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El Shayal, Dalia	المؤلف الرئيسي:
ج81	المجلد/العدد:
نعم	محكمة:
2013	التاريخ الميلادي:
ديسمبر	الشهر:
1 - 48	الصفحات:
661340	رقم MD:
بحوث ومقالات	نوع المحتوى:
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**READING HOUSES AND BUILDING TEXTS:
ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS IN CRISTINA
GARCIA'S DREAMING IN CUBAN**

Dr. Dalia El-Shayal^(•)

**As an architect I've always believed that what can
make a domestic setting truly home is the infusion
of a cultural dimension**

Michael Graves—an American architect

**(how can I not keep on living with two languages homes
nostalgias temptations sorrows?**

because I cannot lose a language

nor tear down a home nor bury a sorrow.)

Gustavo Perez Firmat, "Provocaciones"

Architecture and literature share certain principles of aesthetics and structure and often the same language is used to describe both textual and architectural spaces. Cities, neighborhoods, streets, buildings, gardens and houses are portrayed sites of lived experiences and also places that carry

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visible traces of cultural identity. The presence of architecture and architectural thought in philosophy and literature is solid and abundant.

Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is a philosophical work filled with architectural metaphors. In spite of the antisocial attitude of this work, early Expressionist architects in Germany accepted the text as a source for their creative efforts. (Antoniades 32). Some of the best descriptions of urban environments were those made of Paris by Henry Miller. If Paris was to be rebuilt, an urban designer of talent could have perhaps re-created it just by following Miller's descriptions. Charles Dickens did the same for a bygone industrial London. In Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, Marco Polo describes some of the cities he has seen in his travels. Seemingly unharmonious, the book abounds in vivid descriptions (architectural and otherwise) of cities built high above the ground on stilts or composed of water pipes and inhabited by 'nyads'. Calvino describes each city "by focusing on some dominant characteristic of its geographical situation, its building arrangements, its social practices, or much more subtle matters..." (Becker 270). Despite the fact that Calvino's cities are mostly imaginary or could, perhaps, be semi-realistic versions of existing ones, they do not allude to a specific historical period. Rather, they describe features of urban life, its organization and how people living in it respond to their built environment.

Architecture has been used historically as a tool for the expression of identities: personal, group or national. Building form and vocabulary has also been deployed to memorialize the self and home by the displaced (e.g. Cubans in New York). Human beings (choose to) identify themselves, as much by the environments they inhabit as by the vocabularies they choose to describe them. Hence, one way of understanding people is through a

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close reading of their built environment, their neighborhoods, their houses. This interrelationship between people and their built environment is strongly manifested in Cuban architecture, specifically in reference to Havana, the capital city. Cuban architecture has a tradition dating back to colonial days. In 1983 and with more than nine hundred buildings of architectural note, Old Havana became a UNESCO World Heritage Site. For centuries, Havana has been considered the key to the Gulf of Mexico. Situated on the shores of Carenas harbor, it was a very important site during the 16th and 17th centuries. Known as La Villa de San Cristobal de la Habana, it became, over the course of time a meeting place for the Spanish fleets in charge of transporting to the Spanish Metropolis all the wealth extracted from their domains in the so-called New World (Barcia 1). Throughout its five-decade history, Cuban architecture underwent dramatic shifts in ideologies and consequently in forms. Each sector of the city of Havana describes an era in the city's development stages and a period of its historical and political complex landscape. Although many of Old Havana's buildings are regarded as museums, it is, nonetheless, a city that is intensely lived by its people. Despite the several architectural shifts, they were able to feel a strong sense of bonding with their existing environment.

Winston Churchill, in a 1940 speech in the House of Commons, on the occasion of the death of Neville Chamberlain, described how “ history with its flickering lamp stumbles along the trail of the past, trying to reconstruct its scenes, revive its echoes and kindle with pale gleams the passion of former days” (Churchill). In the creation of the Cuba in the future, the recovery of its history will play a significant role, not only by its architects but also by its artists and writers. Cuban writers have been able to construct their own inside views of history and have showed how it could be

dramatized in their literature. On the other hand, Cuban-American writers created their own world characterized by displacement and search for self as well as by a need to recreate a community away from home.

Cuban-American literature is currently struggling to define itself within the American literary context, drawing from rhythms, flavors and landscapes born of a unique experience with roots in migration and exile. In his description of Cuban -American literary works, Mario Vargas Llosa, the renowned Peruvian novelist, writes “history and literature—truth and falsehood, reality and fiction—mingle in these texts in a manner that is often inextricable” (67). The work of Cuban-American writers is the product of several immigrant waves writing outside Cuba today. While their work varies greatly with regard to content and ideology but many of the same themes are emphasized. The common element of their work is that they foreground the events of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, since the very conditions of the production of literature force the exchange between the writer, the historian and the architect. It might be insufficient to discuss Cuban-American literature, without reference to Cuban architecture and the built environment. Cuban-American writers ‘build’ their texts with a cacophony of language and structures that reflect the complex literary heritage of the Americas.

Among such writers, is Cristina Garcia (1958-), whose first novel *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993) became an instant success upon its publication. Garcia is currently at the forefront of a wave of US Latina writers such as Julia Alvarez, Sandra Cisneros and Ana Castillo who began to be published in the early 1990s to considerable critical acclaim. The issue of dual identity and separation from the homeland is central to her novel. *Dreaming in Cuban* brings to life the story of three generations of Cuban

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women living in New York City and Cuba each with separate responses to the Cuban revolution. Celia del Pino is the matriarch whose passions alternate between her long-lost Spanish lover and the service of Fidel Castro (*El Lider*)¹. Lourdes, Celia's daughter, who runs a bakery in Brooklyn, NY is haunted by the memory of being raped by a revolutionary soldier and is possessed by her hatred for Castro and communism and her mother's devotion to both. Pilar, Lourdes' daughter, born the same year when Castro took power, is a would-be artist and student in New York, but with strong ties to her Cuban roots. Described as a 'dreamy and bittersweet story', the novel tackles the historical theme of spiritual exile and the deadly uncertainty through which Cuba continues to live.

The architecture and the built environment of Havana with its diversity, richness and complexity is, even if indirectly, interwoven in the fabric of the literary styles and character formation of Cuban and Cuban-American writers. Thus, architectural and literary identities are formed, developed and, at times, altered through the city's diverse cultural heritage.

In offering a mosaic merge between architecture and literature, this paper attempts to discuss the established links between people and their built environment as exemplified in three main elements: identity formation, magical realism and hybridity and eclecticism. First, there will be a recount of the several elements in the three periods of architectural development in Cuba, i.e. Colonial, Republican and Revolutionary. The analysis will further trace the presence and effects of these elements as manifested in the characterization, function and ideologies of the women characters in Cristina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*. Second, the paper will examine the literary concept of Magical Realism (which has a strong presence in Garcia's novel) and see how characteristics of such a concept

are present in Cuban architecture, its actual buildings and urban setting. The third element of study is concerned with the hybrid and eclectic structure in Cuban architecture and its parallel mode in literature where Garcia implements interlingual texts in her writing. Examples of the overlaps of above elements/concepts will further enhance the connection between the two seemingly distant genres: architecture and literature.

It is worth noting here that the connections established between architecture and the literary text will be mostly done in a metaphorical sense. No specific house, building, garden, street or neighborhood is closely examined but rather a collective sense of place will be portrayed. This metaphoric channel offers opportunities to see an architectural design or a literary work in another light. It will encourage the viewer/reader to probe a new set of questions and come up with different interpretations.

How do we relate the story of a community with its built environment? Not only do the stories of Cuban- American writers depend upon a building, an environment, a structure as symbolic or metaphorical, but they also use architectural forms of thinking and design as an integral part of their overall structure. The Cuban-American experience is not monolithic and demands, after all, to be told through many voices, only two of which are architecture and literature.

a) Architectural/Literary Elements and the Formation of Identity:

Stuart Hall, the influential cultural theorist, has introduced identity through a “discursive” approach, which understands identification “as a construction, a process never completed—always ‘in process’ ” (2). Architectural identity in Cuba, exemplified in Havana, could be seen through this perspective. The three different periods of architectural

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development: the Colonial (1512-1898), the Republican (1898-1959) and the Revolutionary (1959-present) represent a process through which politics has played a major role in inscribing the features of each period and its inspirations. Not only do these three periods roughly indicate the political and economic ideologies of the time, but they also reflect the geographic resources and technologies available. Moreover, in residential structures, the types of building materials, along with the interior layout, speak to the economic status, family size, and the perception of what the proper house should look like and how its spaces should function (Keiffer 61). The transformation from one period to the next was far from being smooth, despite the acceptance and adaptability of the citizens of Cuba.

Likewise, in Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*, one cannot separate the political from the personal as they constantly weave in and out of each other. Those political circumstances have shaped the identities of the characters as much as they have shaped the identities of the architectural forms and urban settings of Cuba. Critic David Mitchell states that a nationalistic political theme can be a device to explain divisions between family members that have deeper roots, in a psychological sense, and are far older than the 1959 revolution (53). Garcia, indeed, concentrates on the effect of nationalist differences in society in the events of her novel. Her characters' reaction to the revolution relate to their personalities and their economic background. Celia has always been aware of the social and economic injustices of life in Cuba. For her, Castro's coming to power signals a new social order and pride in a free and new Cuba. Lourdes, Celia's daughter, has good reasons for her different political views. She, her husband Ruffino and her daughter, Pilar (considered Garcia's alter-ego), leave Cuba at the first opportunity. Lourdes is also a fervent patriot

and anticommunist but is proud of the life she has created in Brooklyn. Though Garcia has said that Celia provides the underpinnings of the novel ("And There Is" 108), it's actually Pilar's desire for roots and connection and her return to mythical Cuba that bring healing to her family's wounds and thus sets three different examples of how identities of those woman are shaped by social and political circumstances.

It is quite appropriate to refer here to Michel Foucault's notion of identity where he scrutinizes the relationship between subjects and their identities, building his theory on the notion of resistance. To Foucault, resistance allows us to understand the possibility of very radical forms of experience, which may break and fundamentally reconfigure it. What emerges might hardly be conceived as 'the same subject'. Out of this, develops the concept of "discontinuity of the subject" and its "explosion" through a transformative experience resulting in something that is radically other. Foucault asserts that such experiences, moments of revolutionary upheaval and reconstitution of the subject, enable us to see the limitations of attempts to historicize the subject that, even while succeeding in undermining notions of the transcendental or preconfigured subject, nevertheless fail to break with continuing narrative of identity. In such cases, resistance does not merely reconfigure the relationship of subjects to their identities but may sunder that relationship entirely" (46).

Foucault's theory can be applied to the architecture of Cuba. The three periods of architectural typology presented above are, indeed, totally different. None is considered a 'continuity' of the other. First, starting with the Colonial architecture of Havana, it should be highlighted that despite the fact that it is 'mistakenly' considered Havana's 'traditional' architectural style, the colonization process interrupted the development of

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the main expression of the traditional rural architecture 'el bohio'².



El Bohio Traditional Cuban Country House

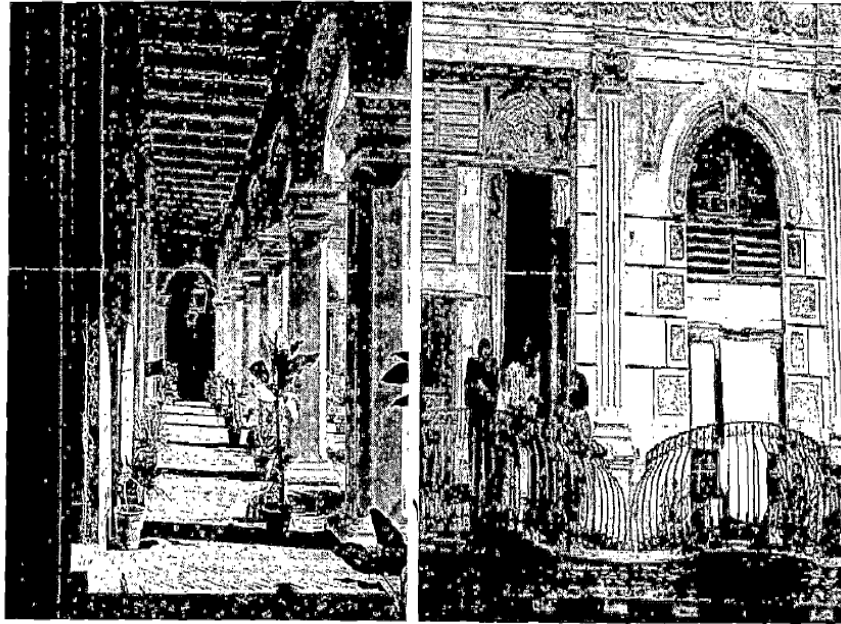
Unlike most Latin American towns where there is a central plaza, Havana has a peculiar urban structure composed by several main squares, each one with one dominating public, social or religious function. Impressive buildings were built on Plaza Vieja, Plaza De Armas, Plaza de San Francisco, Plaza de Cristo and Plaza de la Catedral.



Plaza de la Catedral, Havana

Like the peculiar urban structure of the Colonial period, where there is one dominant building in a plaza, Celia in Garcia's novel, stands as this incredible edifice around which most of the events revolve. She, the island-based matriarch, is the glue that holds together, however tenuously, the divided and complicated family. Unlike her kin, she stands out as an unwitting 'Ariadne-like' character.³ By offering her conflicting views about the revolution; Celia presents a nuanced vision of Cuban reality. Despite the characters' strong attachments with one another, no real family nucleus exists and the dealings of the extended family forge multiple layers of tension. Better still, it is the kind of tension that, although geographically distant, Celia is still able to manipulate. It is the same kind of manipulative spirit that dominates the plaza where, for example, the Cathedral exists.

The resultant Colonial architecture, which is sometimes considered the "traditional" Cuban architecture, comes from the Mediterranean model brought to Cuba by the Spaniards (relationship between indoors and outdoors by the internal courtyard, minimum window area to the street and very thick walls) (Courret 2). It was influenced by European urban layouts and featured colonnaded overhangs to help protect against the tropical sun and sporadic downpours and to create shade to keep the buildings cool. High ceilings and corresponding massive doors and windows allow breezes to pass through the structures while wooden shutters protect against cold spells and violent storms. The red tiled roofs, common to Mediterranean climates, also permit rainwater to be funneled into underground cisterns. Later this model was transformed to fit better the Cuban climatic conditions (higher ceilings, larger windows and colored glasses over them, balconies, porches, galleries and abundant vegetation in the courtyard).

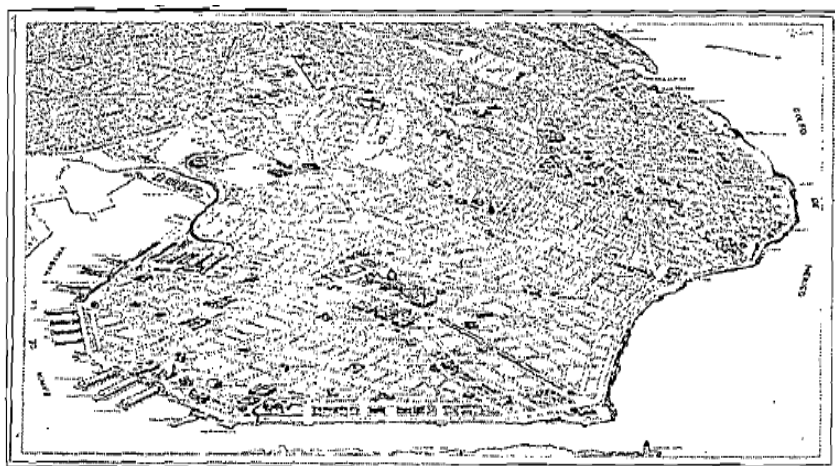


Colonnades and balconies in Havana

Garcia's novel *Dreaming in Cuban* builds those 'colonnaded overhangs', 'massive doors, 'windows', 'wooden shutters' as well as 'balconies', 'porches', and 'galleries' representing different functions and alternate forms of social space. Henri Lefebvre, in his book, *The Production of Space*, confirms "the form of social space is encounter, assembly, simultaneity." He further questions what assembles and what is assembled. "The answer is: everything that there is in space, everything that is produced either by nature or by society, either through their co-operation or through their conflicts" (101). This is shown through highlighting the daughters' connection with their fathers and that of the mothers with their sons. Thus, forming some strong colonnades/columns/pillars on which a strong family unit is built. This strong emphasis on the father/daughter/ mother/son relationship has its roots in the Cuban culture.

The urban form and architecture of the Republican period, to a large extend, takes a dramatic turn when it follows the American model. It

resembles urban planning designs incorporated in cities of the United States in the early 1900s. A grid system of streets crossing at right angles, created rectangular blocks that were divided into lots. Curved streets were straightened and widened to accommodate the automobile. After the establishment of the Republic at the beginning of the 20th century trading and harbor activities increased. Due to the lack of enough spaces for storage, the ground floors of many former mansions were turned into warehouse facilities. The Old Town deteriorated as housing was largely replaced by services. A variety of shops then crowded Old Havana's narrow streets. In the twenties the financial and banking center of the City, a sort of "Little Wall Street", was fully consolidated. Elegant buildings for foreign and national banks were erected. Only the commercial and administrative areas were able to resist the increasing decline of this valuable urban sector. Beginning the 1940 s the International Style and the Modern Movement predominated in the design of new buildings. Cuban Modern architecture followed the most advanced trends and produced outstanding exponents.



Havana's grid System

Contrary to the position of Celia as a central figure in Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*, the structure of the novel as a whole reinforces the decentralizing spirit that animates the text. It's a gradual progression outwards from the town's center (the plaza) reaching out to surrounding areas. Narrative techniques are deployed parallel to the themes to show the range of perceptions and interpretations constructed by the generations of women in the novel. First and third person narratives, blending epistolary sections, alternate but while the first person narratives give an illusion of autonomy, they diminish the power of an omniscient narrator (a central figure) who seems to constantly intrude into the characters' thoughts. Thus, the process of narration moves back and forth, and at cross-sections, among characters almost in a grid form akin to that formulated in the streets during the Republican period. It is the type of grid that allows 'crossing at right angles' and thus encompassing multiple points of view, offering the reader different interpretations of the same incident. It also conveys "the rich texture of intersecting positionalities and overlapping worlds" (Davis 60).

Architecture has also been exploited in politics when Fidel Castro and Che Guevara initiated a program, the result of which was the construction of The Escuelas Nacionales de Arte (National Art Schools), built from 1961 to 1965. The architects they commissioned created an organic complex of brick and terra-cotta Catalan vaulted structures that reflected the optimism and exuberance of the period. The schools attempted to reinvent architecture, just as the Revolution hoped to reinvent society. This echoes the great 19th century revolutionist, Jose Marti when he said, "a revolution of forms is a revolution of essentials". However, even before construction was completed, the schools fell out of official favor and were

subjected to an attack that resulted in their subsequent "disappearance." An ideological campaign branded them politically unacceptable, a bourgeois luxury that was not in keeping with the Revolution. The buildings fell into disuse and, abandoned to the jungle, were literally overgrown (Loomis).

The Revolution brought a new social order to Cuba and with it a new way of looking at buildings and their usage. Following the overthrow of Batista's regime, the new Cuban government led by Fidel Castro, launched an ambitious national building program designed to support the socialist agenda of the new regime. As for the Old City, after the Revolution, priority was given to other matters, so the City was not transformed according to Modern trends. As a result, due to their advanced age and lack of maintenance, historical quarters were quite derelict. At the city's outskirts, after the revolution, architecture followed a single, utilitarian path, with new buildings constructed to be practical and economical. Most architectural structures built after 1959 were apartment cities in suburban areas and in the countryside intended to house the poor and professionals who did not have homes. The architecture rarely varied from the prescribed Soviet styles. An apartment building in the Soviet style, usually three storeys high, consists of units with up to three bedrooms and one bath, a tiny kitchen, and a laundry balcony. These rectangular apartment buildings were built with concrete blocks, and pressed marble was used for the floors. Revolutionary-era school buildings also followed the heavy, utilitarian, Soviet model that makes a distinctive landmark among the more tropical and colonial buildings that were built before 1959.

This principle of utilitarianism reflects what Jeremy Bentham, English philosopher and social reformer, calls 'the principal of utility' (a

term that he borrowed from David Hume). In adverting to this principle, he was not only referring to the usefulness of material things or action, but also to the extent to which these things promote the general happiness. Thus Bentham writes that the principle of utility is that which “approves or disapproves of *every* action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question” (4).

The new social order that came to Cuba and that brought with it the new perspective with which people regarded buildings, had the self-same impact on the level of functionality and utilitarianism as presented in the characters of Garcia’s novel.

Away from romanticizing the idea of Cuba and the nostalgia that comes along with it, functionality seems to permeate the lives of Garcia’s characters. In some instances, it is a type of utility that not only enables them to face reality but that which becomes a set-up that evokes happiness.

Pilar’s travel to Cuba provides her with “full knowledge of her Cuban ancestry, of who she is” (Gomez- Vega 98), whereas the practical side accepts the logic behind her return to the US. This logic soon takes the form of a declaration: “although Cuba is home, New York is more so” (Vasquez 24). Pilar’s return to the US is inevitable. After she got the taste of Cuba and was able to extinguish the thirst of nostalgia, utility and functionality soon followed.

Once again and away from the romantic vision, while she is at a record store, Pilar speaks of her disillusion of punk music but at the same moment buys an old Beny More album, him being Cuba’s greatest singer. By being a consumer herself, she instantly becomes part of commodifying

Cuban culture.

When the group of young boys attack her in the park, one of them "throws [her] Beny More album against the elm" (202). Surprisingly, even violence cannot shatter Pilar's connection to this commodity: "It doesn't break and I'm reassured. I imagine picking up the record, feeling each groove with my fingertips" (202). Such a commodity offers Pilar the possibility for reconnection with Cuba via the Beny More album, "yet she remains ambivalent regarding the access [it] supposedly provide[s]" (Saez).

Such strong connections with what is functional weaves Bentham's "principle of utility" as it is represented in Cuba's architectural new national building program, with many incidents in Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*. In it, characters not only connect with Cuba on the emotional and theoretical level, but also on the functional and utilitarian level.

Thus, the transformation that took place within the structure of Cuban architecture from one period to the next was difficult. The Colonial period started with a complete denial of the authentic rural architecture; the Republican period introduced eclectic architectural forms that differ from the Mediterranean styles adopted in the preceding period. Then, came the modern/revolutionary model, representing a totally alien form of architecture to the city's landscape. Likewise, all the characteristics that illustrate the different architectural forms were also metaphorically represented either in the form or the content of Garcia's novel. Political transitions also obviously affected the choice of the architectural forms represented in the city inscribing different ideologies in the city's political history. Similarly, the ideologies of Garcia's women protagonists were also shaped by the political instances. The discontinuity of a specific

architectural identity from one period to the next clearly reflects Foucault's theory and bears witness to the discontinuity of the thread of identity commonly known and presented by Stuart Hall.

b) Magical Realism: 'Real' or 'Fantastic'?

Magical Realism is not a realism to be transfigured by the supplement of a magical perspective, but a reality which is already in and of itself magical and fantastic.----- *Frederic Jameson*

In the prologue to his novel *The Kingdom of This World* (*El reino de este mundo*), Alejo Carpentier, the important Cuban writer asserts "for what is the history of Latin America but a chronicle of magical realism?" (16) He speaks about magical realism as a style of writing that was founded in the history and beliefs of local people rather than "a literary imposition (or embellishment) grafted onto indigenous cultures" (West 36), The term "magical realism" was first introduced by Franz Roh, a German art critic, to describe the unusual realism of some American painters of the 1920 s. Later, the term grew more popular in Latin America when famous authors like Jorge Luis Borges intended to destroy the demarcation line between the 'real' and the 'fantastic'. In Spanish, the term *lo real maravilloso* (often used interchangeably with *magico realismo*) evokes many associations, all linked with the sense of strangeness, amazement or unpredictability. The concept appropriately explains the syncretic reality, which seems to exist throughout Latin America.⁴ Carpentier believes that because magical realism originated in people's faith and daily experience of reality, it could

inspire them to social action, to seek freedom.

In his book *Carpentier's Baroque Fiction: Returning Medusa's Gaze*,⁵ Steve Wakefield introduces the presence, dominance rather, of magical realism and baroque in Latin- American fiction. Needless to say, this influence was naturally passed on to generations of Latin-American writers. Several critics claim that Cristina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban* bears the imprint of the magical realistic tradition of Alejo Carpentier, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Isabel Allende.⁶ She was affected by the 'Medusa's Gaze' (a metaphor for the petrifying power of the Baroque as a weapon for European dominance) as her selfhood is made up of influences from more than one culture. Many of the "magical realist" mythologies of Latin American culture are preserved in the folklore of Latino/a fiction in the US through stories of miraculous occurrences and spiritual world. This folklore "expresses cultural differences from the dominant Anglo-American culture, which makes magical realism in US Latina/o writing to be *read as an ethnic sign*" (Christian 126). In Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*, *Santeria* (an Afro-Cuban religion merging Yoruba beliefs with Catholic saints)⁷ also functions as ethnic performance by enabling Pilar, the US Cuban protagonist, to reestablish connection with her ancestral culture. One day when Pilar's existence as a college student seems particularly meaningless, she enters an upper Park Avenue *botanica* run by an elderly man who looks "as if his ancestors were royal palms" (200). He immediately identifies her as a daughter of Chango (god of fire and lightning) and gives her holy water, an assortment of herbs with which to bathe, and a white votive candle. Pilar religiously follows his instructions upon her return to her room at the university:

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I light my candle. The bath turns a clear green from the herbs. It has the sharp scent of an open field in spring.

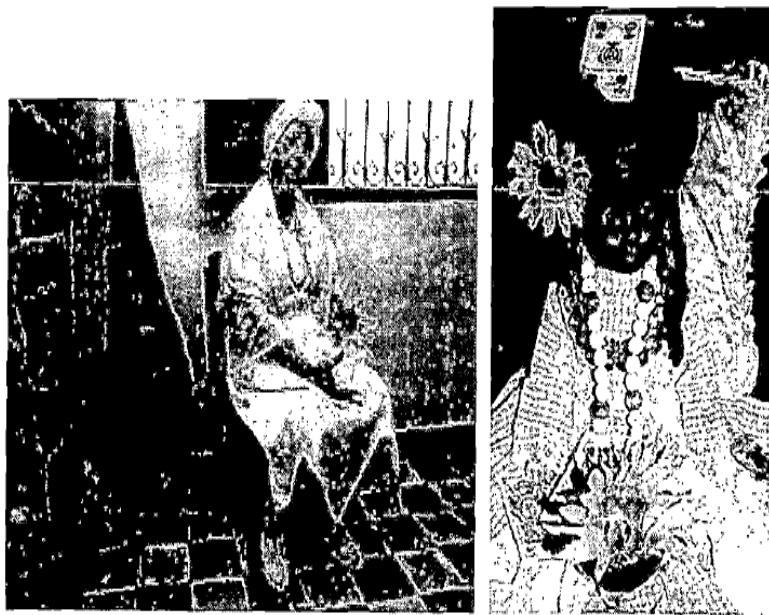
When I pour it on my hair, I feel a sticky cold-like dry ice, then a soporific heat. I'm walking naked as beam of light along brick paths and squares of grass, phosphorescent and clean. At midnight, I awake and paint a large canvas ignited with reds and whites, each color betraying the other.

I do this for eight more nights. On the ninth night of my baths, I call my mother and tell her we are coming to Cuba (203)

In effect, Pilar's performance of the ritual highlights her ethnic difference as it rekindles her desire to seek out her Cuban roots especially when she recalls how her nannies in Cuba "sprinkled cinnamon in [her] bath, and massaged [her] stomach with olive oil" (201). Garcia expresses those magical realist elements in a strong narrative drive, in which the recognizable 'real' merges with the unexpected and the inexplicable, i.e. Pilar's 'real' world as a college student and an artist along with her drive to succumb to the world of *Santeria*—the 'unexpected' and 'inexplicable'. Those elements of mythology are combined with everyday routine, often in a mosaic-like pattern of refraction and recurrence. Time exists in a kind of timeless fluidity and "the unreal happens as part of reality" (Flores 109).

On the other hand, Felicia, Celia's daughter, remains a stranger to the rational world because of her illness (she suffers from acute syphilis), which robs her own sanity. Felicia's madness isolates her and only her interest in the practice of *santeria* rites seems to provide her solace for her solitary existence: "She opens her mouth but her thoughts erase themselves before she can speak. Something is wrong with her tongue" (83). Felicia's

religious practices, her coconuts (identified in *Santeria* with power, purification, and prophecy), her shells seem to be her only consolation in her distraught life. She turns to *Santeria* for insight into the real meaning of things; the ceremonies become “a kind of poetry that connected her to larger worlds, worlds alive and infinite” (186). When she finally takes her own life, her friend, Herminia, a *santeria* priestess, is the only one who seems to understand her predicament.



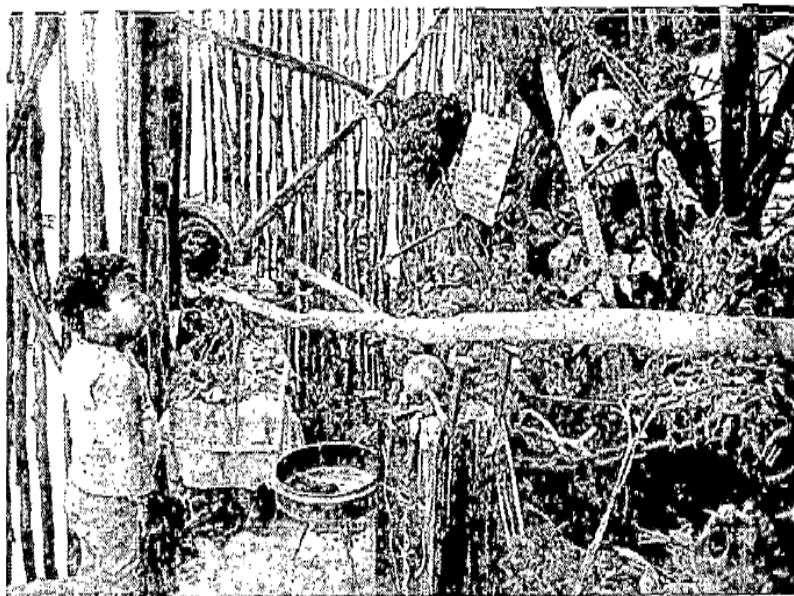
Santeria priestess Santeria doll

Contrary to both Pilar and Felicia, Celia assumes a detached stance from both Catholicism and *Santeria* except when she needs some spiritual formula that might help her. Ironical as it is, since she is the eldest member of the family and the closest to the Cuban rituals and roots, Celia thinks that the worst thing is for women to be contained within the *naiTow* confines to which “priests and politicians” consign them. Although a non-believer, she still feels cautious about spiritual issues and superstitions,

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which she does not comprehend on a rational level. Although she dabbles in *Santeria* herself, she distrusts the secret ceremonies of African voodoo and she fears Chango. Celia prays intensely for her daughter, Felicia, by the Ceiba tree when Felicia's health fails. There she meets Herminia carrying healing baskets full of leaves from the Ceiba tree. At the end of the novel, however, "Celia does fulminate against *Santeria*, Felicia's chosen form of spiritual expression, and commits sacrileges in the temple where Felicia became a priestess" (Kafka 66). Despite her conflicting, and sometimes contradictory, feelings towards *Santeria*, she often falls back upon it as a means of achieving cultural solidarity, "*an ambiente*".



Santaria altar, Havana, Cuba, 1998

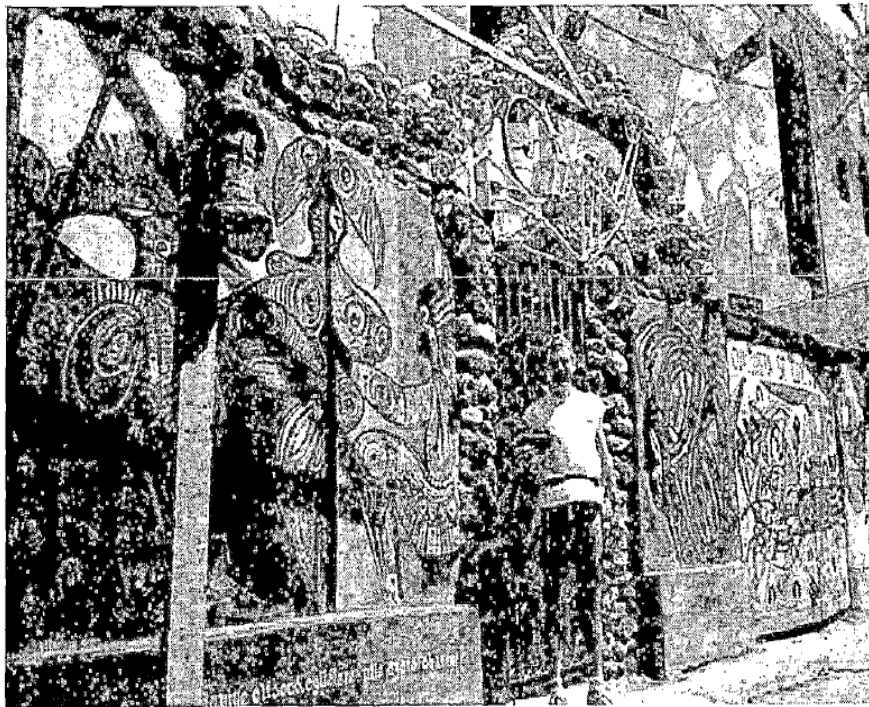
Magical realism may be viewed as more than a specific historical/geographical literary movement; it is an element of style that can be located in a large variety of genres, including architecture and its built environment. It has an obvious imprint in Cuba's urban setting and building heritage. Its presence in Havana is exemplified in two levels: first,

in a holistic perspective where the concepts of Magical Realism are applied to the city's landscape and second, in reference to detailed building-specific elements. Many of the features of the literary concept apply to the city's landscape. The magical element is manifested in the juxtaposition of various time references (with a hegemonic contrast) that exists in the city's urban fabrics and architectural diversity, each expressing an era of the city's political and social history. Those diverse urban fabrics and architectural styles, borrowed from different parts of the world and under different political regimes, added a magical geographic dimension to the city's image. A typical magical realistic element in literature is that characters accept, rather than question, the logic of the magical element. Pilar, in Garcia's novel smoothly accepted, rather than questioned, the implementation of the *Santeria* tradition in her daily routine. Despite being a New York artist, who has lived and practiced daily routines far from those magical concepts, she still adhered and believed in such culturally connected traditions. Likewise, Havana's residents do not, to a large extent, question their urban diversity. They not only accommodate and adapt, but rather feel comfortable with the changes that occurred to the city throughout its history.

The physical representation of myth and beliefs are manifested in the effect of the *Santeria* religion on Cuba's landscape. Historically, Roman Catholicism has been the dominant religion in Cuba, and it remains to have 40% of its population as Catholics, 4% if as Protestants and 2% as Afro-American Spiritist devotees of *Santeria*. True to the country's *mestizo* culture (a mixture of European and Indian ancestry), Cubans grafted Catholicism onto African religions brought over by slaves, resulting in Afro-Cuban equivalent gods for the major Catholic saints—and the

occasional animal sacrifice. (Caribnation).

In downtown Havana there is a unique cultural center dedicated to the *Santeria* religion where a whole block is painted and decorated with symbols. The community of *Santeria* religion is also represented by the famous Cuban muralist, Salvador Gonzalez in his numerous murals on several buildings in the city.



Murals representing Santeria religion and beliefs, Havana

c) Hybrid Structure/Interlingual Text:

Hybridity is one of the most disputed terms in postcolonial studies. It commonly refers to “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization” (Ashcroft 118). The term ‘hybridity’ has been recently associated with Homi Bhabha. In his piece entitled “Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences”, Bhabha stresses the

interdependence of the colonizer and the colonized. He argues that all cultural systems and statements are constructed in what he calls the 'Third Space of Enunciation'. In accepting this argument, we begin to understand why claims to the inherent purity and originality of cultures are 'untenable'. Bhabha urges us into this space in an effort to open up the notion of an international culture "not based on exoticism or multi-culturalism of the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity" (155). In bringing this to the next stage, Bhabha hopes that it is in this space "that we will find those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others. And by exploring this 'Third Space', we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves" (156).

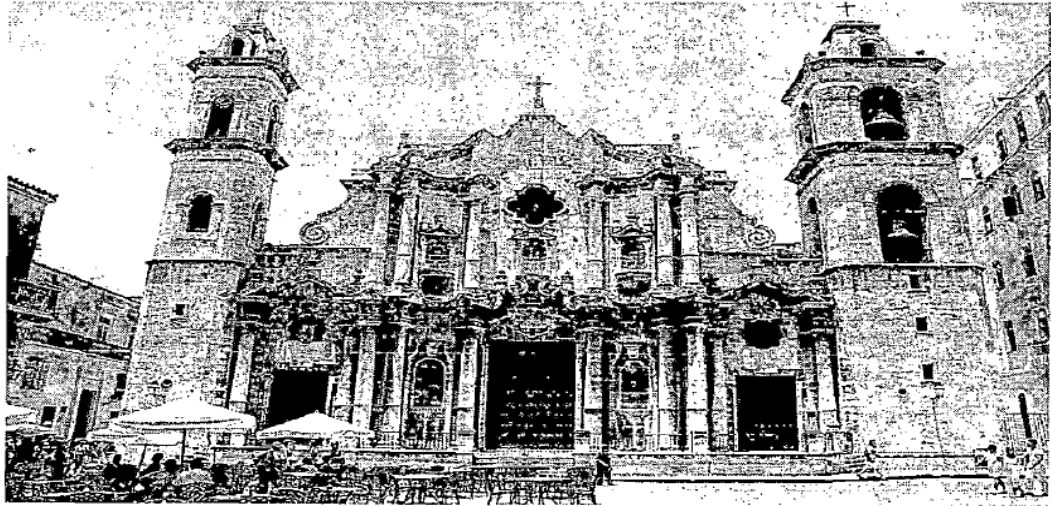
Based on the 'articulation of culture's hybridity', Cuban architecture could be considered hybrid in all its different stages combining European/American/Mediterranean with some local and ethnic elements. This notion of hybridity is two-dimensional. First, the adoption of discrete architectural elements in one building along with the climatic considerations of Havana, the city. Second, is the ease and comfort with which the different styles, through its five-decade history, have accommodated to each other.⁸ Cuba has developed a unique typology of Baroque architecture different from that created in Europe. In the 17th century, the Roman Catholic Church encouraged the popularity and success of the "Baroque" when it decided that the drama of the Baroque artists' style could communicate religious themes in direct and emotional involvement. In European Baroque architecture, new emphasis was placed on bold massing, colonnades, domes, light and shade (*chiaroscuro*), color effects and the bold play of volume and void. In interiors, Baroque also emphasizes the use of a sequence of monumental stairs mostly copied

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in aristocratic dwellings. In their striving for the fullest possible effects of “molded space, manipulated light, brilliant color, and sensuous details”, (Roth 394) Baroque architects created an architecture that was, increasingly, concerned with the shaping of space and almost not at all with expression of the fundamental structure of architecture. Architecture, thus, became concerned with visual effects with very little structural truth. With an attempt to create Bhabha’s “Third Space of Enunciation”, Cuban architects developed a hybrid form of Cuban baroque that evolved out of the Renaissance culture and also opposed it. While the word ‘baroque’ in Europe was almost synonymous with profusion and excess, it is mostly related to elements of being majestic and simple in Cuban baroque. Early examples of Baroque architecture are “modest re-adaptations of the continental style, which results in a curious hybrid built out of the local porous coral rock, which lends itself to less sculpturally sensual flatter, applied model”. (Rodriguez)

The Cathedral of St. Cristobal of Havana is the greatest example of Cuban Baroque style, as it constitutes both a symbol and an evocation of the city. Its construction began towards 1748 in what was called the plaza de la Cienaga, as a temple for the Jesuit fathers. But when this order was expelled in 1767, the half-finished church was designated to be the Parroquial Mayor (principal parish church), in which form it was concluded by 1777, In 1788 Havana was promoted to the rank of Diocese, and the parish church became a cathedral. The building presents a front so harmonious as to rival any other monument of its type. It is composed of three sections stacked in pyramidal form, with a facade designed in the (Italian) Baroque style. The first and second levels are separated by a swirling cornice



Cathedral of St. Cristobal of Havana

Prior to the early part of the 20th century, examples of the Eclectic architecture trends (already popular in Europe and the US), were found in Havana, where they were also identified by progress and innovation. Paul Goldberger points out that Cuba has “one of the richest and most eclectic urban environments, overflowing with architecture that is extravagant in its ambition and spectacular in its execution” (qtd in Engels 9). Neo-classical, Bauhaus and Mediterranean styles from Europe as well as Art Deco and Modern styles from the United States dominated single family residences complete with front yards and garages. In general, at the beginning of the 20th century, with the Republican period, Eclecticism was concluded as the style employed for most constructions. Neo Renaissance, Neo Baroque, Neo Gothic, Neo Moorish, Neo Colonial appeared everywhere.

This very notion of hybridity and eclecticism is a running feature in Cristina Garcia’s novel *Dreaming in Cuban*. She skillfully shifts the narrative from third person to first person while mixing in a series of Celia’s letters to her lover, Gustavo. She often shifts from past to present,

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changes location (from Brooklyn to Havana) from one character to the next. All characters are caught in webs that history has set up for them. Pilar, the grand daughter, is herself a cultural hybrid, raised in Brooklyn, but with strong feelings for her Cuban roots. She is caught with a foot in both worlds, nostalgic for Cuba, but fully rooted in the cultural scene of New York City.⁹ The novel also suggests that she will be the repository of the family's history and memory. As Celia writes to her lover on the day Pilar is born, "I will no longer write to you *mi amor*. She will remember everything" (245).

In an article entitled "Is Fiction the Art of Lying?", Mario Vargas Llosa asserts that in fiction the greatest truths are revealed through the artistic use of language, which is not rooted in the form of inquiry that must respond to reality (40). The exile sensibility that marked the initial works of Cuban writers on American soil has been replaced with a hybrid identity that straddles two cultures. While the older exiled writers lived spiritually and emotionally in Cuba and wrote in Spanish, "the younger generations have exhibited their biculturalism in standard English, often sprinkled with an array of Spanish words" (Lopez 154). Cristina Garcia's use of language in *Dreaming in Cuban* has been described as 'languid and sensual, curt and surprising'. In her novel, Garcia uses both English and Spanish (Spanglish), where her sentence structure and amalgamation of both languages does not obstruct the understanding of the meaning behind words. With simple inference, the reader would be able to grasp the meaning in English, regardless of his/her knowledge of Spanish. Contrary to this situation is, for example, Roberto Fernandez's (a Cuban-American writer) novel, *Raining Backward* (1988), where the novel demands a reader who can understand both English and Spanish.

Critics of other bicultural literatures such as Chicano fiction have referred to the cultural and literary strategy of using two languages simultaneously within a literary text as interlingualism. According to Marta Sanchez, interlingualism requires the reader to move from one language to another: “In an interlingual experience, the tensions in syntax, the ironies, and the reverberations of words and images interlock, pulling in two directions at once” (21). Narratives written interlingually engage rival sets of reader expectations as they graphically enact on the surface of the page the conflicts and tensions between English-speaking and Spanish-speaking audiences. Critic Mary Vasquez states that the “over-literal renderings of Spanish expressions into English become markers of cultural alienation and conflicting cultural values” (100).

Garcia was able to overcome such tensions and alienations by her subtle, yet effective, use of Spanish within her text. In an interview, Garcia once claimed that her “use of Spanish is very conscious and judicious...there’s a kind of musicality and cadence that works its way into [her] English” (Heredia 78). As a Cuban American who grows up in the United States, Pilar, has grown up speaking English, and English is the language in which she writes and records the tales of Del Pino family. Pilar’s own anxiety about losing the language of her culture is manifested through her obsession with paintings and “in her rumination about visual texts” (Alvarez-Borland “Displacements” 46) . Pilar finds that visual images communicate meaning much more effectively than language: “Painting is its own language....translations just confuse it, dilute it, like words going from Spanish to English” (59). She questions, “Who needs words when colors and lines conjure up their own language” (139).

It is indirectly that Garcia borrowed from Cuban Baroque architecture its concern with and emphasis on the visual effects, giving little attention to structural truth. Garcia also borrowed the qualities of Cuban baroque architecture in her use of language that could be easily described as ‘majestic and simple’—a quality that often describes architectural elements in Cuban Baroque architecture along with its stress on the visual component including use of color. In poetic language, Pilar narrates her impressions of her homeland upon her visit to Cuba:

Until I returned to Cuba, I never realized how many blues exist. The aquamarines near the shoreline, the azures of deep waters, the eggshell blues beneath my grandmother’s eyes, the fragile indigos tracking her hands. There’s a blue too, in the curves of the palms, and the edges of the words we speak, a blue tinge to the sand and the seashells and the plump gulls on the beach. The mole on Abuela’s mouth is also blue, a vanishing blue (233)

The pictorial way in which Pilar’s perception of her homeland blend with the use of simple, yet effective, images along with some architecturally oriented words like ‘curves’ and ‘edges’ is testimony to the, rather, unconscious blend of the two genres—literature and architecture. In the same vein, Garcia’s use of the color blue as a primary motif for the representation of Cuba and its powerful link with the characters, blends the people and the land.

One of the notions of the baroque “which more than being a period style, is a state of soul, a way of being, a spiritual trace, which can appear at any time, in any place, and consequently within any culture” (Rodriguez 146). The baroque, then, becomes a useful concept to express Cuban reality. This

could be operative at many levels, for Garcia's language itself could be seen as baroque in its syntax and use of literary devices. So is her vision of the world, which incorporates themes as circularity, change and movement and fatalism.

Coining the term *biculturation*, Gustavo Perez Firmat ¹⁰ defines it as "a situation where the two cultures achieve a balance that makes it difficult to determine which is the dominant and which is the subordinate culture" (6). This biculturation implies an equilibrium between the two contributing cultures like in the case of Cuban Baroque. This equilibrium could also be achieved within the one culture. At the end of *Dreaming in Cuban*, Garcia identifies Pilar as the inner narrator. In a manner reminiscent of the character of Tom in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, "Pilar leaves the-reader with the conviction that the double consciousness of being narrator and participant in her story has enabled this protagonist to find that part of her own identity she knew was missing" (Borland 141).

Since the novel presents a variety of discourses, Mikhail Bakhtin's insight on dialogism is particularly relevant. In his literary genres, multiple and contradictory languages confront one another. The plot of the novel could be described in Bakhtin's words as "subordinated to the task of coordinating and exposing languages to each other" (365). This principal is illustrated when the "alienness" of another person's language is perceived by a speaker of the same national language. When Lourdes goes back to Santa Teresa del Mar, she tries to convert people's way of thinking to conform to the capitalist way of life. Pilar confirms to her that the language Lourdes speaks "is lost to them. It's another idiom entirely" (221). Here, language loss is directly related to the exile experience, often serving as a

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metaphor for existential alienation. Because of the loss of language, characters often turn to other, nontraditional forms of expression. Celia and her granddaughter communicate telepathetically in conversations that prove vital for both, a device that takes us back to magical realism. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, language functions “as a measuring device for gauging both connection and separation, loyalty and abandonment, between families and land. The languages each learns, speaks, and passes on illustrate diverse attachments, just as a common language signals the severance of a bond” (Davis 64).

Conclusion:

The merge between architecture and literature offers a multi-perspective vision of possibilities for division and unity, separation and bonding. "Architecture has been a container of life, yet it has seldom been a true reflection of life. It has the peculiar characteristic of being to a great extent a 'petrified form' in space, a particular time (Antoniades 293). This 'petrified form' is given mobility when it penetrates into and is reflected in other art forms, in this case, literature. This is a continuous process that goes beyond a building or a text.

The established links between the people and their built environment is exemplified in the three periods of architecture in Cuba, i.e Colonial, Republic and Revolutionary. The characteristics of such periods were also eminent in the formation of Garcia's characters in her novel *Dreaming in Cuba*. It was through such traits that they constantly asserted their 'Cuban-ness' but have also found place for their 'American-ness'. Magical realism and its strong presence in both the architecture and the literature of Cuban Americans manifested itself clearly in the urban setting as well as in the novel. Hybrid and eclectic structures in Cuban architecture was yet another feature that facilitated drawing parallels of how this feature presented itself in the interlingual text.

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The two seemingly remote genres—literature and architecture— are no longer distant. The above established connections are but a few among many others that can probe a whole new set of inquiries that can lead to a variety of interpretations. The study of Cuba does not end with this rapid glance cast down the centuries of its history, architecture, culture and literature. It continues on beyond— to further explorations of its rich heritagea building or a text.

Notes:

- ¹ In *Dreaming in Cuban*, Garcia never calls Fidel Castro by name. He is always *El Lider*—a figure of power and object of female fantasy. (Celia replaces her bedside picture of her husband, Jorge, with one of *El Lider*. In Garcia's second novel, *The Aguero Sisters*, he is *El Comandante*. This certainly gives Fidel Castro a kind of mythic, larger-than-life quality.
- ² El bohio is a firmly rooted traditional Cuban countryside dwelling that has a wooden structure and covered with yagua (dried palm leaves). It is circular in shape and all the material used in its construction comes from natural surroundings.
- ³ Celia here is compared with Ariadne -the fertility goddess of Crete, also known as the “Mistress of the Labyrinth” who helped Theseus escape from the labyrinth, and later went with him to Naxos where he deserted her. Later Dionysus found her and married her. The analogy leads to inescapable parallelisms between Celia and Ariadne regarding their life stories.
- ⁴ Carpentier also devises his own term *lo real maravilloso americano*, to describe what is a uniquely American form of magical realism. His “marvelous American reality” does not imply a conscious assault on conventionally depicted reality, but, rather an amplification of perceived reality inherent in Latin American culture. For more information on this topic, refer to Alejo Carpentier's “On the Marvelous Real in America”, a chapter in Lois Parkinson Zamora (ed) *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Durham, NC:

Duke University Press, 1995.

- ⁵ Medusa was originally an aspect of the goddess Athene from Libya where she was the Serpent-Goddess of the Libyan Amazons. She symbolizes sovereign female wisdom, female mysteries, cycles of Nature as life, death and rebirth. She is also universal Creativity and Destruction, union of heaven and earth. The reference to her 'gaze' is related to her wide unblinking eyes, penetrating our illusions and looking deeply into truth. The most famous representation of the Medusa (1597) is in a painting by the Italian Baroque artist, Caravaggio, in the permanent collection of the Uffizi, Florence.
- ⁶ Cristina Garcia was also influenced by other writers and specific literary texts. Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, the poetry of Pablo Neruda and Wallace Stevens.
- ⁷ *Santeria* is one of the syncretic religions created in the New World. It is based on the West African religions brought to the new world by slaves imported to the Caribbean to work the sugar plantations. These slaves earned with them their own religious traditions, including a tradition of possession trance for communicating with the ancestors and deities, the use of animal sacrifice and the practice of sacred drumming and dance. Those slaves who landed in the Caribbean, central and South America were nominally converted to Catholicism. In Cuba this religious tradition has evolved into what we know today as *Santeria*, the Way of the Saints. Similarly, there is Voodoo in Haiti, Macumba in Brazil and Candomble in the Northern coasts of South America. For more information on *Santeria*, consult Luis M. Nunez, *Santeria, A Practical Guide to Afro-Caribbean*

Magi, Spring Publication, 1992; Miguel A. De La Torre. *Santeria: The Beliefs and Rituals of a Growing Religion in America*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004; Migene *Gonzalez-Wippler* *The Religion (World Religion and Magic)*, Llewellyn Publications, 2002; Raul J. Canizares, *Cuban Santeria*, Destiny Books, 1999.

⁸ Not all hybrid structures in architecture are successful. The attempt starts with the need to build in 'exotic' lands and impose a new style on the already existing environment. Le Corbusier's buildings in Chandigarh in India, Louis Kahn's government buildings in Pakistan, Walter Gropius' efforts with the American Embassy in Athens, have been mostly evaluated by their dwellers as failures. For the success of such hybridity, a genuine understanding of the people, the climate, material, method of construction, etc is necessary and required.

⁹ After the publication of *Dreaming in Cuban*, Garcia gave birth to a daughter whom she named Pilar. Her daughter's mixed heritage (Cuban, Spanish and Guatemalan on Garcia's side; Japanese and Russian on her husband's) is emblematic of contemporary hybrid and multiple identities. The challenging concepts of cultural identity, migration and in-betweenness were issues especially prominent in her third novel *Monkey Hunting*.

¹⁰ Gustavo Perez Firmat coins another famous word: 'the one and a halfers' or the '1.5 generation' referring to the generations who came to the U.S from Cuba as adolescents or preadolescents. In his famous book *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban American Way*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994, he celebrates the dualities and

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juxtapositions of being bicultural and how these are used by the writers to their advantage. They achieve a double vision by fitting their Cuban self into their American setting—a possession of both an ethnic and exilic vision of their heritage. In his autobiographical memoirs, *Next Year in Cuba* (1995), Firmat reflects Edward Said's description of the “contrapuntal” condition of exile, examining how the adopted country can be a source of new ways of perceiving reality

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* Special thanks are due to my colleague Dr. Mohamed Abdel-Khader,

Assistant Professor at the Architectural Department, Faculty of

Engineering, Cairo University, for providing me with a lot of

material and for his architectural insights and advice.

قراءة المساكن وتشبيد النصوص:

عناصر فن العمارة

في رواية كريستينا جارسيا "أحلام من كوبا"

د/ داليا الشيال (*)

تمتد مبادئ جمالية وبنوية مشتركة لتربط بين الأدب وفن العمارة، ويحدث كثيرا أن تستخدم

الكلمات نفسها لوصف النص الأدبي والمجال المعماري؛ فالمدن والأحياء والطرق والمباني والحدايق

والمساكن تصور بوصفها مواقع لحياة معاشة فضلا عن أنها أماكن تحمل آثارا واضحة من الهوية الثقافية.

ويقول مايكل جريفز، وهو المعماري الأمريكي الذي قام بالدور الأكبر في حركة ما بعد الحداثة في مجال فن

المعمار في سبعينيات القرن الماضي، يقول إنه لطالما آمن إيماننا راسخا أن دفء البيت وخصوصيته إنما

(*) أستاذ مساعد- قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها- كلية الآداب- جامعة القاهرة.

ينبعان من سريان البعد الثقافي بين جدرانها.

وعلى مر التاريخ جرى توظيف فن العمارة كأداة للتعبير عن الهوية سواء الشخصية أو الجمعية أو

القومية، فعلى سبيل المثال أقدم المهاجرون في نيويورك ممن انقطعت بهم سبل التواصل مع وطنهم في كوبا

على إحياء ذكرى الذات والوطن. ويذهب البشر إلى الانتساب لهوية تميزهم من خلال البيئة التي يسكنونها

وعلى أساس من □□□□□ البيئة. ولذلك فإن أحد وسائل فهم شعب من الشعوب يمكن في القراءة

المدققة لبيئتهم وما أقاموا فيها من مساكن وأحياء.

ويسعى الأدب الأمريكي ذو الأصول الكوبية في الزمن المعاصر ليقدم تعريفا لنفسه في سياق

الأدب الأمريكي، فيعتمد على نقل الإيقاعات والمواقع والسمات المميزة التي نتجت عن امتداد الجذور

الكوبية في دار الهجرة وأرض المنفي. وقد نتج عن تلك الظاهرة استحالة دراسة الأدب الأمريكي الكوبي

دون الإشارة إلى فن العمارة والبيئة المحيطة به سواء كانت في زمن ما قبل الاستعمار أو زمن الاستعمار أو

ما بعده، فكتاب كوبا الذين استقروا في مهجرهم بالولايات المتحدة "يشيدون" نصوصهم من شذرات

متناثرة من اللغة ووحدة البناء التي تقدم إرثا أدبيا معقدا للأمريكتين.

وتسعى الباحثة لتقديم "قراءة" للتصميمات المعمارية في رواية كريستينا جارسيا "أحلام من كوبا"

وشرح الدور الذي تؤديه تلك التصميمات في "تشديد" النص الأدبي. وتقدم القراءة المعمارية مصدرا ثريا

كي يتدبر الناقد الجوانب الثقافية التي تجتمع لتنتج عملا معماريا فنيا. ويطرح البحث تساؤلات حول صلة

الرواية بالمساكن من حيث الاستخدام الرمزي أو المجازي فضلا عن بنية النص. إن التجربة الأمريكية الكوبية

جد متنوعة وتتطلب الإنصات إلى أصوات متعددة يرصد البحث صوتين منها فن العمارة والأدب.