir aquella vida de desenfreno, que había alentado sus locos anhelos de placer y belleza y su profundo desprecio hacia todo lo necesario y útil, los miraba ahora hastiados y bostezando, veía desaprovechados todos los hermosos frutos de la tierra, y al pensar en aquellos súbditos bienamados se sentía invadir por la pesadumbre<sup>54</sup> (1998: 82).

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<sup>53</sup> “They were heading for complete ruin. In the end, their artistic achievements were not going to feed and clothe them for the morrow.”

<sup>54</sup> And their commander, who had given them wings to continue that life of excess, who had encouraged their yearning for pleasure and beauty and their profound lack of appreciation toward all that is necessary and useful,

Therefore it fits that Alfau's representation of the "caudillo" would not be a negative one, especially since he represents the political beliefs with which Alfau would always associate himself. However, the depiction of the "caudillo" is not one created out of blind submission to authority, since Alfau does assign him flaws, one being the lack of ability to change the lifestyles of these two villages and another the indulgence towards the South's idleness.

The other important additional character in the story is the prophet that comes to offer a solution to the two villages. This prophet, again a most likely candidate for autobiographical connections to Alfau, represents the role of the writer or the artist, removed from society and capable of unique perceptions: "Estando las cosas en tan triste estado, un famoso profeta llegó a España un buen día. Hay un proverbio español que dice que 'nadie es profeta en su tierra,' pero afortunadamente este que digo venía de alguna tierra desconocida, y por eso le hicieron caso"<sup>55</sup> (1998: 82). The mysterious origins of this prophet are fitting with Romantic literature as well as biblical references, since the idiom quoted is actually from the Bible, in reference to Old Testament prophecy and even Jesus Christ. The prophet is also coincidentally similar to the author's own background, as he was living in New York City. The prophet's solution to the polarity of the two villages is for them to mix and share their cultures so as to arrive at a place in which both are valued: "—Ninguno de vosotros está completamente en lo cierto ni completamente equivocado. Ambos pueblos, vosotros los del Norte y vosotros los del Sur, debéis reuniros y mezclaros, porque tenéis muchas cosas que aprender uno a otro y muchas que

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saw them now bored and yawning, he saw wasted all the beautiful fruits of the earth, and when he thought of those beloved subjects he felt himself invaded by sorrow.

<sup>55</sup> "And with things in this sad state, a famous prophet came to Spain one fine day. There is a Spanish proverb that says that 'no one is a prophet in his own land,' but fortunately, this prophet of whom I speak came from some unknown land, and for this reason they listened to him."

enseñar el uno al otro”<sup>56</sup> (1998: 84-5). There is nothing original in this idea, with no great insight available from this prophet, except, perhaps, for the final comment comparing idealism to reality: “Todo esto lo saben los hombres desde que el mundo es mundo, pero su aplicación a la práctica requiere una tolerancia de carácter que el ser humano no suele poseer”<sup>57</sup> (1998: 85). The idea that the practical application of these ideas would be the difficulty in uniting these two Spains, does seem to reach the level of prophecy, given that Alfau wrote this analogy for the two Spains only a few years before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

While the story represents a drastic change from Alfau’s ambiguous and ironic narratives, the actual content he delivers through this analogy is not original. Several authors, including Mariano José de Larra, Miguel de Unamuno and Antonio Machado have used the image of “the Two Spains” in their literature. However, perhaps the originality in Alfau’s use of this analogy comes from the conclusion of the story as the narrative slips into the surreal:

Vuestra cultura os ha llevado demasiado lejos en direcciones opuestas, y ya no queda más que una solución para vuestro problema, aunque no es de tipo humano. Puedo convertirlos en un nuevo género de insecto que aúne las buenas calidades de ambos pueblos, es decir, que trabaje para aumentar la belleza de la vida<sup>58</sup> (1998: 85).

This solution, which is more accurately a lack of a solution, is an instance of Alfau’s tendency towards the surreal when confronted with insurmountable political or social predicaments. The absurd continues to play itself out in the plot: “Entonces el profeta hizo una amplia señal, y el milagro se operó. Al bajar el brazo, se había convertido en un jefe sobrenatural encabezando el

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<sup>56</sup> None of you is completely in the right or completely wrong. People of both villages, those from the North and those from the South, you should meet and mix among yourselves, because you have many things to learn from each other and many things to teach each other.

<sup>57</sup> “Men have known all of this since the world came into existence, but the practical application requires a tolerance of character that human beings do not normally possess.”

<sup>58</sup> Your culture has gone too far in opposite directions, and now there is nothing left but one solution to your problem, although it is not of the human kind. I can transform you into a new species of insect that combines the good qualities of both villages, I mean, that works to increase the beauty of life.

extraño y armonioso zumbido de incontables enjambres de abejas”<sup>59</sup> (1998: 86). While there is a certain logic in choosing the bees as a symbol for the hybridity of the two Spains, this narrative twist seems more a move toward the absurd, reminiscent of Magic Realism, and the playful chaos of Postmodernism. Using the surreal as a solution in this story represents the difficulty of resolving the predicament in Spain. In this way, converting the peoples of the two villages into bees is a prophecy pointing toward the drastic changes and transformations Spain would have to undergo in order to find a middle ground between the two opposing sides.

## 2.6 Form in the Stories

Turning to the form and structure of the short stories, on the whole, the techniques used remain primarily conventional. While most of these techniques have been mentioned throughout the discussion of the specific stories, it is important to view them as a whole, especially since they dramatically contrast the experimental techniques of Alfau’s novels. As a theoretical foundation for this discussion, I will refer to the three essential qualities of a good short story, as set out by Kilduff et al in *Working with Short Stories* (1991), which are: unity of impression, moment of crisis and symmetry of design. This triple nature had been set out by Allen in his *The Short Story in English* (1981), and the definitional paradigm he suggests is that: “we recognize a short story as such because we feel that we are reading something that is the fruit of a single moment of time, of a single incident, a single perception.” In terms of these criteria, Alfau seems to fulfill these qualities in his stories. Therefore, in the remainder of this section on form, I will expand upon which stories best represent these different characteristics, and then I will return to the significance of these patterns within the oeuvre of Alfau.

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<sup>59</sup> “So the prophet made a broad sign and the miracle was performed. When he lowered his arm, he was converted into a supernatural leader in charge of the strange and harmonious buzz of uncountable swarms of bees.”

Unity of impression is a rather abstract concept basically referring to how well the separate components of the story work together to create a cohesive and pleasing result. Edgar Allan Poe, in his essay, “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846), called this the “unity of effect,” focusing on the drive of the story and the tone the author maintains throughout. Poe also pays special attention to how the reader will respond to the story, and identifies this as an essential aspect of story writing. In *Old Tales from Spain*, as previously mentioned, Alfau does achieve unity of impression through his heavily Romantic tendencies; however, I would argue that this unity of impression is at times forced and oversaturated with romantic imagery. One particularly blatant example of this heavy-handed Romanticism is “El Sauce y el ciprés,” since the tone remains nostalgic and melancholic throughout, with the drama of the story enclosed by mirroring images of the two trees side by side. “Entre dos luces” contains similar symmetry since it begins and ends with a young boy’s adventure, yet in the middle transitions into a myth. The themes also contribute to the unity of impression, since the myth provides a sort of moral lesson about contentment, which the young boy then applies to his particular situation. While these are only two examples of how Alfau unifies his stories through the use of Romanticism, Romanticism can be found throughout the stories, as has been previously discussed. Therefore, we could say that Alfau’s stories are highly successful in this category since they consistently cohere to the rules of Romantic literature. However, it becomes very clear that Alfau’s Romanticism is an intentional copy, and the doubt remains as to what extent creating a replica is as praiseworthy as creating an original rendition.

The second category laid out by May, that of a moment of crisis, is perhaps the category most easily recognizable in these short stories. Alfau succeeds in this category by incorporating these moments sometimes metaphysically (“La leyenda de abejas,” “Entre dos luces”) or through

situations of physical danger (“Barcos de vela,” “El trébol). Many of these moments are reminiscent of fairy tales, such as in “La bruja de Amboto,” in which one brave individual must kill the evil witch, or in “El canto del cisne” when the prince must choose between selfish gain or sacrificial love. Yet while these moments are easily identifiable in the text, the question still lingers as to whether the presence of these crises is sufficient in order to claim the success of these stories. For while these moments of crisis do exist in every story of *Old Tales from Spain*, the conflicts Alfau chooses to portray are so typical they almost fall into the category of cliché. Therefore, the reader does not experience the moment of crisis as if he was living the experience with the characters, for the outcome is almost certainly foreseeable. Perhaps, then, this is the main point of failure in these short stories, for the urgency and suspense is lost upon the readers who are comfortably witnessing the playing out of what they already assume will happen.

The final aspect of form that May considers essential to the success of a short story is the symmetry of design. In this aspect Alfau is meticulously aware of structure, and many stories contain patterns and design that reveal this attention to detail. As previously discussed, the use of frame narrators and frame stories lends itself well to this symmetry since they ease the reader into the story and also equally lead the reader to a point of conclusion. These frame narrators can be found in “La rivalidad,” “El gusano de oro” and “Entre dos luces.” While other stories lack frame narrators, Alfau uses other techniques to bring about a sense of symmetry. The motif of the rainbow in the story “El arco iris” is clearly central to the story since it titles the story, and, even more so, it appears in a moment of foreshadowing and is key to the denouement. As previously mentioned, in “El sauce y el cipres” symmetry is achieved through the bird’s-eye view of the two trees with which the author begins and ends.

In the discussion of each one of these characteristics, the one repeating pattern is how Alfau recycles techniques already common in short stories, such as Romantic imagery, or cliché moments of conflict, creating a respectable volume of short stories, but less than innovative or noteworthy. He tends to use forms already established by other authors and movements, relying on genres such as fairy tales or the retelling of legends as techniques for developing his own work. The Romantic style of the stories also reminds the reader of the typical Romantic form often associated to Washington Irving in his work, *Tales of the Alhambra*, and this stock form is especially notable in Alfau's story "El trebol." Also, the addition of the surprise ending, crafted meticulously in "El sauce y el ciprés," reminds the reader of the class of story told by O. Henry, gently startling the reader, but never shocking. A particularly weak point of this volume is the use of allegory as a thinly masked political essay. It is quite clear to the reader that in these stories the priority has shifted from quality storytelling to political expository writing. One highlight amidst the mediocrity of the form of the stories could be the use of his frame narrators and the creation of the story within the story, especially important in "La rivalidad" and "El gusano de oro." In these ever-so-slight deviations from the standard form of these short stories, one can see the novelist of *Locos* and *Chromos* emerging, as these particular techniques allow the author to distance himself from the story being told and remain anonymous in the background. However, apart from these two techniques, the form of the stories is unoriginal, further demonstrating Alfau's schizophrenic persona as an author, or, perhaps, this is an example of his desperate attempts to publish, which in this case, worked in his favor.

Curiously, Charles May has stated that the short story is especially useful in minority writing, and has become the preferred vehicle of many such writers. He states that such writing has "the magic suggestiveness of music," perhaps more subtly and appropriately alluding to the

challenges of life as an outsider (May 1995:15). Therefore, it is somewhat disappointing that this particular work by Alfau should contain little to none of his Third Space writing, but perhaps *Old Tales from Spain* reveals more about the author in his formative years than his definitive style found in his later works. Even *Locos*, which could be considered a volume of short stories (although this study has claimed otherwise), is centered on Spain rather than liminal experience. In the end, Alfau's two genres of choice for liminal writing are the novel, which, as I have previously discussed, he succeeds at, and poetry, which is the last of his works to be analyzed in this chapter.

## **2.7 Conclusions**

Having discussed the styles, the techniques and format Alfau uses in this collection of short stories, it becomes increasingly clear how very distinct this work is from the two novels. Whether or not this is due to the simple change in genre or the fact that Alfau was complex in his own persona, these short stories reveal less of the innovative author from *Locos* and *Chromos*. The overriding Romantic style is exclusive to only these stories and Alfau's poetry, with the novels containing a much more conglomerated experimental style, composed of a variety of techniques meshed together to Alfau's liking. The tone in the short stories is also much more literal and in line with traditional fairy tales, while the writing in the novels shows a highly ironic and distanced perspective. The idea of form is also different in the short stories, as Alfau adheres to a traditional form throughout all the stories, without digressions or disruptions.

Within this very different representation of Alfau as an author, there are several points in the short stories in which Alfau the novelist shines through his own rigid formatting. There is the momentary lapse into the ironic found in "El gusano de oro," or "La rivalidad," reminding us of the ironic voice of the narrator from the novels. Also, while the reader expects to find a

selection of stories for children, even within the limits of this genre, Alfau dabbles with deeper themes, and in most cases, when he embarks toward the philosophical through the technique of allegory, it is to make a criticism of Spanish society. The narration of these stories also reminds the reader, on occasion, of the unreliable narrator primarily found in *Locos* but present in *Chromos* as well, for example, in “El gusano de oro,” the father intentionally reveals to his daughter the lack of veracity of the story he just told.

On another level, while some of the stories are simple tales of Romanticism, there are several themes that lurk beneath the surface of these carefree children’s tales. The first theme identified by Martín Gaité is that of the recurring protagonist: the young male with mysterious origins, flawed in either his own obscurity or his egocentrism. This protagonist, as Martín Gaité proposes, does bear a strong resemblance to the young author of these tales, finding his own literary voice (1998: xx). Another theme that emerges from these stories is the representation of the Third Space through the use of fairy tales, especially through the image of “the Other,” accompanied by a critique of “othering” in itself, recognizable in the tale “El arco iris.” There is also more of a tendency in this book than in the novels that would follow to comment on the events in Spain, the land Alfau had left behind. The latter books focus, instead, on the inability to speak into Spanish life, perhaps because of the distance wedged between the author and the land. This seems a reasonable conclusion since Alfau composed these stories during his first years in the United States, while his connections to Spain were still fresh and relevant.

One final hypothesis on this collection of stories focuses on the progression of Alfau’s voice as a writer throughout his lifetime. While it is true that Alfau wrote these stories in hopes of commercial success, there also exists the possibility that the change in the voice of the author comes with his movement further into the Third Space. This is a common occurrence within the

theory on the Third Space, since many theorists reference how the very inhabitation of the Third Space forces the author on a journey to find a voice that is appropriate and compatible with his experience. Therefore, while these stories are less critically acclaimed, they do show the author's progression into writing from the Third Space, as he struggles to find his voice.

### **3 The Poetry: *La poesía cursi***

In considering Alfau's book of poetry, *La poesía cursi*, first I will evaluate what has already been said about this work, with each perspective taking on more importance since this work is so little known. Ilan Stavans is both the translator of the poems into English and the author of the introduction to the book itself. Stavans offers this perspective on Alfau's poetry:

*La poesía cursi* is a rebuttal of Romanticism, but it emerges from the very ranks of the Romantic movement and its sense of life. Thus, parody is the book's signature. Alfau tries to caricature the sweep and atmosphere of Romanticism, with its drive for spontaneity, creative freedom, an inflated emotional engagement with the universe, and with its opposition to Rationalism (1992a: xii).

Another hint as to the purpose of this book comes from the title page through a quotation from one of Alfau's fictional characters, Garcia, stating: "Soy romántico y por eso mismo es que me burlo del romanticismo"<sup>60</sup> (1992: 1). Starting the book of poetry in that way prepares the reader for a parody of Romanticism, but as the reader makes his way through the book, it leaves him wondering to what extent Alfau is truly mocking Romanticism or if he is participating in it. If the second option is true, the participation must be a conscious one, as one continues on with a bad habit although aware of its negative effects. On this point I disagree with Ilan Stavans' review of the work, for after reading the poems in search of this parody, it seems that Alfau wrote the majority of the poems in a style that fully participates in Romanticism. Only a few of the poems allow for a satirical interpretation and even those poems contain less dramatic irony

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<sup>60</sup> "I am a Romantic, and that's why I make fun of Romanticism." [The translations from *La poesía cursi* are Ilan Stavans's from the book itself except when otherwise noted]

than Alfau's prose. Indeed, another reviewer of this work, Lawrence Olszewski, notes the conventional nature of the poetry, which he says, "hark back to late-19th-century Spanish poetic style," not containing the same innovative experimentation as the novels (1992: 85). Ilan Stavans has also commented on the meticulous restrictions Alfau placed on the form of the poems: "All with a careful metrical system and following a format in vogue in the late nineteenth century with many South American *modernistas*" (1996a: 153). Since Alfau wrote this poetry throughout almost the entirety of the twentieth century, this tendency to revert back to a prior system is an incongruence with what we know of his prose writing.

Before moving onto the poetry itself, there is something more to be said about the framework set around the book of poetry, being, in this case, the title Alfau chose to give this work, "*La poesía cursi*". The issue of this choice of words arises when Ilan Stavans, in translating the title, must find an equivalent for the term in English and can only come up with the word "sentimental" (1992a: xiv). This is a fascinating predicament, given that it mirrors the predicament the two characters "Alfau" and Garcia find themselves in when translating the same word from Garcia's novel in *Chromos*:

He was in a temporizing mood. He said that he agreed in principle but that he had done it intentionally as part of the presentation, in keeping with the times when the action took place. Stereotyped style, situations, phrases. You know: *cursi*, and he reminded me that this was not the final draft and that he expected to improve it (1990: 103).

In this explanation from the character Garcia, *cursi* is portrayed as a style of literature, and while the novel presents this statement through an ironic lens, one begins to wonder at Alfau's intention for this book of poetry when he names it *cursi*. Perhaps this is for him a sort of guilty pleasure of participating in the very style he criticizes, or maybe there is a deeper criticism present in the poetry.

Especially when considering Alfau's poetry, it is also important to keep in mind several things about the author himself. The first thing of which Ilan Stavans reminds the reader is that "Alfau is a prose writer who happens to write poetry" (1992a: xi). This is one plausible reason as to why it lacks the revolutionary and innovative style that makes his prose so distinct. Stavans also grants permission to read these poems as being closely related to the poet himself: "The themes are often autobiographical and have an immediacy that apparently results from personal experiences, like the death of a companion or the daily contact with Afro-Americans in New York City" (1992a: xii). Such a comment from this friend and closest literary contact to Alfau opens a door to reading the poetry as largely autobiographical. Stavans makes one further comment on the poet himself, stating: "Alfau's poetic voice is very much like his own: sarcastic, baroque, and theatrical" (1992a: xiii). I would argue, however, that Alfau's poetic voice is only partially representative of his own voice, in that in this work he is most definitely theatrical, and at times baroque, but lacking the sarcasm more prevalent in his novels.

### **3.1 Romanticism in Alfau's Poetry**

The first poem in *La poesía cursi* is titled "Romanticismo," and in evaluating the Romanticism of Alfau's poetry, it seems a logical place to start. The poem is very formal in its structure, and the rhyme scheme is consistent and systematic, even concluding with a heroic couplet. Within the rhyme scheme there is also a sense in which the poet is playing with different rhyme arrangements, as if to exhibit his abilities, starting with ABBAB, followed by CDCD, then on to GHHG, and finally ending with IJJJJ. Again, such meticulous organization and variety show a very traditional perspective on what the structure of a poem should be, but at nineteen lines long, it is not of a traditional fixed length. There is also the use of parentheses in the sixth and seventh line of the poem, reminding the reader of e.e. cummings, who was a contemporary of Alfau. The

poem is divided into three stanzas, each one with its own focus, but with a volta at the midway point of the poem through the introduction of the idea of “alegría,” in English, “happiness” (1992: line 10).

As for the content of the poem, it goes through Romanticism with an almost categorical approach, checking off each major aspect of Romanticism as it progresses. Much of the Romanticism presented seems to align better with what would be considered the Spanish version of Romanticism, focusing on topics such as suicide, destiny and fate (1992: lines 1, 5, 6). The poem also makes reference to the moon and uses it in the Romantic sense as a symbol of lunacy. The darkness of these Romantic characteristics is contrasted at the volta with the naivety of others in their happiness, using the sun as a symbol for these simpler blissful perspectives (1992: line 9). Toward the end of the poem, the subject turns to the idea of life being death (1992: line 19). This thought is also reminiscent of Gothic literature and the perspective found in many Romantic works. Even at the conclusion of the poem, it is nearly impossible to find any sort of mocking tone toward Romanticism. It states the negativity of the Romantic perspective, but it does not do so in an openly cynical or ironic manner, nor does it contrast Romanticism with any better outlook on life, judging harshly the naivety of the happily innocent.

One can draw a curious comparison from this poem to the novel *Locos*, since the type of personality Alfau is describing in the poem bears a strong resemblance to the character of Doña Micaela from *Locos*, who is obsessed with death. There are several references in the poem that stand out as being very similar to the description of Doña Micaela. First, the idea of living a suicide greatly resembles Doña Micaela and her repetitive deaths, or the solution Dr. de los Rios offers, for her to commit suicide in order to regain her life. Other details from the poem also remind the reader of Doña Micaela, from the idea of “egomania,” self-obsession, to the mention

of the “fantasma,” ghost, since the novel refers to Doña Micaela’s movements as those of a ghost (1992: lines 11, 18). Even the idea that “en el amor nunca tuvo fortuna,”<sup>61</sup> brings the reader back to Doña Micaela’s deceased husbands, as she would eventually bring them to their deaths (1992: line 7). One wonders then, if Doña Micaela is a negative example of Romanticism in the novel *Locos*, or if this poem is somehow related to the religiosity that defines Doña Micaela.

There also seems to be a relationship between this poem, specifically, and the theory of the Third Space. Knowing that Alfau wrote this poem as an immigrant in New York City, the idea of the phantom ship coming into the port of happiness conjures up pictures of the past haunting the present as if a phantom, or the immigrant, caught up in the tension of the Third Space and watching the uninhibited happiness of those around him who do not have the same nostalgic relationship with the past as he does. Also, the idea of living a death seems relevant to the immigrant life, since embracing the new nation and its customs means dying to the past, or, as described in the poem, to live a suicide. There is also a sense of mourning for oneself, a concept which could reveal a loss of identity as one has to abandon parts of oneself in adapting to a new culture.

Returning to Ilan Stavans’s interpretation of this poem in particular, while Stavans argues that Alfau wrote this poem ironically, there is not strong enough evidence in the poem itself to render this interpretation valid. Stavans’s argument for viewing this poem as ironic comes from the heroic couplet at the end of the poem, as mentioned earlier. He states that this couplet sets itself apart from the rest of the poem and thereby reveals the irony at work. The couplet: “La egomanía lo encerró como un presidio./ Su vida fue un suicidio,”<sup>62</sup> is actually a restating of the prior line, stating that his whole life was a death (1992: lines 18-19). Therefore, it seems that the

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<sup>61</sup> “In love he [she] was never lucky” [My translation]

<sup>62</sup> “Its egotism was a prison;  
life, a suicide.”

entire poem retains the same tone throughout, with a negative depiction of Romanticism, but lacking the biting irony of *Locos* and *Chromos*. This is where Ilan Stavans's statement that the poetry is largely ironic does not seem to be supported by the poetry itself. One finds the author playing along with Romanticism more than rebelling against it, either subtly or openly.

The majority of the poems seem to follow this same structure and style. For example, "El Naturalista" criticizes the scientist who anatomizes wild nature, taming it and killing it in order for it to be dissected and displayed. Both the content and the structure are very traditional, avoiding Alfau's more creative techniques. In looking more carefully at the structure, one finds a similar rhyme scheme to what Alfau used in his poem "Romanticismo"; however, perhaps this poem contains more variation by uniting the separate stanzas with one line of repeated rhyme. The poem also offers similarities to other Romantic poets, especially through the use of exclamatory statements, reminding the reader of Wordsworth. The parentheses used in "Romanticismo" find their way into this poem as well, though again reminiscent of the later poet, e.e. cummings. The structure of the poem is even more formally arranged into stanzas of five lines, with most of them beginning with the exclamatory statements, again adding to the evidence that the poem is structured with the intent of being formal and Romantic.

In evaluating the content of the poem, one finds, once again, a lack of rebuttal against Romanticism. Taking a closer look at the word choice throughout the poem, it is evident that Alfau has specifically chosen a cross between scientific and romantic language, shown through contrasts like "selva" and "laboratorio," jungle and laboratory in English, or "taumaturgo," in English, miracle-worker, a word in Spanish that sounds lofty and intellectual, contrasted with the word "artista," artist (1992: lines 2-3). In general, the tone of the poem depicts the Romantic in a positive light, while portraying the scientific negatively. As the poem progresses, the language

again takes a Romantic turn, comparing the relationship of science to nature as that of an abusive lover and his victim. Indeed, the poem links the butterflies, a representation of the beauty of nature, directly to women: “como si fuesen retratos de mujeres”<sup>63</sup> (1992: line 9). As the imagery escalates, the mounting of butterflies is compared to a rape, and the scientist as an “amante de tu víctima inocente”<sup>64</sup> (1992: line 12). This mirrors the Romantic exaltation of pure nature coupled with the denouncement of killing and classifying nature. However, the poem does not pursue any theme or opinion beyond this typical Romantic argument. It is entirely lacking in evidence for any claim of irony, without even a momentary lapse into a contrasting tone. Therefore, in this poem specifically, there is only a reversion back to a Romantic perspective as if it were a guilty pleasure.

As this methodological consistency in rhyme and structure continues throughout the collection, the vast difference between Alfau the poet and Alfau the novelist soon becomes overwhelming clear. In Alfau’s novels he purposefully remains enigmatic in his style, never allowing the reader to know exactly when the events take place or in which order they occur. He also comments on his own writing, breaking the separation between the author and the written work, but also at times leading the reader astray by allowing him to believe that the narrator is trustworthy. All of these characteristics are strangely reversed in Alfau’s poetry.

Another way in which Alfau’s poetry differs significantly from his prose is in the themes found in his poetry. Except in a few cases, his poetry addresses the representative topics of Romanticism, one of which being the loss of youth. In “Reflexión,” for example, the poem relates youth to spring, and autumn and winter to old age, which are classic similes that have become stock images of Romantic poetry. Alfau could manipulate these images into the ironic,

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<sup>63</sup> “As if they were portraits of women.”

<sup>64</sup> “Lover of your innocent victim.”

but he only reaffirms them, at all times keeping the form and the rhyme intact. In his poem “Juventud urbana,” (“Urban Youth”), the poet also reflects on this theme of the loss of youth: “Aquellos fueron días de vino y rosas,/ vino después agriado por los años,/ rosas... ya sólo espinas entre la basura”<sup>65</sup> (1992: lines 22-24). The image of the rose, so overused in poetry that it has become a cliché, is central to this poem, even used in a stereotypical way of showing the passage of time. Yet another poem that discusses the loss of youth, with the enigmatic interrogative title “¿?” reflects the poet as observing and being observed in New York City: “Niños que son lo que fui/¿acaso pensarán/ que soy lo que serán/ cuando se fijan en mí?”<sup>66</sup> (1992: lines 1-4). This is yet another reflection on the chasm that forms between youth and old age and the naivety that accompanies youth in thinking that old age will never come.

Death also emerges as a theme, written about from a Romantic perspective in order to express the difficulty in losing a loved one, or the curiosity and fear related to knowing what comes after death. The poem “Magnetismo,” in English, “Magnetism,” uses death as an image of lost love, and the poem portrays the lover as drowning: “y la ví ahogarse y conservé la calma”<sup>67</sup> (1992: line 22). The idea of drowning, especially in relation to love is another representative image from Romanticism. In another poem, “Por qué,” in English, “Why,” the poet reflects on the death of a lover, revealing an egocentric perspective on death, stating, “No es ella la que ha muerto”<sup>68</sup> (1992: line 1). This is the sort of theatrical poetic voice that Stavans ascribes to Alfau; however, the Romantic rendition of loss is preserved without any hint of altering it for the sake of irony. In one final example from the poem “Funeral,” death is first

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<sup>65</sup> “Those were days of wine and roses:/ wine, turned sour with the years;/ roses. . . now only thorns amid the rubbish.”

<sup>66</sup> “Children that are what I once was./ Do they ever think/ that I am what they will become,/ when they notice me?”

<sup>67</sup> “I saw her drown and I remained calm.”

<sup>68</sup> “She’s not the one who died.”

represented as a stately occasion, an end to a long journey, but by the end of the poem, death has become a thing of nightmares, with the dead crying out from the grave: “Es entonces que todos oímos su grito,/ el loco y final alarido,/ el horror de morir sin estar en lo cierto”<sup>69</sup> (1992: lines 63-65). The image of death as something to be feared, both mysterious and dark, is a Romantic one. Indeed, it is not only the opening lines of this poem that remind us of Romanticism, later to be rebuffed at the conclusion, it is the conclusion of the poem itself that reiterates the Romantic perspective, casting doubt on this idea that Romanticism is only a caricature in these poems.

One more Romantic theme addressed frequently in Alfau’s poetry is the theme of remembering: mainly remembering youth, which has already been discussed, but also remembering scenes from the Golden Age of Spain and other references to progress and change over the years. In “Epitafio,” in English “Epitaph,” one finds a brief description of a bullfight, and someone who “pasó de pronto a la historia/ despachado por un toro/ en una tarde siniestra,/ en una tarde de gloria/ en una tarde de oro”<sup>70</sup> (1992: lines 2-6). This poem is also strikingly similar to Federico García Lorca’s poem, “Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías” (1935), dedicated to the matador killed in a bullring in 1934, causing us to wonder which poem preceded the other, and if either author had inspired the other’s poem. One can hear the nostalgia through the voice of the poet as he recalls this scene. Another such example comes from the poem “La cena del hidalgo,” (“The Nobleman’s Supper”), which seems to refer back to the Golden Age of Spain and the simplicity of life in those days. Once again, the *cursi* aspect of the poem receives but a slight ironic rebuttal: “Y de postre al balcón/ a mirar las estrellas;/ que es también su oración/ antes de soñar con ellas”<sup>71</sup> (1992: lines 9-12). It makes reference to the riches available to all

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<sup>69</sup> “And then all heard his scream,/ the demented, final shriek,/ expressing the horror of dying without the assurance.”

<sup>70</sup> “he suddenly became history/ dispatched by a bull on a sinister afternoon,/ a glorious/ and golden afternoon.”

<sup>71</sup> “And for dessert the balcony/ to contemplate the stars./ He will pray before dreaming of them.”

who have the eyes to see the beauty around them, but, like the *hidalgo* in *Lazarillo de Tormes*, have nothing to fill their belly. This is the conclusion of the poem, leaving the reader with a questionable Romantic image.

These are the clearest examples of Romantic themes found throughout Alfau's poetry, but they are most definitely not the only ones. Others that could be included would be love, loss of innocence and nature. However, as previously stated, in almost every case these themes are dealt with from an entirely intact Romantic perspective, without irony breaking through at any point.

### **3.2 The Third Space in the Poetry**

In discussing Alfau's poetry, especially these themes that define the majority of the collection, being loss of youth, death and nostalgia, we find that they are not just representative of the Romantic movement, but they are also representative of the Third Space. In comparing passages from the novel *Chromos* with these poems, one can see similar tendencies toward characteristic traits of the Third Space. In one passage from the novel, a character slips into a nostalgic memory:

In the dark chamber of his mind was reflected the sunny yard, but it was a chromo of a legendary patio in Andalucia. Majos dressed in short jacket with calañés and fringed leggings; some in colorful bullfighters' costumes and manolas with shawls and mantillas, high combs and full skirts and guitars and castanets and kegs of manzanilla, flowers on women's heads and in men's teeth and everywhere and bright sun as only it can shine in one's imagination. He had never been to Sevilla (1990: 313).

While the poetry never so directly speaks of Spain, there is the same nostalgic reaching back into memory to see the way things used to be. At another point in the novel, the same nostalgic glance into the past again reminds the reader of these Romantic poems:

“I doubt you would like it— you know—” His hand moved with dismay. “But what can one do? Perhaps someday, again in Spain.” His usual laughter was missing. “That is what we always say: perhaps someday and we know the day never comes. We leave in order to think of returning, in

order to love more. It is a very old vice and that makes it a virtue, but let us dream, my dear.” (1990: 343)

The idea of returning to the past and finding it to be inevitably altered is yet another way in which these nostalgic comments in the novel resemble the tone of the poetry.

With these comments from *Chromos* in mind, there are certain poems that are particularly related to this gaze into the past. Perhaps the “Cena del hidalgo” is a glance back to the Spain of one’s memories, with the simplicity of life lost in the City of New York. The poem dedicated to a bullfighting scene, “Epitafio,” reminds the reader of Garcia and “Alfau” arguing in *Chromos* over whether or not to include a scene on bullfighting in Garcia’s novel, given that the audience would be American. The nostalgic nature of that poem is reiterated by its final lines, quoted once more, “en una tarde de gloria,/ en una tarde de oro,”<sup>72</sup> reminding the reader of Lorca’s reoccurring line and leitmotif of “a las cinco de la tarde” (“at five o’clock in the afternoon,” 1992: line 32). The reference to past glories and the Golden Age of Spain reaches back into Spanish history and times gone by. If these were not enough examples, the poem entitled “La nube de recuerdo,” in English, “The Cloud of Memory,” speaks about the obsession with memory as an unfulfilling desperation (1992: lines 5-9). One final reference reminiscent of the Americaniards from the novel *Chromos* comes in the poem “Ciclo,” in English “Cycle,” which begins by stating: “Hubo un alma directa,”<sup>73</sup> and goes on to speak of a line that has been bent by circumstances and changes, until, “Y tenemos,/ que hoy día, lo que fue es solamente/ el recuerdo ideal/ o la tangente/ de la circunferencia actual”<sup>74</sup> (1992: lines 8-12). This calls to mind the Americaniards who have undergone such a process of shifts in identity that they no longer resemble the people they once were before coming to New York.

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<sup>72</sup> “a glorious/ and golden afternoon.”

<sup>73</sup> “There was an honest soul.”

<sup>74</sup> “And here we are:/ that which once was/ is today only the ideal memory,/ or the tangent,/ of an actual circle.”

### 3.3 Deviations from the Norm

While most of Alfau's poems belong in the category of conventional poetry, there are a few poems that do stretch the boundaries, even if only slightly. These poems give clues that connect this work to the novels *Locos* and *Chromos*. Without those clues, *La poesía cursi* seems to be written by an entirely different author, due to the overriding Romantic quality of the poems. Perhaps this was intentional, since the inclusion of the quotation from Garcia at the beginning of the collection leaves the reader wondering if this book is in fact part of the world Alfau has created to encompass his own schizophrenic identity.

One of the poems that slightly deviates from the Romantic style is "Dos retratos de una dama," in English, "Two Portraits of a Lady." Even the title gives it away as straying from the norm with the obvious reference to modernist Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). The first part of the poem is a formal ode to feminine beauty. Alfau begins each stanza by focusing on one part of her body or personality, and then in the second part of the stanza, he makes a comparison to something in nature or to other women. Even modesty is described as one of her attributes in this ode to the lover's beauty: "Tus curvas que se entregan, tu porte tan discreto,/ hacen dudar lo que eres/ porque afirman y niegan el divino secreto/ que dan otras mujeres"<sup>75</sup> (1992: lines 9-12). This rendering of feminine beauty follows the rules of Romantic poetry, and all the imagery Alfau uses in the first part of the poem has been seen countless times in other poems, even reminding the reader of Shakespeare or John Donne at times, in the way he compares the female body to different objects.

In the second part of the poem, the tone changes as the poet begins again by describing, one can only assume, the same woman. This time, however, the description is still one of

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<sup>75</sup> "Your tempting curves that offer themselves, your discreet elegance,/ makes one doubt who you are./ They affirm and negate the Divine Secret/ other women don't hide."

attraction, but the innocence in the eye of the beholder is gone. The poet mixes a negative tone with admiration and one is not sure by the end of the poem if she is indeed attractive to the poet or not, as the original depiction has broken down. What is assumed as “natural” in the first part is now accused of being “sistemática,” in English systematic (1992: line 3). This reflects an objective gaze without the lens of Romantic beauty. The criticism deepens as the stanzas continue, reaching the conclusion of the poem, with a vision of an entirely different woman: “Por momentos despierta como desconcertada,/ si le hablan, y es helada su Mirada de muerta.../ pero se le ve cierta compostura estudiada”<sup>76</sup> (1992: lines 28-30). By using the same form as in the first part of the poem, but changing the key descriptive words, the poem creates a conscious narrator who is purposefully contrasting the “natural” and the “created”. Such a careful criticism of a beautiful, mysterious woman does not fit with the Romanticism of the other poems where love is absolute, emotional, and undoubted. This is a clue toward the conscious narrator who plays with Romantic images with the goal of irony and critique, as one can find in *Locos* and *Chromos*.

Another poem that breaks the mold of Romanticism that Alfau has created throughout the majority of his poetry is “Nocturno.” This is yet another example of a poem that becomes progressively less Romantic, stanza by stanza. The very structure of the poem demonstrates this change in that while the different rhyme schemes used in the stanzas are quite traditional, each stanza is progressively longer and more complex. Alfau uses the first stanza to keep the Romantic images entirely intact, without straying from the images of the night, the stars and the garden. However, in the next stanza, there are slight discrepancies divulging the falseness of the scene Alfau is portraying, revealing the moon to be created out of “cartulina,” in English,

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<sup>76</sup> “At times she awakes as if not there/ when someone talks to her. Her look of death is glacial.../ One senses in her a rehearsed manner.”

cardboard, and the word “artificial” appears in the description of the swan (1992: line 8, 10). When the reader arrives at the third stanza, Alfau allows the references to the falsity of the scene to abound, from the reference to the “tarjeta postal,” postcard, to the “escamoteo burlón,” the swift jokester, followed by the use of mirrors and painting, and even the doubling of the entire scene (1992: line 17, 19). All of these images force the reader to experience the poem from a removed perspective, since they distance him from the scene.

Therefore, this poem is worth noting because there is a sense of irony toward Romanticism that the reader has been expecting ever since the quotation on the opening page. At first glance, the poem seems like the rest. The topic is standard: the references to the stars and the garden seem to fit. However, as the Romantic imagery is revealed as a fake, it is as if the poet has peeled back the façade of Romanticism to show the bitter reality that lies beneath, that the world is nothing like the world represented by Romanticism. This is also the one mention of the word *cursi* in the entire book of poetry, again restating that this façade and the contrasting reality beneath it is exactly what Alfau is hoping to accomplish. The problem is that this sort of double imagery and deeper meaning is simply absent in the majority of the poems. Therefore, while this poem matches perfectly with Stavans’s proposal that this book of poetry is meant to be read as a mockery of Romanticism, this is one of the only poems that does just that. The question then, that must be posed, is whether the book of poetry can be read through the lens of this single poem, especially given the great variety of dates when these poems were written. Apart from this debate over the Romantic nature of the poems, it is true that this poem hints toward the ironic and postmodern author that we experience in *Locos* and *Chromos*.

Another poem that stands out among the rest is “Evocación Afro-Ideal,” in English, “Afro-Ideal Evocation.” The difficulty in this poem comes from the blatant racism that runs

throughout it. Of course, it is impossible to know whether the racism is ironic or if it is in fact the author's perspective. Regardless of whether the poem is intentionally racist or not, there is a strange irony in that the poet himself is an "outsider" commenting on another "outsider's" position in New York City. Considering this particular poem through the theory of the Third Space opens up the possibility that the poet sees himself, the immigrant, and even his own "othering," reflected in the African, most likely an anomaly within the society of that day. There are even comments suggesting that this African should return to his homeland since, "Allí amanece la inteligencia y se abre el raciocinio como una flor"<sup>77</sup> (1992: lines 47-48). These statements remind the reader of *Chromos* and the dilemma of the Americaniards, who wish to return not only to Spain, but to a prior simpler understanding of themselves as Spaniards and of the world through purely Spanish eyes, what would become known in postcolonial literature as primitivism. The poem concludes by stating the reason why the African would not return to his home, saying, "Mas no. Ya ebrio de igualdad, falta de hombría, desdeñas volver a aquella aldea de chozas/ donde acataban tu soberanía/ los ancianos y mozas/ cuando regresabas de la cacería"<sup>78</sup> (1992: lines 77-81). This statement also reminds the reader of these Americaniards from the novel *Chromos*, who are incapable of returning to Spain because they are no longer the Spaniards they once were and their identities have changed.

The Romantic elements of this poem stand out in the poet's description of the African's origins. Mentions of "tierras de fetichismo" and "misterioso exorcismo" matched with "vudú" and "mil lenguas bantú"<sup>79</sup> show the spiritual exoticism connected with foreign lands (1992: lines 12, 13, 17, 22). This aspect of the poem aligns well with Romanticism through an emphasis on

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<sup>77</sup> "That's where intelligence emerges/ and reason blossoms!"

<sup>78</sup> "But no. Already drunk with equality, short of manhood,/ you refuse to return to that village of huts/ where the old men and the maids/ pay tribute to your sovereignty/ when you return from the hunt."

<sup>79</sup> "Lands of fetichism" (12) "Mysterious exorcism" (13) "voodoo" (17) "in a thousand Bantu languages" (22).

the exotic and the foreign. Alfau goes on to mention the “evoluciones” that had to take place in order for him to become what he is now in Western civilization (1992: line 40). The poet even goes further into selling the Romanticized image of Africa: “Habrá noches de hogueras y danzas, días de euforias, de ofrendas, bacanales y flores, flores, flores...”<sup>80</sup> (1992: lines 75-6). This is an intentionally typified rendering of the African’s homeland, playing on the reader’s imagination and already generalized image of Africa.

An interpretation of the poem “Evocación afro-ideal” requires a decision about whether or not the poem is written ironically. The difficulty in making such a decision is that Alfau was accused of being racist, which makes one think that this poem was not written ironically. However, Alfau is often known to play off stereotypes about Spaniards to the point where it is nearly impossible to know if he is truly commenting on Spanish culture or if he is ironically commenting on the stereotyping of culture and ethnicity as a whole. This same issue is at play in the poem, making this poem one of those that stand out among the Romantic poetry found throughout the book. The mere impossibility of knowing whether the poem is ironic or not reminds the reader more of the novelist Felipe Alfau. If the poem is racist, it was written at the time of the Civil Rights Movement, when all of these opinions would have been discussed in bars and cafés throughout the United States. If the poem is written as a satire, it shows “the Other” of New York City. An example of how either interpretation is valid comes from a line in the middle of the poem in which Alfau is discussing the benefits of returning to Africa: “Aquel ambiente favorece toda existencia,/ despierta la conciencia de su estupor”<sup>81</sup> (1992: lines 45-46). Either this is a racist insult of the intelligence of the African, or it is a reflection of the author’s own puzzling thoughts as to the difficulty of inhabiting the Third Space. It seems most likely

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<sup>80</sup> “There will be nights with fires and dances; days of euphoria,/ of gifts, feasts and flowers, flowers, flowers. . . .”

<sup>81</sup> “That kind of environment favors every type of existence!/ Its astonishing power is overwhelming!”

that this poem is, in fact, a mixing of styles and thoughts on race. The mixing of styles is evident through the Romantic emphasis on the exotic alongside the Third Space style of representing “the Other” in a state of in-between. The mixing of thoughts on race comes as a result of the fact that this poem is unavoidably racist in its content, but there exists a possibility that these racist thoughts can be read as a reflection on the loss of identity for those living as “the Other” in New York City.

Another poem that deviates from the Romantic tradition established in the rest of the poems, is “La escalera,” (“The Stairs”). This poem is, once again, quite traditional in its rhyme scheme and in its structure of evenly separated stanzas, with the last one being longer. However, some of the rhyming couplets are separated by the divisions of stanzas, and the rhyme scheme itself is much more complex than in the rest of the poems. There is also a *volta* at the beginning of the third stanza that separates that final stanza from the first two descriptive stanzas with the word “pero,” in English, “but” (1992: line 11). In this poem, there is also much less punctuation used in general, with fewer commas at the end of each line. Also, there is the rare use of the ellipsis, found only in a few other places in the poetry, and here found twice in the last, most important stanza. Therefore, while Alfau is not a great innovator when it comes to the structure of his poetry, there are small clues that set this poem apart from his more Romantic poetry.

While this poem does not contain the double meaning of “Nocturno” and “Evocación afro-ideal,” the style and the theme make it stand out from the rest of the more standardized poems. First, the poem seems to be describing a murder, which does not fit with the rest of the themes about aging, loss of innocence and nature. The second way in which it stands out comes from how it conveys the fact that a murder has just occurred. The first clue is “un grito

ahogado,”<sup>82</sup> already making reference to death (1992: line 3). The second comes with the description of what must be a pool of blood: “se derrama roja la estera/ como vino de un vaso”<sup>83</sup> (1992: lines 4-5). Later, there is a reference to the banister as a “jaula,” a cage, and the door below the stairs is called “la fosa,” a grave (1992: lines 9-10). Finally, the street acts as the “cómplice,” an accomplice, as the murderer’s escape route (1992: line 18). All of these factors make the poem stand apart from the rest and remind the reader of scenes from Alfau’s novels in which the metaphors are original and inventive, and the meaning is left hanging in the air as if only a hypothesis developed through the reader’s intuition.

Another poem that follows the idea of “La escalera” is “Cuento de niños” (“A Children’s Story”) because of the theme it interprets and the metaphors it uses. The main anomaly that differentiates the structure of this poem from the rest is that Alfau has taken the structure and the main image for the poem from a popular children’s song. As has become typical in Alfau’s poetry, he begins by speaking literally about the song through quotations from the children’s song, and remains writing within the framework of the song about the bird throughout the first part of the poem, but begins to insert fragments of irony that reveal what is to come. The first instance of these fragments comes with the reference to the words “yeso,” plaster, and “tinta,” ink, revealing that this bird is painted and not real (1992: line 9). Next, he mentions the bird seated at her “vanity” with the clear possibility of the author’s use of this word as a pun, later confirmed at the conclusion of the poem (1992: lines 8, 30). However, both of these examples from the second stanza come as part of the children’s song, and the poet only reveals the true topic of the poem later in the fifth stanza. To complete the poem, the author returns to the lines of the song, leaving a contrast of the before and after when read from the context of the song.

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<sup>82</sup> “A strangled cry.”

<sup>83</sup> “Through which the red mat is spilled/ like wine from a glass.”

From the very title, one knows that irony is at play in the poem. Alfau takes a children's song and uses it to describe the "fall" of one woman. In his description he keeps to the style of the children's poem with stanzas like "¡Qué bonita el vestido! ¡Qué bonito el nido! ¡Qué hermoso el amor!"<sup>84</sup> (1992: lines 15-17). However, even with the double meaning of the bird and cat references to symbolize the demise of a relationship between the husband and wife, the poem does not offer any real originality on this level, as this metaphor has been used to describe adultery countless times. Therefore, the only real irony present in the poem is in the title "A Children's Tale," since this is most clearly a poem about adultery and not appropriate for a children's song, but perhaps telling of what a child might experience in witnessing these events.

### **3.4 Conclusions**

With such a variety of poems and no consistent theme throughout all the poetry, one begins to wonder if it is appropriate to consider the chronological element of Alfau's poetry. One possibility would be that Alfau began with a predominant Romantic style and slowly progressed in irony and imagery later in life. However, while the majority of his more "original" poems were written later in life, the Romantic and more traditional poetry stretches from 1923 with "Ciclo" to 1987 with "Punto Final," ("Full Stop"). The other problem with looking for chronological coherence is that several of the poems do not have a recorded date and so there is no conclusive evidence. Taking this into consideration, Alfau's poetry as a whole seems to define itself as being Romantic in the structure, rhyme schemes and themes.

Having discussed the poems and their possible significance when compared to the rest of Alfau's work, the issue of the translation of the title returns to the center of the discussion. Stavans was well aware of this conundrum when he was given the work of translating Alfau's poetry, since it was written originally in Spanish:

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<sup>84</sup> "What a pretty dress!/ What a pretty nest!/ What a beautiful love!"

But when dealing with *La poesía cursi*, the word “corny” leaves out important aspects of its style: the parodic, self-referential dimensions as well as the intentional exaggeration, or perhaps misrepresentation, of human feelings. Thus, my choice of “sentimental,” which denotes foolishness but also infatuation, nostalgia, amorousness, and a hint of the ridiculous (1992a: xv).

While I disagree with Stavans on the “parodic” and “intentional exaggeration” aspects of the poetry *as a whole*, I admit his choice of the word “sentimental” does describe Alfau’s poetry relatively well. However, at times, it seems that “sentimental” could be interpreted as too serious for the lighthearted mockery in the word *cursi*. Fortunately, with the changes that have come with the recent literary movements of postcolonial literature and the literature of the Third Space, there is a stronger argument for leaving this word *cursi* in the original language and allowing the readers to grapple with its lack of a true translation.

What is perhaps the most important aspect of this word when considering Alfau’s oeuvre is the fact that this is the style of writing the character Garcia is constantly aiming for in *Chromos*. It is also the style that “Alfau” ridicules endlessly and which Garcia rallies against time and again in defense of his own work. As previously discussed, while there is little to no literary value in the novel within the novel in *Chromos*, it is portrayed to the reader as one Americaniard’s version of the experiences of living in the Third Space, and therefore it stands as its own testament, despite “Alfau’s” disapproval. Therefore, as previously mentioned in the discussion of *La poesía cursi*, there is a sense in which these are Garcia’s poems, forming part of the multiple personalities of the one author, Alfau, at times so much so that it feels as though Garcia, the Romantic character from Alfau’s novels, has passed these poems on to “Alfau” just as he passes on his manuscripts in *Chromos*. So, while these poems lack the technique of distancing prevalent in the novels, Alfau uses a different form of distancing in the poems, evident through this lighthearted disassociation with his own work.

One further conclusion in looking at the poetry of *La poesía cursi* is that, while it cannot be said to have achieved great originality, it is true that the poetry, in retrospect, is an example of poetry written from the Third Space. As explained through the specific examples in the poems, there is a theme of nostalgia that runs throughout the poetry in differing images and sentiments. Also, “the Other” is discussed, albeit indirectly. Moreover, several of the poems reference the struggle to arrive at authentic identity from within the in-between. There is also a sense of hybridity represented in the poetry in that, while it is not the ironic and innovative material that makes Alfau a postmodern author ahead of his time, this poetry is no less his own than his novels, just reflective of a different aspect of his own Americaniard self. In this way, the poetry, while perhaps of less literary merit, reveals an author living out the hybridity he wrote about in his novels.

As one final comment on the Romanticism present in this sampling of poetry from the Third Space, by combining Romantic style and hybridity, Alfau reveals that the two can be, in fact, related. In this way, literature from the Third Space does not necessarily align with the distant and cold poetry of the modernist movement, and perhaps even the postmodern does not reflect the teleological emphasis of the Third Space in the search for identity. In this regard, I would agree with Scott when he states, “Alfau uses this fund of Gothic and sentimental imagery in order to renew it” (2005: 45). Alfau, by indulging himself in Romantic imagery, solves his own existential problem in that he finds a style that allows him to express himself in the manner he sees most appropriate. Permitting this discovery of true self-expression is, after all, what the theory of the Third Space hopes to accomplish. In fact, Alfau’s use of Romanticism as a part of his Third Space voice even summons up references to those recent scholars questioning

postcolonial theory because of its tendency to reject the use of conventional techniques as part of the postcolonial voice (Loomba 1998: 90).



## **Conclusion: A Voice Left Behind**

In the chapters of this study on Alfau's oeuvre I have considered several distinct yet compatible theories as lenses through which to better evaluate his literature and I have postulated the accomplishments of each of Alfau's works. In this final remaining section, I will highlight some of the key themes discussed as a way of finalizing and completing each topic of discussion. Then I will elaborate further on the potential outcomes of this study and what new insights we have into Alfau's oeuvre as a result. Finally, there are several elements in Alfau's work that remain enigmatic and could be potential areas for further investigation. I will conclude by discussing these future lines of research and preliminarily hypothesize on each one based on my study thus far.

As a means of beginning this process of concluding, I affirm that Alfau's writing contains elements of the theory of the Third Space as well as Postmodernism, making his work innovative and original. His experimentation with form and technique made him a marginalized novelty at the time he was writing; however, his eccentricity in style has eventually proven to be his innovation, unrecognized by the original audience that could not appreciate his methods. His anticipation of movements yet to come is uncanny, as he utilizes the greats of the past, mainly Cervantes, to rework the genre of fiction to his liking. Therefore, while the Spaniards of New York City in the first half of the century may be described most accurately as obscure and irrelevant in terms of other more prominent immigrant groups, the particular technique Alfau employs in his writing makes their situation emblematic of a wider trend of hybridity that would follow in later years in the United States and in postcolonial literature at large.

## **1 The Keystone: Points to Remember**

Beginning in Chapter 2, I first demonstrated Alfau's creation of a Third Space through his redefinition of the Spaniards' existence as immigrants in New York City in his novel *Chromos*. Indeed, Alfau reveals the fallacies of traditional notions of space by creating a liminal space in a variety of manners, from the center of downtown Manhattan, to *tertulias* at the local café, and finally a transcendent moment achieved through music. The development of this liminality has further implications in the novel, since the characters utilize this Third Space as a tool to help them forge a hybrid identity. The theme of language is especially prominent as the characters generate an original liminal use of discourse, even at times openly discussing the no-man's-land of language in which they find themselves. However, while Alfau's writing in *Chromos* fits well within the theory of the Third Space, this particular rendition emerges as one of tension and even a self-imposed torture for those who purposefully inhabit this in-between in an effort to create an authentic liminal voice for themselves.

As a result of this evident tension in the text, it is tempting to place the novel under the label of resistance writing, however, the postmodern aspect of this narrative restrains the reader from creating a direct correlation between liminal tension and resistance writing through an attitude of ambivalence toward this lingering unresolved dissonance. Countless techniques that would become representative of Postmodernism can be found in the pages of *Chromos*, from the surreal yet grotesque ambience of the metanarrative, the enigmatic narrator "Alfau" whom the reader learns to never fully trust because of the ever-so-subtle sleights of hand evident in the details of the novel; even the unresolved arguments that continue throughout the text point back to this postmodern style. Countless more, from deconstructionism in language and experience,

intertextuality, the absurd, even the use of manuscripts, all denote the characteristics that would become irrefutably associated with Postmodernism.

While the use of the Third Space as a method for procuring a new, more authentic identity as New York immigrants is, in itself, a merit, especially given the time period in which Alfau was writing, it would appear as though his intentions in creating such a space were far more political than they may first seem. By reviewing the political climate in the United States on the issue of immigration, we see that Alfau's writing was not just innovative, but extremely countercurrent. For amidst the rhetoric of assimilation and Americanization, or what is more, living amongst those who would label themselves "Nativists" and strongly oppose immigration as a whole, Alfau's work stands as a protest for individual identity and difference. The "Other," a concept unknown at the time Alfau was writing, played an important role in American rhetoric, portraying the immigrant as a mysterious evil to the general public. *Chromos* reveals this rhetoric as false by breaking down the idea of a fixed, singular, and opposing group, paving the way for differences and authentic existence for these hybrids. Alfau's technique in creating this critique of the main political rhetoric of the day relies heavily on the use of satire, allowing the reader to see the preposterousness of the stereotyped "Other." His portrayal of both the Green Man and the *cursi* literature created by Garcia feed into this satire by revealing the need for hybridity through the use of exaggerated extremes.

Turning from this Third Space postmodern evaluation of *Chromos* to the themes discussed in the novel *Locos*, this study especially focused on the use of stereotypes in this, Alfau's first novel. The approach is almost dictated by the text itself, since the novel reads as if it were a prison line-up of the usual suspects from Spanish society. In order to be as fair and objective concerning the author's use of these stereotypes as possible, in Chapter 3, I began by

examining how Alfau uses the stereotypes, finding that while the author maintains an ambivalent attitude in the depiction of the stereotypes, there is an actual critique being developed through the use of type characters. The clues that permit the reader to interpret the stereotypes as critique are the use of distance, exaggeration, metanarrative, and an unreliable narrator. The object of said critique appears to be Spanish society itself, analyzing a variety of topics from prostitution, mendicancy, fraud, thievery, religious fanaticism and the importance of public image. The use of stereotypical images to critique Spanish society is not original to Alfau, and for this reason, I spent considerable time contrasting Alfau's work to Valle-Inclán's theory. Especially significant in this comparison is the employment of both tragedy and comedy evident in Valle Inclán's depictions, calling his type characters *bufones* after the deformed subjects of a series of portraits by Diego Velázquez. This characteristic is most suitable for describing Alfau's *locos* as well. An endless array of stereotypical characters defines the very marrow of the novel, containing no real three-dimensional characters, with the exception of the religious characters: Sister Carmela and Padre Inocencio.

However, before painting an erroneous picture of Alfau's purpose in using these type characters, apparently judging and denouncing a vast amount of Spanish society, a key and essential element of his depiction of these stereotypes is his postmodern style. Through the use of these techniques, Alfau is able to release a stereotypical and blatantly antagonistic rendering, all the while diluting or even obliterating the brutal blow through the use of play. By not concluding certain stories, Alfau keeps the reader from arriving at a concrete conclusion about the point of each story. His tendency toward the use of the absurd also forces the reader to acknowledge a deeper theme than a simple critique through stereotypes. However, Alfau's more subtle technique of distancing himself from the apparently obvious content of the novel runs the

risk of the reader misinterpreting his aims. Even so, his outrageous renditions of coughing houses and old women in love with death, act as an insurance policy to guarantee that the reader will not take the entire endeavor literally. As previously stated, Alfau's one deviation from this strategy comes when he critiques religion. Suddenly, the ambivalence, distance and theatrical nature found so clearly in the other stories, fade, and the reader confronts a much more transparent and direct critique, as in the story "A Romance of Dogs." One possible reason for this deviation is that it comes as a result of Alfau's own strong religious beliefs.

Turning to Alfau's short stories and his poetry, the first admission that must be made when approaching these two works is their lack of originality in comparison to the two novels. That said, this does not mean that the two works are devoid of any significance to Alfau's oeuvre. Both works, *Old Tales from Spain* and *La poesía cursi*, resound with romantic imagery and style. Additionally, they follow more traditional structures, whether in the form of legends and tales for the stories or the perfect rhyme and rhyme patterns of the poems. Curiously, the two voices that have argued for the innovation behind these two works are the two editors: Ilan Stavans and Carmen Martín Gaité. Ilan Stavans in particular argues that the poetry is a rebuttal of Romanticism, which I have argued is not a sustainable claim due to the invested participation in Romanticism found in almost every poem. However, before entirely disdaining the two works, throughout the pages of both the short stories and the poetry, one can catch a small glimpse of the novelist who wrote more experimental and original novels. Indeed, there are momentary gaps in which the rigid style of the poetry is broken, leaving room for a fresh voice. In the stories, at times the metanarrative becomes convoluted and the reader is surprised by the untrustworthy voice guiding him through the story. The semblances to Alfau the novelist even materialize, although ephemerally, in the very content of the stories or poems, especially

detectable in the short story, “La leyenda de las abejas,” when Alfau makes his first attempt to comment on the two Spains. Even the autobiographical tendencies, evident in the stories about artists, young men, or adventurers, remind us of Alfau’s recurring narrator, his seemingly autobiographical “Alfau.” Therefore, these works, although clearly fitting into the category of Alfau’s minor works, contain momentary glimpses of emerging genius that bring us back to the innovative novelist.

## **2 Significance of this Study**

One of the difficulties in accurately portraying Felipe Alfau’s innovation to the current literary field is the time that has elapsed from when he wrote the novels to when they were published, most definitely the case with *Chromos*, but also true with *Locos*, considering it only received real attention upon its republication. This is an issue because countless novels today use and even reformulate the techniques Alfau uses and the abundance of such authors means there is little talk of possible innovation in their style. The revolutionary nature, therefore, of Alfau’s work is not simply the techniques he uses but *when* he used them. Keeping the date of his experimental writing in mind, he then emerges from the unknown as a writer ahead of his time. His work is best described, especially for those scholars who insist on particular dates for the beginning of postmodernity, as a precursor to Postmodernism, chronologically matching Modernism, yet in style, technique and even philosophy, aligning itself with Postmodernism. Having already recounted the specific tools and techniques Alfau utilizes in his postmodern approach, it suffices to say that his chaotic playful style, holding no bar to the use of the grotesque or the surreal, shows an apathetic attitude toward the modernist pursuit of an escape from the unfruitful search for meaning.

Another similar area in which Alfau now seems to be just one more author amidst the crowd comes regarding his place within the theory of the Third Space. Again, upon remembering that he was writing forty years before the theory would even come into existence, let alone build into a movement, his ingenuity comes to light. Even more so, his strong, yet playful anti-assimilation stance promotes a countercurrent attitude in response to the “native” majority, revealing an author courageous enough to defy a society with a fervent and even militant nationalism. Alfau’s writing is also a precursor to countless other voices who would, much later on, write about New York City as a Third Space, to the point in which “New York writing” has almost become a genre of its own. Even in Alfau’s less prominent works, such as his poetry, the fact that he harnesses Romanticism in order to express nostalgia denotes a freedom to jump from one movement to another, even changing techniques, all with the hopes of conveying to the audience his own authentic voice. Indeed, the inclusion of the old along with experimentation and chaotic playfulness is almost more refreshing than other Third Space authors who do not want to be associated with have-beens and gone-bys. Perhaps then, Alfau possesses more freedom in his expression than these authors writing today demonstrate.

Finally, Alfau’s unique combination of techniques from distinct movements is part of what makes his work exceptional. After all, as the different chapters from this study have examined, Alfau’s novels do not just represent one innovative style, but an interfusing of styles, creating wholly unique concoctions. In *Chromos*, the Third Space is partnered with Postmodernism, and so within one sole novel Alfau manages to create a liminal space in New York City, while at the same time he dismantles the existence of this space through his postmodern deconstructive techniques, leaving the reader with a feeling of unresolved tension that even dissolves into whimsical apathy upon confronting the inability to fully inhabit any

space. In *Locos*, the use of stereotypes as a critique is combined with Postmodernism, yet another curious combination of an ethically driven strategy with an indifferent or even fatalistic one. Just as Alfau creates a pointed and brutal rendition of Spanish society, he absorbs this critique in the ambience of the surreal, removing the biting commentary from coming into direct contact with the audience. This intermingling of techniques is also a further rejection of fixity, in fiction as well as in identity. Furthermore, the fact that Alfau compounds techniques is yet another sign that he was not creating a copy of someone else's work, but trying to fuse and recreate literature into something new, a goal which I would claim he met with success.

### **3 Strange occurrences**

A primary comparison can be made between Alfau's choice of characters in his first novel and in his second, since in *Locos*, Alfau relies almost entirely on the portrayal of type characters, while in *Chromos*, type characters are exchanged for hybrid ones. It is true that *Chromos* does contain a few characters that remain stereotypical, curiously being Dr. de los Rios and Don Pedro, the two characters that make up Alfau's rendition of the two Spains, however, even the stereotypical poet, Garcia, becomes three-dimensional as he relays to "Alfau" his experiences of nostalgia over the loss of his homeland. Perhaps the very setting of *Chromos* caused Alfau to set aside his type characters, since pure Spanish stereotypes would be out of place in New York City.

However, Alfau's criticism of his hybrid characters is equally as harsh as his treatment of the type characters in *Locos*. At the same time, the reader experiences sympathetic inclinations toward the Americaniards that are not transmitted in Alfau's portrayal of the *locos*. Another possible reason for the difference could be Alfau's own progression as an immigrant author, as perhaps he loses the clarity and authority on Spanish society necessary to present type characters, and so he sets out to create stereotypical hybrid characters. A future study focused solely on

contrasting the characters in the two novels could delve further into these curious comparisons and Alfau's shifting techniques from the 1920s to the 1940s.

While the characters Alfau selects for each of the two novels seem to be polar opposites, the reassertion of the two Spains as a central theory in *Chromos* is a surprising addition, considering that the novel no longer seeks to represent pure Spaniards, but altered and even deformed hybrids. In *Locos*, his use of the two Spains seems more than appropriate, especially considering how he breaks down both sides of the duo: the Left, progressive, yet secretly and unperceivably crazy, and the Right, traditional, culturally rich, and yet publicly shamed as being crazy. The surprise comes, then, when Alfau packs up this ideological tradition and renders it new through the Americaniard characters. This time, Garcia, the resident Americaniard artist, is removed from the binary opposition—however he is replaced by an almost militant mongrel—Don Pedro. Dr. de los Rios remains crazy and yet well respected, however in this novel, he is equated with the religious, offering a strange perspective on the original division of the two Spains. The question remains as to why Alfau would insist on carrying over this traditionally Spanish image to the Americaniards. Perhaps *Chromos* is a picture of what becomes of these two sides when they are converted into immigrants, although the lack of attention to the personal relationships of Dr. de los Rios and Don Pedro makes this seem to be a misreading of the text. A different approach would be the possibility that Alfau saw these two Spains as two inevitable forms of human existence, even universal traits. When seen in this light, Alfau's work on this well-used motif becomes another unique and innovative accomplishment. While the use of the two Spains in the two novels has been explored on a limited level in this study, further and deeper examination of this theme in both the novels could be the basis for another study, resulting in a more politically-based critique of Alfau's work.

Another curiosity that has surfaced at several points during this study is the number of authors who seem to be inexplicably linked to Alfau. Beyond the link to Cervantes, one that Alfau himself acknowledged as one of the points of inspiration for his work, there are several other authors who bear striking similarities to Alfau, yet upon his rediscovery, he claimed not to have read any of them. This study has mentioned the likes of Unamuno, Pirandello, Valle-Inclán, O. Henry, Hemingway, e.e. cummings, and even perhaps García Lorca. Therefore, either Alfau lied about which authors he had read, a viable position since he perhaps thought he could gain more renown if he denied this fact, or he is simply an example of an author reading the mood of the times and writing from what seemed to him a logical position, which would only later become formalized into theories. While this study has referenced these similar authors, a thorough and detailed evaluation comparing Alfau's novels to these authors' works would provide a more concise picture of the relationships between them, possibly leading to further insights as to whether or not the contemporaries knew each other's work.

Beyond the influence of/on his contemporaries, it seems that the future would bring even more authors that bear a resemblance to the unknown Alfau. Kathy Acker has been linked to him as a result of her postmodern rendition of a Quixote tale (1994), taking on Spanish imagery and feminist theory at the same time. Margarita Cota-Cárdenas with her novel *Puppet* (1985) uses metanarrative and liminal language as a form of resistance writing as she describes the plight of Latinos in the United States. Whether or not these two writers had ever read Alfau, the use of these matching techniques with similar motivations becomes an echo of what Stavans has proclaimed about Alfau: "Alfau was an influential writer without readers" (1996a: 152). One final element of the repercussions of Alfau's work comes from Charles Simmons, who did, in fact, know Alfau and molded the protagonist of his novel, Jose Llano, after Alfau himself:

“When the book was done I showed it to him, wondering whether he would be offended. He wasn’t. He understood, I think, Jose Llano was an homage” (1993). While this is, instead, a direct influence on forthcoming literature, it does allow us to see a more intimate picture of Alfau’s eccentricities and strength of character. Future studies contrasting Simmons’ perspective of Alfau with Alfau’s own narrator “Alfau,” could result in an interesting understanding of Alfau as an author and a persona. Also, contrasting his work with later authors such as Cota-Cárdenas and Acker could reveal more shared trends among marginalized authors seeking a Third Space through traditional Spanish imagery.

#### **4 Upon Leaving the Madhouse**

As this study comes to a close, one wonders what prospects a marginalized, deceased author may have in this fast-paced, highly innovative literary world. Perhaps Alfau’s moment has already passed us by. On the contrary, I believe authors such as Alfau remain relevant today, for as he moves from a contemporary to a historical figure, he represents the beginning of a broken linear historical method. Now, not only do we possess the rhetoric of the “Nativists,” those who supported assimilation and Americanization, but we have in our hands a renegade version of the resulting emotional and psychological distress such a rhetoric placed on immigrants coming to the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. Finally, an emboldened immigrant voice spoke up about the need for freedoms: freedom to exist in the in-between, freedom to hold on to prior beliefs or to choose to adapt to new ones, the freedom to be citizens of a former country, or adopted citizens of the new one, or perhaps neither of the two. Unfortunately, in the crucial moment of Alfau’s writing and attempts to be published, Gayatri Spivak’s infamous question, “Can the sub-altern speak?” was answered by the publishing scene and the literary world at large with a resounding “no.” However, one further advantage to Third Space fictional

writing as opposed to just the theory itself is that the novel still speaks and offers a perspective of that otherwise irretrievable individual Third Space, now, through fiction, still available to read today. We still have the potential to listen to this voice and hear an alternative version of this particular moment in history. The choice is ours. Which version or versions of the past will remain?

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## **Resumen en español**

Entre dos tradiciones literarias distintas se encuentra un autor llamado Felipe Alfau. Este autor, que escribió no sólo desde un punto de vista español sino también norteamericano, concretamente neoyorquino, nunca consiguió llegar a un nivel de reconocimiento por sus contribuciones al mundo literario, sin embargo, sus textos nos ofrecen una perspectiva tan peculiar que merece la pena estudiarlos. Esta tesis trabaja con las cuatro obras de Felipe Alfau: *Old Tales from Spain*, *Locos: A Comedy of Gestures*, *Chromos*, y *La poesía cursi*. Este estudio revela atributos de estos textos que afirman el prodigio de este autor y aunque escribió durante la primera mitad del siglo veinte, encaja mejor con el postmodernismo y la teoría del Tercer Espacio. A parte de la innovación de sus obras, lo que Alfau cuenta desde un punto de vista marginado, da forma a un espacio híbrido de tensión y lucha revelando otra versión de la historia de Nueva York en el siglo veinte, normalmente reconocido como una época de asimilación y americanización de nuevos inmigrantes en los Estados Unidos.

### **1 Introducción al autor:**

Nacido el 24 de agosto de 1902, Felipe Alfau formaba parte de una familia educada de la clase alta en el norte de España. Aunque nació en Barcelona, su familia se trasladó a Guernica, el lugar que sería para Alfau el hogar de su infancia. Sus padres se consideraría que eran algo aventureros, ya que vivieron en las Islas Filipinas y en el Caribe (Martín Gaité 1993: 175-176). Cuando empezó la Primera Guerra Mundial en Europa, la familia Alfau decidió dejar el ambiente poco estable de España por una vida nueva en Nueva York, un lugar en el cual obtendrían mucho trabajo y conseguirían una vida mejor, según algunos familiares. Este traslado a los Estados Unidos reflejaba el mayor desplazamiento que hubo en ese momento en España, especialmente evidente después del desastre de 1898, con la pérdida de las colonias.

Alfau no fue un autor de profesión, de hecho, trabajó durante la mayor parte de su vida como traductor en un banco en Nueva York. Escribió su primera novela durante una época de su vida en que se empeñó en ganar dinero a base de sus libros. *Locos: A Comedy of Gestures* y también *Old Tales from Spain* fueron dos intentos de entrar en el mundo literario. Con el pésimo éxito que consiguió con estos primeros libros, Alfau se dio cuenta de la dificultad de ser autor inmigrante en Nueva York, y pronto dejó su idea de ser autor, por lo cual escondió su segunda novela en un cajón hasta el año 1990. Amigos de Alfau han comentado que estos rechazos de su trabajo le molestaron bastante, y lastimaron su orgullo como escritor. El fracaso de aquel entonces hoy se puede explicar como un triste resultado de haber utilizado un estilo innovador en sus obras, que habrían parecido incomprensibles y modernos en los años 1920 y en adelante.

Por fin, en el año 1987, Alfau estaba viviendo en una residencia de ancianos cuando Steven Moore, un editor bien conocido de Dalkey Archive Press, le llamó y le pidió permiso para publicar de nuevo la novela *Locos*. Alfau mostró poco interés en la publicación, aun así ofreció su ayuda en todo lo que se le pedía (Moore 1993: 246-247). Parecía apático frente a esta nueva oportunidad, sobre la cual reflexionó: “Todo esto ha llegado demasiado tarde. De veras, ya no me importa” (Stavans 1993a: 151). Sin embargo, poco a poco Moore fue ganando la confianza de Alfau, y en 1990, éste le enseñó el manuscrito de su segunda novela, *Chromos*, la cual fue publicada en seguida y luego nominada para el National Book Award de ese mismo año. Ilan Stavans, autor y también aficionado de las obras de Alfau, le persiguió, intentando conseguir entrevistas e información biográfica, y en 1992, a base de dicho esfuerzo, se publicó un libro de poesía de Alfau en una edición bilingüe: *La poesía cursi*.

La obra de Alfau ha sufrido mucho a raíz de ser desconocida dentro del mundo literario, lo cual se nota en las pocas críticas disponibles sobre sus novelas. Existe solamente una serie de

resúmenes de las novelas, anunciando cada publicación nueva. Estos resúmenes tienen poco valor crítico, ya que la mayoría sólo ofrece una breve idea de la historia de cada novela y afirma únicamente que Alfau era un autor innovador. *The Contemporary Review of Fiction* dedicó una edición entera a la crítica de las obras de Alfau y también Luigi Pirandello, y en esta revista se encuentra lo que es, hoy en día, la crítica más comprensiva de Alfau. También las introducciones y epílogos de las novelas nos ayudan a ver las áreas que todavía podrían ser investigadas. Como Alfau en su día fue desconocido y poco apreciado como autor, hoy día todavía hay muchos temas de sus obras que podrían ser explorados.

## **2 Teoría del Tercer Espacio**

Una de las teorías centrales de esta tesis es la del Tercer Espacio, y la afirmación de que se puede aplicar esta teoría a la novela *Chromos*. Para entender mejor lo que significa esta teoría del Tercer Espacio, antes tendríamos que explorar lo que es el Primer Espacio, que en términos sencillos sería la nación. Este estudio usa como esquema teórico la idea de Benedict Anderson de la nación como una comunidad imaginada, construida con imágenes de unidad y nacionalismo para conseguir más poder político. En cambio, el Segundo Espacio se asocia con el término “el otro” que figura como el opuesto de la nación, que podría ser, por ejemplo, el de los inmigrantes, las minorías étnicas, o los que tienen creencias o costumbres distintas a los demás, que luego se convierte en un “enemigo” interior. Este paradigma empezó durante la época colonial, creando una oposición binaria entre los colonizadores y los colonizados. La oposición entre los dos grupos es exagerada por medio del uso de estereotipos y generalizaciones. Esta relación binaria significa mucho prejuicio hacia los que son identificados como “el otro,” y les reprime hasta que no tienen voz propia ni los mismos derechos que los demás. Desde este estado de relaciones binarias, el movimiento postcolonial busca una manera de salir de esta represión, buscando un

espacio intermedio entre los dos lados opuestos; es lo que llamamos Tercer Espacio. Es importante recordar que cuando se habla de una teoría de espacio, no solo se refiere a un lugar concreto, sino también un estado emocional o psicológico. Definiendo el espacio de esta forma, el Tercer Espacio se abre a muchos distintos grupos o individuos, siendo inmigrantes, exiliados o marginados. Normalmente, los que habitan este Tercer Espacio no se identifican ni como parte de la nación ni tampoco como ciudadanos puros de su sociedad nativa; son inevitablemente híbridos. Al enfocar estos grupos de personas híbridas y la literatura que viene de estas situaciones, podemos llegar a la conclusión de que esta literatura del Tercer Espacio es importante porque ayuda a romper la linealidad de la historia y revela que hay varias perspectivas desde las cuales podemos ver la sociedad. Además trabaja para disolver la oposición binaria del colonialismo, dejándonos encontrar diferentes opiniones, y que esas opiniones sean escuchadas y aceptadas como válidas. Aún más, rompe la autoridad de la nación repartiéndola entre las distintas voces cercanas o lejanas de ese centro. El lenguaje forma otra parte esencial de este Tercer Espacio, como otro medio que necesita ser liberado de esta oposición binaria, creado de nuevo de manera que refleja el ser híbrido del autor.

### **3 La novela *Chromos* y el Tercer Espacio de Nueva York**

Ver Nueva York desde la teoría del Tercer Espacio cambia de forma dramática la imagen estereotípica de esta ciudad al comienzo del siglo veinte. Las narrativas tradicionales de crisol o refugio de inmigrantes son escritas de nuevo por el filtro del Tercer Espacio, destacando las tensiones y momentos híbridos que existían para los que venían a los Estados Unidos durante ese tiempo como inmigrantes. La idea de los barrios étnicos también se puede reexaminar por medio de esta teoría, pero no imaginándolos como guetos que existían en los barrios más pobres de Nueva York, sino definiéndolos como espacios difíciles e inestables para inmigrantes cuyas

culturas chocaban y las redes de apoyo que tenían que ser construidas. Viendo Nueva York así, la narrativa nacional de un refugio de inmigrantes se derrumba, creando un espacio con diferencias de experiencia, que depende más del estatus socio-económico que su tendencia a ser artífice de su éxito.

De este modo, la novela *Chromos* refleja esta Nueva York como un Tercer Espacio por medio de varios temas representados en el texto, incluyendo la invención del “Americaniard,” la descripción de “The Green Man,” o el relato del Lower East Side de Nueva York. La novela también cuenta la experiencia de estos Americaniards de ser representados como el “otro” en la sociedad, y describe el estado del ser híbrido como algo incómodo y lleno de tensión: no es una serenidad placentera al haber encontrado una solución al problema de la identidad. Por eso, el proceso de adaptación presentado en la novela muestra un rechazo revolucionario a la teoría de asimilación. La rendición de Alfau del Tercer Espacio consiste en una adaptación incompleta a la nueva cultura, con dificultades innumerables por el camino, en vez de las transiciones fluidas que los Nativistas predicaron en ese momento.

Aunque esta relación en sí entre la novela y la teoría del Tercer Espacio es algo fascinante porque demuestra una aplicación de la teoría a una situación niche, también es importante tener en mente cuándo fue escrita esta novela y quién la escribió. La novela, escrita en los años 40 y escondida bajo llave en un cajón del armario, fue creada casi cincuenta años antes de que el movimiento postcolonial se hiciera predominante, y dentro de ese movimiento, la idea del Tercer Espacio. Desde otra perspectiva, habiendo explicado el ambiente del lugar dónde escribió Alfau, es aún más evidente que esta novela no encajaba con las tendencias de la literatura escrita en Nueva York en los años 40. De hecho, en ese momento, la mayoría de las narrativas inmigrantes eran historias de asimilación: la lucha y pruebas de los inmigrantes al

llegar a la nueva tierra, contrastada con el éxito a largo plazo que consiguieron, y por supuesto, la americanización de estos inmigrantes a la vez que mejoraban sus situaciones. Con la mayoría de inmigrantes asumiendo un papel de humildad y aceptación delante de la retórica de la americanización, la crítica de Alfau de estos conceptos es nada menos que revolucionaria.

Preguntado por el proceso que le llevó a escribir de tal manera, Alfau mismo nos confirma este tema a contracorriente que se percibe en su trabajo:

P: Cuando escribió *Locos* ¿seguía cierta tradición literaria?

R: Bueno, en realidad estaba tratando de transformar una tradición. Verá desde los griegos hasta la actualidad, la música ha hecho avances tremendos. Del unísono a la policromía, ha habido descubrimientos increíbles que nos han llevado de la longitud a la latitud (Stavans 1992b: 611).

Entonces, esta innovación en la obra de Alfau es, según el autor, completamente intencional, hasta el punto que podríamos llamarlo una búsqueda de la innovación, su propio intento de ofrecer algo nuevo al mundo literario.

Otro logro de esta novela se basa no sólo en la innovación de los aspectos históricos o teóricos, sino también en la técnica original utilizada para comunicar estas ideas. El uso de la novela dentro de la propia novela funciona bien dentro del paradigma del Tercer Espacio tanto como el posmodernismo porque crea distancia y otra perspectiva alternativa dentro de una sola narrativa. También la metanarrativa crea un marco, otra vez añadiendo distancia entre la acción del argumento y la realidad. El comentario constante sobre el proceso de escribir también revela el mecanismo detrás de la narrativa. Esta técnica de exponer el mecanismo detrás de la escritura es una característica del posmodernismo y también relevante al Tercer Espacio porque revela la lucha y la tensión en el proceso de escribir desde un estado híbrido. La sátira presente en la novela también apoya el tema del Tercer Espacio, sobre todo en la inhabilidad de declarar un argumento o una verdad directamente, y aún más, la creencia cada vez más fuerte en la validez de varias versiones de eventos o situaciones. Curiosamente, cuando Alfau fue nominado a ser

candidato al premio National Book Award, algunos críticos, como Carol Iannone, opinaron que la nominación fue del impulso político, declarando que la novela en sí no merecía el premio, sino que la novedad de *Chromos* servía para manipular y por tanto, que la novela podría llegar a ser reconocida bajo la idea de justicia, una tendencia del movimiento postcolonial (Iannone 53). Mientras la opinión de esta crítica forma parte de una pequeña minoría dentro de los que han evaluado las obras de Alfau, lo que cuenta es verdaderamente curioso porque significa que Alfau no sólo ha entrado en las categorías que de forma cronológica no le corresponden, sino también sufre de la misma crítica que otros autores de esas mismas categorías.

Más allá de la innovación en la novela *Chromos*, esta obra también revela los detalles de este Tercer Espacio de los Americaniards en particular, con su propia representación de cómo es vivir en un estado híbrido. Autores del Tercer Espacio y sus obras nos ofrecen un entendimiento más profundo sobre la realidad de la identidad porque representan la polémica que existe en el crear un ser fluido en medio de dos culturas. En el caso de la obra de Alfau, algunas de sus percepciones nos ayudan a llegar a un profundo reconocimiento de la tensión de existir en tal espacio, y que este estado híbrido no es algo que se deba exaltar desde una perspectiva ingenua. La novela también argumenta que el hecho de crear, es decir, ser artista, dentro de un Tercer Espacio es un acto de auto-tortura, porque al recordar y representar su propia realidad, esa persona revive constantemente el sentido de pérdida y nostalgia del pasado, pero también la inestabilidad de su identidad en el presente y futuro. Sin embargo, es a la vez un acto de auto-salvación, porque el hecho de escribir se convierte en una catarsis, creando un espacio libre y respondiendo con desdén al valor en términos económicos que pudiera conseguir el trabajo.

#### **4 Estereotipos en la novela *Locos***

Mientras los personajes de la segunda novela de Alfau forman parte de un grupo de inmigrantes en los Estados Unidos, su primera novela, *Locos*, está ubicada en España. Una de las características centrales de esta primera novela es el uso de estereotipos. Teniendo en cuenta las diferentes teorías de estereotipos que existen, lo primero que hay que identificar cuando evaluamos el uso de estereotipos en una novela como *Locos* es cómo Alfau manipula los estereotipos y para qué propósito. Cuando interpretamos los estereotipos en esta novela, primero sabemos que se puede tomar los estereotipos como sátira por el número abundante de pistas metanarrativas. Aunque Alfau es bastante sutil en su uso de estereotipos –nunca explica directamente al lector su verdadero propósito– estas pistas metanarrativas demuestran tan claramente este fin que es casi irrelevante cuestionar la sátira por medio de estereotipos. La primera pista se encuentra en los varios niveles de distancia logrados por medio del narrador, pero luego siguen muchas pistas más, como por ejemplo, el hecho de nombrar al narrador “Alfau,” o el prólogo escrito con el fin de revelar el mecanismo oculto detrás de la narrativa. También hay en la novela el uso de un manuscrito, y además, el autor se convierte en personaje en distintos momentos de la novela. Otro asunto que contribuye a estas pistas metanarrativas es el énfasis dentro de la narrativa en la organización de la novela en sí, porque revela la intencionalidad del autor con cada estereotipo que elige utilizar. Además, hay varias referencias al lector y su papel dentro de la novela, que también eleva la conciencia del mismo lector, alertándole al elemento de crítica presente en la novela. Como última pista, la misma indiferencia hacia la representación de estereotipos asegura al lector que éstos son nombrados con la intención de crítica. Aunque esta es la tendencia mayoritaria en la novela, hay algunos momentos en los cuales Alfau cambia de estrategia y la ambivalencia se disipa: un ejemplo sería

Pepe en la historia “The Wallet,” en español, “El monedero,” aunque, al final sabemos que Pepe no es el estereotipo representado, sino España misma. También Alfau deja su tono de indiferencia en el relato de Padre Inocencio y Sister Carmela en la historia “A Romance of Dogs,” en español, “Un romance de perros,” quienes son diferenciados de los demás personajes en esa historia para revelar una crítica a la religión.

Aunque los estereotipos forman parte de una crítica más grande de la sociedad española en sí, esto sólo representa un lado de lo que expone el autor en la novela, porque las representaciones de los estereotipos reflejan también un divertimento absurdo, lo cual es típico de la literatura postmoderna. Este aspecto también es esencial para entender la novela, porque parece que Alfau no escribió con la intención de resolver los problemas de la sociedad por medio de su crítica, lo cual se comunica con un enfoque postmoderno de *laissez faire*. Se nota esta técnica en las historias cuando los personajes toman el control de la dirección de la narrativa, mientras el autor es supuestamente llevado cautivo a los caprichos de sus creaciones. La mezcla de personajes dentro de las historias revela también este elemento postmoderno, porque los personajes asumen una vida “real” y también se mueven adelante o atrás en el tiempo entre historias. Aún más allá, el lector se puede perder dentro del laberinto porque las historias no van por orden cronológico, y pistas importantes vienen antes y después de la conclusión de cada historia. Por último, el tono de la novela es de disfrute dentro de la locura, debido al lenguaje y los detalles de la narrativa que sugieren un sentido de humor incorporado en cada una de las historias. María DeGuzmán, en su reacción al uso de estereotipos como forma de crítica en esta novela, refleja frustración a este método de sátira, porque es fácil de malinterpretar: “*Locos*, escrito por Alfau, nunca confronta las repercusiones sociales del rebote de ironía que puede, de

hecho, conservar y reforzarlas”<sup>1</sup> (2005: 255). Su preocupación sobre esta combinación de disfrute y crítica incisiva es válida, y es uno de los problemas que se encuentra cuando un escritor elige usar estereotipos de esta manera. Sin embargo, el hecho de que Alfau intente tal combinación revela, de alguna manera, uno de los dilemas principales del movimiento postmoderno: la lucha para llegar a un acuerdo con la ética.

Teniendo en cuenta que los estereotipos en la novela son a la vez una crítica y una función postmoderna, existen tres áreas en las cuales la crítica se convierte en algo especialmente prominente en el texto. El primer caso de esta sátira elevada ocurre en la crítica de la sociedad y cultura españolas, especialmente cuando describe diferentes roles en la sociedad, o la falta de avance como nación. La sátira también es más fuerte en las historias que hablan de un “otro,” pero el nativo y también el otro son representados con desprecio. Finalmente, la crítica por medio de la sátira se convierte en algo mordaz cuando se trata de religión. En las dos historias que se dirigen a la religión, el tono es claramente sarcástico, revelando que esta faceta de la vida fue algo especialmente interesante para Alfau, y, de lo que intuimos de la novela, lo estima como algo retorcido y deformado.

También hay una relación entre la crítica por medio de estereotipos en esta novela y el trabajo de Ramón del Valle-Inclán, quien desarrolló la modalidad literaria que busca lo cómico en lo trágico y que él llamó “esperpento.” Cuando miramos el texto de *Locos* a través de este género más conocido en el mundo literario español que en el anglosajón, se ve que los personajes estereotípicos de la novela se parecen mucho a los bufones de los textos de Valle-Inclán. Este paralelismo nos indica una perspectiva literaria sacada de la tradición española, porque Alfau comparte con Valle-Inclán el uso de esta técnica para criticar la sociedad española. Ejemplos de

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<sup>1</sup> “Alfau’s *Locos* never confronts the social repercussions of ironic ricochet, the potential failure or inability of irony to unfix the stereotypes, the danger that irony might in fact conserve and reinforce them” [El original está escrito en inglés, y la traducción es mía]

los bufones de Alfau serían sus personajes que intentan, de modo también quijotesco, superar la mediocridad y trabajar para el avance del país. Otros ejemplos serían los que se llaman religiosos, y también España misma, con sus formas anticuadas y su pobreza. Con el relato de cada historia de estos bufones, Alfau intenta crear lo ridículo, lo absurdo, y la incapacidad de llegar a la excelencia para estos miembros de la sociedad española. Su tono consigue una mezcla de tragedia y comedia, demostrando una sociedad que se ha convertido en el bufón de Europa. Una pregunta que se queda sin resolver a pesar de este estudio es hasta qué punto es razonable imaginar una conexión de veras entre Alfau y Valle-Inclán, porque Alfau insiste que nunca había leído los grandes autores de la literatura española de su época. Las similitudes son evidentes, haciéndonos preguntar si las entrevistas con Alfau, que se hicieron unos cuarenta años después de que escribió la novela, son, de verdad, fiables, o si Alfau quería esconder sus raíces literarias para parecer más innovador y pionero. Aun así, sigue el hecho de que el autor proclama su indiferencia ante su nueva fama a la edad de 88 años, y parece ser poco probable que él quisiera retener información.

Otro asunto que surge a raíz de la descripción meticulosa de cada personaje estereotípico es cómo Alfau marca una diferencia de tono cuando relata los estereotipos religiosos. Alfau se mantiene constante durante la mayoría de la obra, tipificando la sociedad española por medio de sus personajes para burlarse de ellos y llevarnos a ver la crítica de cada aspecto de la sociedad. Sin embargo, con los estereotipos de la religión, la apatía que caracteriza los demás estereotipos desaparece y entra en una crítica más directa. La diferencia es tan marcada que se podría interpretar como una imperfección en el texto, porque Alfau no se mantiene constante en el estilo de escribir. Al contrario, prefiero pensar que este desplazamiento de estilo es parte del elemento postmoderno en la obra de Alfau, porque rechaza la idea de ser enjaulado por la estructura de

cualquier teoría, ni siquiera la suya. También relevante es la posibilidad de que las tendencias religiosas de Alfau hicieron que fuera más difícil para él mantener la objetividad ante la representación de este estereotipo en particular.

Por último, aunque este estudio de *Locos* se ha enfocado más en la parte del uso de estereotipos en la novela, *Locos* permanece bajo el esquema de literatura del Tercer Espacio, cosa obvia porque Alfau escribió esta novela sobre España desde Nueva York, mientras habitaba su propio Tercer Espacio, pero también evidente por su forma de tratar los estereotipos. Cuando Alfau exagera y juega con los mismos estereotipos, consigue romper las imágenes estereotípicas, al igual que las oposiciones binarias se pueden romper por medio de perspectivas híbridas. Aun así, como es especialmente evidente en el cuento “The Wallet,” en esta novela, Alfau no crea personajes híbridas como hace en *Chromos*, señalando, quizás, su propio desarrollo como autor desde la publicación de su primera novela hasta el momento de escribir la segunda. Otra posibilidad podría ser que Alfau también descubrió, a causa de su propia metamorfosis como inmigrante, que es imposible evitar el estado híbrido.

## **5 Estructuras postmodernas**

Una discusión de las características de los dos movimientos, modernismo literario y postmodernismo, revela la proximidad entre los dos, y también la complejidad de definir y separarlos. Ambos ponen un gran énfasis en la búsqueda del significado de la vida y el tema de la identidad, enfocándose en la inhabilidad de percibir una realidad objetiva o una experiencia real. Los dos son también caracterizados por el colapso de leyes y estructuras dentro de la novela, interrumpiendo la experiencia del lector y dejando que haya fragmentación constante que domine las obras. También tratan de resolver una crisis de existencia, y tienden a la desesperación que acompaña el habitar en incertidumbre. Estas características compartidas de

los dos movimientos están presentes también en las dos novelas de Alfau, haciendo viable la posibilidad de que ambas podrían encajar bien con el modernismo literario, o bien con el postmodernismo.

Aun así, cuando miramos más de cerca los motivos de usar estas técnicas en ambas novelas, descubrimos que las dos expresan temas de postmodernismo, y por eso cabe la posibilidad de que las dos sean precedentes del movimiento postmoderno. El uso de la metanarrativa en las dos ayuda a romper la fachada de realidad, exponiendo la naturaleza construida de los textos. También la pérdida de un solo género en las novelas, conseguida por medio del uso de manuscritos fragmentados y también por los cuentos cortos sin resolución, refleja el colapso en los distintos niveles de escritura de ficción, llegando hasta el fondo con el colapso del género mismo. También, los mismos personajes cambian de papeles dentro de la novela, creando un ambiente de incertidumbre y confusión.

Las técnicas literarias también nos recuerdan al postmodernismo, sobre todo con el énfasis en el juego. La primera de estas técnicas es el narrador poco fiable de las dos novelas, siendo “Alfau,” quien encaja con la técnica postmoderna porque a primera vista representa el autor mismo, sin embargo, es otro personaje, y uno que no transmite mucha confianza, ofreciéndonos una narración retorcida e inadecuada. El uso del absurdo mezclado con la ironía también demuestra esta tendencia de morar en incertidumbre, pero ambas técnicas son utilizadas de una manera ligera y alegre, haciendo posible que aun la crítica más mordaz obtenga un tono tentativo.

Al nivel filosófico, la ironía presente en los textos en momentos en los que se presentan verdades o ejemplos morales demuestra otra característica postmoderna: la subjetividad, sobre todo evidente cuando habla de los límites de la experiencia. Uno de los temas centrales de las

dos novelas es el deconstruccionismo. Alfau usa varias técnicas para demostrar este tema, de las cuales ya han sido mencionadas: el narrador poco fiable, el revelar el mecanismo detrás de la ficción y el uso de la fragmentación. Todas estas técnicas revelan la idea de que el lenguaje, la identidad y aun la sociedad en sí son construidas. Mientras las novelas se centran en el deconstruccionismo, el tono es de alegría y juego total, y los eventos son relatados con humor, no importando hasta qué punto son alarmantes. Un último elemento de este lado filosófico de la ficción de Alfau es el uso de la conclusión abierta, lo cual promueve la idea de que no existe una solución a la crisis existencial. La única manera de actuar entonces es o regodearse en la desesperación o jugar en la locura.

Definir las dos novelas dentro de estas teorías literarias ayuda en proveer al lector un esquema desde el cual se pueda leer y entender mejor las novelas, especialmente importante dado las técnicas complejas que Alfau utiliza en las dos novelas. Aun así, el hecho de clasificar las novelas nos lleva a un descubrimiento mucho más significativo. Teniendo en cuenta sólo las fechas en que Alfau escribió las dos novelas, estas novelas deben encajarse perfectamente en el periodo modernista. Por eso es tan importante el debate que hemos mencionado aquí de los marcadores de los dos períodos, porque estas dos novelas, aunque se alinean cronológicamente con el modernismo literario, mirando su estilo, contenido, tono y temas, encajan mejor con el postmodernismo. Clasificar la obra de Alfau como parte del movimiento postmoderno hace que Alfau sea un autor adelantado a su tiempo. Por lo tanto, Alfau sigue siendo una anomalía dentro de la teoría literaria, un ejemplo de un autor cuyo fracaso en el mundo de la industria editorial refleja su obra revolucionaria pero a la vez incomprendida.

Existe una implicación más de estas dos obras, especialmente relacionada con la novela *Chromos*, porque una novela que representa la experiencia del inmigrante desde una perspectiva

postmoderna era una rareza dentro de la literatura de inmigrantes de la primera mitad del siglo veinte. Así que, Alfau no sólo usó técnicas postmodernas adelantadas para su tiempo, sino que en realidad fue aún más innovador porque utilizó esas técnicas para realizar un relato de la experiencia inmigrante desde un modo original. En el momento en que la mayoría de las narrativas inmigrantes empleaban un lenguaje de sacrificio, progreso y gratitud inmensa hacia el país receptor, la narrativa de Alfau demuestra el colapso de la identidad bajo la tensión de la inmigración, combinando la teoría del Tercer Espacio con el postmodernismo para crear una manera original de describir los desafíos e inquietudes de ser inmigrante. Esto pone aún más peso en la cuestión de identidad, ya importante en el periodo postmoderno, pero en la obra de Alfau es amplificadas porque habla de una identidad híbrida pero a la vez restringida.

## **6 Cuentos cortos y poesía**

Al leer los cuentos cortos de Alfau, *Old Tales from Spain*, y la colección de poesía, *La poesía cursi*, es bastante obvio que los estilos, las técnicas y el formato que Alfau usa en estas dos obras son muy distintos de su forma de escribir en las novelas. Mientras es imposible decir si este cambio está relacionado con el cambio de género o más bien la compleja identidad de Alfau como autor en sí, el resultado de este cambio hace que estas obras tengan menos aspectos innovadores que las novelas. El estilo romántico que domina estas dos obras es un cambio de su estilo experimental y conglomerado, creado de diversas técnicas compuestas al gusto del autor. Por ejemplo, el tono de los cuentos cortos es mucho más literal y encaja bien con los cuentos de hadas tradicionales, sin embargo, en la forma de escribir en las novelas, se nota una perspectiva de alta ironía y mucha distancia. La noción de estructura también cambia en los cuentos cortos, y parece que el mantener esta forma tradicional a lo largo de las historias se convierte en una prioridad importante para el autor.

Aunque estas dos obras revelan una representación de Alfau como autor muy distinta, hay varios puntos en los cuentos cortos en los cuales Alfau el novelista luce por medio de sus estructuras rígidas que ha inventado para esta obra. Hay lapsus momentáneos a lo irónico que se encuentran en “El gusano de oro” o “La rivalidad,” que recuerdan al lector de las novelas y la voz irónica de su narrador. También, mientras el lector sólo espera encontrar una selección de cuentos para niños, dentro de las limitaciones de este género, Alfau sí profundiza en cuestiones y movimientos de polémica, y en la mayoría de estos casos, cuando se lanza hacia la filosofía por medio de la técnica de la alegoría, lo hace con el fin de criticar la sociedad española. Además, hay momentos en los cuales la narración de estos cuentos también nos recuerda al narrador poco fiable de las novelas. Un ejemplo de tal narrador sería el padre que informa a su hija que la historia que acaba de contarle no es verdad (“El gusano de oro”). Por estos motivos, mientras los cuentos cortos parecen no tener ninguna relación con las novelas hasta el punto que se puede llegar a sospechar que son la obra de otro autor, existen destellos del novelista Alfau en estos cuentos.

En otro nivel, mientras algunos de los cuentos son cuentos sencillos llenos de romanticismo, hay varios temas que merodean detrás de la fachada de cuentos alegres para niños. El primer tema ha sido identificado por Carmen Martín Gaité, siendo el protagonista recurrente: joven, varón, enigmático, y con el defecto de su propio egocentrismo y oscuridad. Este protagonista, como propone Martín Gaité, se asemeja al autor joven de estos cuentos, buscando su propia voz literaria (1998: xx). Otro tema que aparece en estos cuentos es una representación del Tercer Espacio por medio de cuentos de hadas, especialmente cuando el cuento trata del tema del “otro,” acompañado por una crítica del acto de crear “el otro,” lo cual es más reconocible en el cuento “El arco iris.” También hay una tendencia más fuerte en este libro que en las novelas

que lo seguirían de comentar los eventos en España, la tierra que Alfau había dejado atrás. Los siguientes textos se enfocarían más en la imposibilidad de hablar de la vida española y los eventos, quizás el resultado de la distancia y el tiempo interpuesto entre el autor y su patria. Esto parece una conclusión lógica porque Alfau compuso estos cuentos durante sus primeros años en los Estados Unidos, cuando quizás sentía una conexión más fuerte.

Una última hipótesis sobre esta colección de cuentos es la progresión de la voz de Alfau como escritor a lo largo de los años. Aunque es verdad que Alfau escribió estos cuentos con la esperanza de un éxito comercial, también existe la posibilidad de que el cambio de la voz del novelista se realice a la vez que él se mueve más al fondo del Tercer Espacio. Esto es una característica del Tercer Espacio y muchos teóricos hacen referencia a la idea de que sólo el habitar en el Tercer Espacio obliga al autor a encontrar una voz apropiada y compatible con su propia experiencia. Por eso, mientras estos cuentos ahora son menos apreciados desde un punto de vista literario, demuestran la progresión del autor hacia una voz híbrida, donde existe tensión en la identidad.

La misma historia se repite cuando miramos la poesía de Alfau, enfocándonos en el estilo y tono del poeta. Con una colección de poesía tan variada que no tiene ningún tema en común, se empieza a cuestionar si existe una transformación basada en la cronología de la poesía. Una posibilidad sería que Alfau empezó escribiendo con un estilo más romántico, y luego desarrolló un estilo más irónico y original. En realidad, mientras la mayoría de sus poemas más originales fueron escritos más tarde, los poemas románticos y tradicionales se extienden desde 1923 con el poema "Ciclo" hasta 1987 con "Punto Final." El otro problema con esta hipótesis de coherencia cronológica es que varios de los poemas no tienen una fecha documentada y no hay evidencia suficiente para llegar a esta conclusión. Teniendo esto en cuenta, la poesía de Alfau parece

definirse en general con el movimiento romántico, perceptible en la estructura, los esquemas de rima, y los temas filosóficos.

Importante también para la discusión de esta colección de poesía es el título que Alfau le dio: *La poesía cursi*. Este uso de la palabra cursi como definición para la obra entera es uno de los argumentos que Ilan Stavans utiliza para afirmar que existe una burla detrás del estilo romántico de esta obra. Stavans, el crítico más conocido de las obras de Alfau y el que más oportunidad ha tenido para hablar con el autor sobre estos temas, puede llevar razón en que esa fue la intención del autor, pero mirando la obra en sí no hay bastante evidencia en el texto para confirmar esta estrategia. Por las mismas razones que he clasificado a las dos novelas como sátiras de estereotipos y la experiencia del inmigrante, no encuentro pistas en esta obra que sirvieran como señales de un tono irónico. No hay la misma metanarrativa, ni tampoco digresión ni experimentación que ayuden al lector a ver la sátira del contenido de los poemas. Aunque existen pocos poemas que sí varían de este estilo convencional, no son bastantes para considerar esta obra como una burla del romanticismo. El mismo autor hace esta comparación entre su participación en el romanticismo y la burla de ello, pero la obra en sí es mucho más una participación y quizás la burla sólo existía en la mente del creador de estos poemas.

Otro asunto importante relacionado con la palabra “cursi” viene a raíz de que el personaje Garcia está obsesionado con el estilo cursi en la novela *Chromos*. En la novela es un estilo que el narrador, “Alfau,” ridiculiza y también en el cual el personaje Garcia siempre tiene que defenderse. Mientras la parte cursi de la novela *Chromos* se encuentra en la novela dentro de la novela, y por lo cual se puede argumentar que no tiene valor literario, es una versión de un Americaniard de la experiencia de vivir en el Tercer Espacio, y por eso, mantiene algo de valor como una versión auténtica, a pesar de la desconformidad de “Alfau.” Así, al leer *La poesía*

*cursi*, uno tiene la sensación de que estos poemas forman parte de las personalidades múltiples del único autor, Alfau, hasta el punto de que uno puede imaginar que estos mismos poemas son de Garcia, y que los había pasado a Alfau, al igual que le pasa sus manuscritos para revisión en la novela *Chromos*.

Aunque la poesía de Alfau no consigue un nivel de gran originalidad, sí se puede decir que es un ejemplo curioso de poesía escrita desde el Tercer Espacio. El tema de nostalgia se encuentra en varios poemas por medio de diferentes imágenes y mecanismos. También hay un sentido en que el estado híbrido es representado por medio de la poesía. A pesar de que esta obra no dispone del mismo material irónico e innovador que etiquetaba a Alfau como autor postmoderno prodigio, esta poesía no es menos suya que sus novelas, pero sí refleja otro aspecto de su ser Americaniard. Un ejemplo de esto podría ser uno de los poemas, “La juventud urbana,” que refleja recuerdos de una juventud en el Tercer Espacio, donde los coches eran algo que “torear.” Quizás el poema “¿?” es una reacción al hecho de observar y ser observado como “el otro.” Desde esta perspectiva, hay aún más poemas que representan la tensión de la hibridez, por ejemplo los poemas “Ciclo” o “Punto final.” De esta manera, la poesía, aunque conlleva menos mérito literario, revela a un autor que vive de forma real la hibridez que describe en sus obras.

Como comentario final sobre la mezcla entre el romanticismo y el Tercer Espacio en la poesía de Alfau, por medio de esta combinación el autor revela que las dos teorías literarias son relacionadas. De esta manera, la literatura del Tercer Espacio no se alinea con la distante y fría poesía del movimiento moderno literario, y quizás el postmoderno tampoco refleja el énfasis teleológico del Tercer Espacio en la búsqueda de identidad. En este aspecto, yo estoy de acuerdo con Joseph Scott cuando propone, “Alfau usa este trasfondo de imágenes góticas y sentimentales

con el fin de renovarlo”<sup>2</sup> (2005: 45). Para Alfau, usar imágenes románticas para describir su propia hibridez resuelve una parte del problema existencial porque encuentra un estilo que le permite expresar nostalgia como él considera apropiada. De hecho, este uso del romanticismo como parte de la voz del Tercer Espacio evoca referencias a teóricos recientes que cuestionan la teoría postcolonial por su tendencia a rechazar el uso de técnicas convencionales como parte de la voz postcolonial.

## **7 Conclusión**

Al terminar este estudio sobre las obras de Alfau, uno se puede preguntar qué futuro tienen las obras de un autor marginado y fallecido en este mundo literario tan acelerado y de alta innovación. Quizás el momento de Alfau ya ha pasado. A pesar de todo esto, hoy en día todavía hace falta leer autores como Alfau, porque en este momento, cuando deja de ser un contemporáneo y pasa a ser una figura histórica, él representa un momento en el comienzo del colapso del método lineal de la historia. Ahora, no sólo poseemos la retórica de los “Nativistas” que apoyaron la asimilación y la americanización, sino que tenemos en nuestras manos una versión renegada de ese tiempo: el resultado de la angustia emocional y psicológica que tal retórica se sobrepuso en los inmigrantes que vinieron a los Estados Unidos al principio del siglo XX. También, la voz inmigrante envalentonada defiende la necesidad de la libertad: libertad para existir en el entremedio, libertad para mantener creencias antiguas o elegir adaptarse a las nuevas, libertad de ser ciudadanos del país de nacimiento, o ciudadanos del nuevo, o quizás ninguno de los dos. Desafortunadamente, en el momento crucial cuando Alfau intentó publicar sus obras, la pregunta de Gayatri Spivak, “¿Puede hablar el sub-alterno?” se contestó por medio del mundo editorial con un “no” resonante. A pesar de esto, una ventaja adicional de la escritura

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<sup>2</sup> “Alfau uses this fund of Gothic and sentimental imagery in order to renew it.” [El original está escrito en inglés, la traducción al español es mía.]

de ficción del Tercer Espacio, en lugar de sólo la teoría, es que la novela hoy sigue hablando y ofreciendo una perspectiva de este espacio niche, que sin la voz de Alfau, habría sido perdida para siempre. Hoy seguimos con la posibilidad de reconocer una versión alternativa de este momento en particular de la historia. ¿Qué versión o versiones del pasado sobrevivirán?