

Wandering Narratives in Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo's *Boring Home*: Boring Through Revolutionary Rhetoric

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After the demise of the Soviet Union, critics speculated about the end of utopian dreams, as in the article, “End of the Soviet Union,” where Serge Schmemmann performs last-rites over the dead body of a seventy-four-year-old utopian experiment, and in Ernest W. Lefever’s book, *How New is the New World Order? The Dangers of Ideology and Tribalism*, in which the author suggests that ideas drive the search for a better world, not the failed economic policies of Soviet materialism (73). For Cubans who still live under conditions originating in the Marxist utopian legacy, this issue naturally carries a great deal of relevance. Despite a half century of patriotic exhortations for building a socialist paradise, often described as “Cuba, territorio libre de América” (including the title of a 1960 Fidel Castro speech), many would argue that the only substantive legacy resulting from official pronouncements is a rather precarious existence for the citizenry. It is within this background, and despite ever changing degrees of censorship and punitive measures, that some voices are raised challenging governmental rhetoric; among them, Wendy Guerra’s *Todos se van* and Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo’s collection of short stories entitled *Boring Home*.

Independent bloggers Yoani Sánchez and Claudia Cadelo, in their respective articles “*Boring Home*” and “To Heberto Padilla and Virgilio Piñera,” reported how *Boring Home* was banned at the last minute from the 2009 Havana International Book Fair, and how the author opted instead for an irregular book presentation outside of the official venue. Pardo Lazo added his own version of the events surrounding banishment, informal presentation and police harassment in his blog article “The Wild Detectives / los detectives domésticos.”

Frederic Jameson, in “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” downplays the cultural rift between the capitalist first-world and the communist second-world *vis à vis* the mindset of the third-world writer, more likely engaged in cultural resistance against “cultural imperialism” exerted by former colonial powers or native bureaucrats (67-68). Jameson’s views are pertinent for analyzing *Boring Home*, as he argues how western narratives relegate history to an

anachronistic postmodern role or make it disappear altogether (*Postmodernism* 18), while third-world narratives return to the allegory as a tool for fleshing out a national allegory (“Third-world” 69).

With this in mind, what we find in *Boring Home* is a collection of discontinuous and heterogenic short stories that portray Cuba’s regimented society in ways that are reminiscent of George Orwell’s *1984* and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* dystopia novels. However, the narrative strategies of *Boring Home* clearly are not conceived in the realist style of man *vis-à-vis* his social setting, as Pardo Lazo asserts in an interview published in *Manguito Review*; instead, Pardo Lazo characterizes his primary objective in *Boring Home* as a discursive, verbal exercise: “una interpretación fónica. A falta de eventos (o de entusiasmo para narrarlos), nos queda el lenguaje como última tabla de salvación (o perdición). *Boring Home* no es un libro de realismo en el sentido literario, pero sí es un túnel discursivo de sinsentido para horadar en el ahora cubano” (Interview n.p.). Pardo Lazo’s rhetorical objective hinges on what I see as the intended meanings of the word *boring*: to suffer the boredom of one’s life and, and to pierce with a twisting motion or to make one’s way through perceived resistance (Merriam-Webster). Thus the encoding of his title, by which Pardo Lazo declares his home (Cuba) to be boringly restrictive and his discursive objective to break through (horadar) the stifling inaction of its immobile status quo.

When considering Pardo Lazo’s narrative strategy in his previous citation, it may be useful to recall that first-world narratives have pushed aside the narrator, because it so happens that Jameson considers authorial intervention as “perfectly suitable to the allegorical fable as a form” (Jameson “Third-world” 83). Pardo Lazo’s narrative strategy, therefore, may be linked to Julio Cortázar’s subversive language style as depicted in the essay collection entitled *Literatura en la revolución y revolución en la literatura*, where Cortázar argues in favor of revolutionary action through literary writing (76). In short, Pardo Lazo’s discursive strategy is an attempt to rattle Cuban society out of its boring inertia, as Omar Granados has indicated in “A not so *Boring Home*: Intertextualidad, exilio y diseminación en la obra de Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo” (336).

Pardo Lazo’s role as a typical third-world writer is complicated by Cuba’s exceptional history as a colony lacking what Jameson has identified as a key Latin American third-world characteristic: “a collective memory back into the archaic and tribal” (Jameson “Third-world” 69). In addition, Manuel Moreno Fragnals claims that the island enjoyed an exceptional colonial past as a privileged communications hub (43), as supporter of Spanish rule during Latin American independence movements (159), and as an occasional *de facto* ruler of its own affairs (163). It is perhaps as a result of its colonial and modern historical conditions that Cuban narratives, whether motivated by pro or

antigovernment rhetoric, may not be as representative as those from the rest of Latin America. This appears to be Pardo Lazo's case, whose authorial interventions do not engage the socio-political chaos that often results from US policy in Latin America, as one would readily find in the at-large Caribbean texts of Miguel Ángel Asturias, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez and René Marqués; instead, Pardo Lazo's narratives respond to what he perceives as the failures of the Cuban Revolution, while he maintains a decidedly neutral tone toward the United States.

If Pardo Lazo's style cannot be easily associated with other Caribbean writers, how are we to interpret what are his authorial objectives? Is *Boring Home* to be interpreted as a kind of postmodern exercise for liberating an oppressed minority, let us say, Cuban dissidents, perhaps fearful of openly expressing their dissatisfaction with conditions in the island, but who nevertheless see themselves as acting within the national allegory of a past and future Cuba Libre.

In *The Radicant* (2009), Nicolas Bourriaud discusses how globalism—perhaps a newer version of cultural imperialism—has caused rampant standardization of world cultures, which in turn awakens an “ethics of precariousness” (83-84), and a new aesthetic form, which he calls the “form of wandering.” It seems that Bourriaud's theoretical pronouncements manifest themselves in the collection of wandering narratives that make up *Boring Home*, and they may be quite useful for analyzing Pardo Lazo's text as a third-world narrative. Therefore, my objective will be to show how Pardo Lazo's stories present Cuban society as a utopia gone terribly wrong, and how the use of Radicant aesthetics are key in interpreting the author's crafting of a discursive alternative to half a century of stale, Cold War conditioned, revolutionary rhetoric.

Boring Home narratives are written by a sort of autobiographical wanderer, sometimes identified as Orlando Woolf, who interacts mostly with the physical environment and only haphazardly with very few minor situational characters on the edges of Cuban society. Of course, short stories normally do not feature rounded characters; nevertheless, those found in *Boring Home* are particularly marginal, as in the metaphysical aloofness of Orlando's girlfriend, Ipatría, also known as Silvia. As the former, she seems to represent the nation, but as the latter she is linked to Gérard de Nerval's autobiographical novel, *Silvie*, synonymous with unattainable love, which motivates feelings of intertextual desperation by Orlando towards Nerval's feminine character, and by Silvia toward Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (68). By whatever name (Ipatría or Silvia), she plays an allegorical role for her boyfriend-narrator with which he expresses their despair living in a third-world society which, borrowing Jameson, forces them to be “situational and materialist” (85). What the reader finds in *Boring Home* is similar to what is contained in a travel diary; that is, Orlando's private

feelings provoked by his wandering experiences with people, things, forms of locomotion, as they are made public through his satirical and allegorical monologues.

Of all the travels undertaken by the protagonist, “Todas las noches la noche” is of particular importance because of its dystopian theme. Since narratives that portray societies aspiring for perfection have a propensity to be set in the future with obvious links to the writer’s present, this story takes place in Havana on December 31, 2101, at precisely nine o’clock in the evening, as marked by the ritualistic cannon blast still performed 100 years into the future, but now rendered in digital form. The wandering protagonist begins a journey that takes him from a metro station under the Plaza de la Revolución eastward toward Alamar, Havana’s eastern district known for its rap music and boxy Soviet style architecture; that is, an encounter with first and second-world components of the current national allegory. This wanderer’s experience is multidimensional, not just in space, but also in time, composed of a futuristic dream of progress (metro system) and a disturbing view of a place-event (Plaza de la Revolución). The reason for his travel is a planned romantic encounter with Ipatría. Along the way, the protagonist purchases some exotic items for the *rendez vous*: “an electric flower, obscenely Italian food and a half pixilated bottle of red wine” (15). Despite the possibly negative connotations of “half pixilated red wine” (material quality or fading ideology?), the availability of these consumer goods plus other material features (rolling stairs and 3-D television) hint at a future Cuba that has achieved a certain level of technological and material progress; yet, before long the reader perceives other disturbing signs. As the lovers shed their clothing, they avoid physical contact while there is a possibility of being observed by video cameras capable of peering into dwellings (17-18). Their reaction does not seem motivated by moral concerns; instead, it suggests social regimentation, as the text quickly makes reference to publicity slogan, *Brave New Havana*, which has been promoted in touristic brochures since the spring of 2084 (19). While it may be that the lovers are not required to engage in the same kind of public, promiscuous sexual (mis-)conduct as the citizens of *Brave New World*, nonetheless, their fear of state monitoring echoes totalitarian social controls. Indeed, an even more direct link to traditional dystopia narratives appears when the lovers make reference to musical events held at the Asfixeatro, a pun on “asphyxia theater” that recalls the multisensory Community Sing, also found in Huxley’s dark novel (47).

To sum it up, in “Todas las noches la noche,” Pardo Lazo catalogues the many rituals that still give meaning to Cuban society one-hundred years into the future: a digital cannon blast symbolic of a reclusive society that, from the earliest days of her colonial past, still closes its harbor and the city walls every evening at nine o’clock; the Italian food, wine and flowers that should

accompany a romantic encounter; touristic brochures that feature anachronistic events; and mass gatherings designed for collective control are examples of an asphyxiating Big Brother dystopia. In contrast to these coercive practices, Pardo Lazo has his wandering protagonist travelling away from a place known for its ritualistic events toward a place saddled with conformist architecture, but proud of its unconformity in music.

Nicolas Bourriaud links wandering to *erre* (as in “she wanders”) from the French *errer* (to wander), which Bourriaud defines as the residual speed or momentum that still propels ambulatory narratives within cities; or as they are “depicted or set in motion by the artists of today, is what remains of the movement of socialization when its own energy has vanished, giving away to an urban chaos” (94). Bourriaud’s assessment of a city’s life cycle is analogous to most of *Boring Home*’s wandering narratives. In these, Pardo Lazo hints that the city’s pre-1959 rituals (9:00 o’clock cannon blast) already were signs of dwindling social vitality; a process of social decay and material chaos which accelerated as the Revolution lost its revolutionary momentum.

To illustrate the importance of the ambulatory narrative in *Boring Home*, I will point out that nine of seventeen stories involve displacement in various forms of transportation. For example, in “Decálogo del año cero,” the story involves travel by bus, as is the case with “Ipatria, Alamar, un cóndor, la noche y yo,” and in “Entre una Browning y la piedra lunar.” In the stories “Lugar llamado Lili,” “Campos de girasoles para siempre,” and the short story that names the whole collection, “Boring Home,” the means of transportation is by private car. Additionally, locomotion in “Isla a mediodía” is by truck, while in “Imitación de Ipatria” it is carried out in both taxi and rental car; and, as previously commented in “Toda las noches la noche,” the reader even learned about future travel by metro. In fact, in “Historia portátil de la literatura cubana,” there are not only references to travel by rail but also the explicit assertion that fiction is synonymous to traveling: “Ipatria ha coincidido sin saberlo con ciertos teóricos del siglo XX acerca de la ficción como un viaje” (191).

As Bourriaud puts it, wandering throughout the city implies a kind of political inquiry; which is to say, “It is writing on the move and a critique of the urban, understood as the matrix of the scenarios in which we move. This kind of wandering creates an aesthetic of displacement” in time and space (100). In “Todas la noches la noche,” the protagonist tries to take a measure of the city of Havana: “La Habana. Nave fantasma, hangar sintético reflejado en un bolsón de agua o metal. . . . Aberración mnemónica del lenguaje” (16). A city characterized as a phantom ship, reflected in its harbor, known by a name that vaguely suggests motion (*va*), or sounds of ships entering or leaving port, all serve in recalling its maritime history. This image is made more dynamic by the inclusion of

the aeronautic word, *hangar*, thus, resembling more a space ship than a water craft. Further reading reveals the nature of the protagonist's political assessment: "Cada noche Ipatria y yo la comparábamos con una ciudad distinta. . . . Hiroshima, por ejemplo, tiritando en una noche de verano de agosto. . . . Con Haifa, por ejemplo, y su ristra de supertanques insomnes con el vientre eructando oil [sic]" (16). As in the Hiroshima of 1945 and modern Haifa, Havana is exposed to an unnamed looming catastrophe; all the while intimating concern for an already oil-polluted harbor. "La Hanada," or a previously offered moniker, "Habanada" (5), are mnemonic devices for helping one's memory about the city's meaning; however, Pardo Lazo characterizes the device as an "aberration;" that is, the device does not produce an "exact point-to-point correspondence between an object and its image" (Mirriam Webster). Does he mean, then, that Havana is nothing or that it is capable of swimming? Given his inclination toward the wandering form, I believe the suggestion is that the city, as an animated entity, perhaps even capable of swimming away from the surrounding chaos. Well, the people, if not the city.

Another important concept in Radicant theory is the use of topology as a tool for determining what is preserved or lost whenever the properties and/or coordinates of an object are reconfigured; thus, when the lovers go by the Olympic Multi-Stadium, and observe that a liquid screen still advertises the 2091 games, ten years after the event was supposedly held, (25) the reader is left with a surviving message that lacks relevancy. This is a not too subtle indictment of a society where public announcements do not conform to factual reality, as other critics of Cuban society have pointed out; namely, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío, co-directors of the road film *Guantanamera*, in which they poke fun at official radio reports of food production gains, while the travellers are unsuccessful in finding adequate sustenance along the road. However, if someone were to set things straight, let us say the wandering protagonist, this person would run the risk of detention, "ser detenido por los peritos de Linguapol, acusado de practicar alguna variante nueva del vocabulario" (29). The neologism "vocabulario" clearly ties this newly coined term to the very name of the country, which together with the cost of the electric flowers that the protagonist buys with fictitious future currency, in the suspicious amount of 19 *américos* and fifty-nine *centavos* (27), establish a direct reference to the 1959 Cuban Revolution. Also, by questioning the relevancy of a public announcements and the implied intentions of official rhetoric, the protagonist engages in a political inquiry as to what the Revolution has accomplished 142 years since it got underway; a sobering thought on current speculation about imminent changes in the Cuban political scene.

Another topological exercise results when Pardo Lazo includes in his short story collection a narrative entitled “Isla a mediodía,” it is easy to see it as a reshaping of Cortázar’s “La isla a mediodía,” included in the short story collection, *Todos los fuegos el fuego*. Both narratives involve an island, harsh midday climate, a traveling protagonist, and death waiting at destination; but what is really significant is how each protagonist reconfigures the island’s reality.

In Cortázar’s story, the protagonist sees the island from a plane, “La isla era pequeña y solitaria. . . . con la deslumbradora franja blanca al borde de un azul casi negro” (252). As the protagonist, Marini, becomes progressively intrigued by the island’s primitiveness, he tries to capture its essence by photographing it, but the snapshot turns out to be blurry (257). Cortázar here is clearly ruling out realism as the right approach for attempting to capture the island’s essence; thus, Marini employs his imagination where modern technology failed to recreate a simpler past environment where he would seek refuge, “los más pequeños detalles se iban ajustando. . . . la mancha verde del promontorio del norte, las casas plomizas, las redes secándose en la arena” (258). Chilean writer Lilian Elphick, in “Apuntes sobre ‘La isla a mediodía’, de Julio Cortázar,” interprets Cortázar’s island as “un espacio intersticial o lugar “entre” [que] permite un desplazamiento en tiempo-espacio y un acceso a la superrealidad.”

In Pardo Lazo’s narrative, something similar occurs with his traveler as he compares a miserable stop-over with the anticipated splendor, super reality of his destination, “A Maisí [destination] lo imaginábamos de color terracotta. . . . Imías [stop-over] no sería eso jamás. Imías era blanco reconcentrado. . . . Un iceberg de verano, con las gotas de sudor rodando gruesas” (19). Both travelers impose their visions on their respective destinations; that is, were Cortázar’s protagonist rejects the modern and longs for a simpler, net-fishing tradition; Pardo Lazo’s protagonist, hampered in his journey by inefficient government officials, offers a counter view of reality as a hallucinating summer iceberg and reworks the meaning of Maisí’s terracotta color to mean “cota de tierra donde se acaba el país” (19). His obsession to reach Cape Maisí, the eastern end of the island, is an exercise in counter historical displacement. It is there where indigenous people’s incoming migrations occurred, and where Spanish colonization, wars of independence and revolutions began. In Cuban topography, there is no better symbol than Cape Maisí as the starting point for all major historical displacements, and indeed as the birthplace of Cuban history of the national allegory. Pardo Lazo’s appropriation of Cortázar text serves to highlight spatial and ideological differences between the two island stories. One basic difference is that Cortázar bases his story on the Greek island of Xiros and Pardo Lazo is, of course, referring to Cuba. More substantive differentiation

results from the fact that Cortázar was an early non-resident supporter of the Cuban Revolution, while Pardo Lazo is a dissident writer living in Cuba. However, the most important difference is how each writer conceives and reacts with his island: that while Cortázar's character is dying to go to the island paradise, Pardo Lazo's is dying to get out of the precarious island. His urge to leave is emulated by many as shown in Wendy Guerra's novel *Todos se van*: "Mi libreta telefónica está llena de rayas rojas. Ya no puedo marcar esos números. Nadie me contestará. . . . Todos se van. Me dejan sola. Ya no suena el teléfono. Yo espero mi turno, callada" (242). A collective feeling of despair over half a century: it too has become part of the national allegory.

Pardo Lazo also engages in the topological reconfiguration of Guillermo Rosales' *Boarding Home* (a novel that was later retitled as *Casa de los náufragos*). The Rosales's text is an autobiographical novel about the abuse suffered by a mentally ill character and Mariel refugee named William Figueras in a hellish halfway house for the insane in Miami. Pardo Lazo's reworks this narrative as in "Boring Home," a short story included in the collection by the same name. Whereas Rosales's William Figueras unsuccessfully is trying to get out of the institution, seeking freedom for himself and for his "girlfriend," Frances, Pardo Lazo's nameless (although he calls himself Orlando Woolf in one instance) and terminally ill protagonist has traveled from Hialeah (Miami) to his former home in Havana for the purpose of dying and in his old home. Of course, his former home was taken over by the Revolution long ago, and ironically he now has to rent a room in it in clandestine fashion; or as Cubans like to say, "por la izquierda." Orlando Pazo's reconfiguring of the original story showcases the illegality of every day existence in Cuba, against the backdrop of difficult life-ending decisions for sick and/or elderly Cuban-Americans (an interesting thought for a writer who had not been outside of Cuba when he wrote *Boring Home*), but nevertheless an attempt to link Cuban-Americans to the national allegory.

Another noteworthy characteristic shared by both narratives involves how the authors end their respective tales. Rosales does it by citing four of William Blake's *Proverbs from Hell*; that is, proverbs 2-4 and 12. The first three proverbs: "Drive your cart and your plow over the bones of the dead," "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom," and "Prudence is a rich, ugly old maid courted by Incapacity," are not in keeping with Figueras failure to escape institutional life; however, proverb 12: "The hours of folly are measur'd by the clock; but of wisdom, no clock can measure," is incomplete (no reference to wisdom), and thus it reflects the character's resignation to his life in the institution (99). For his part, Pardo Lazo ends his by having his Cuban-American character waiting death in bed, as he has ingested an overdose of pills, and expresses his wish to "No ser tanto, no

ser,” which paradoxically is choosing to be (alive), even though he is overdosing. The dying man’s thought are that “Aunque solo sea para volver a interpretar las rimas de aquel hombrecito cómico . . . que comete cada trastada de casa.” He then ends the story quoting three lines from the popular anonymous poem “Mr. Nobody”: “I know a funny little man / Who does the mischief that is done / There’s no one ever sees his face, and yet we all agree...” (174). In the end, Orlando Pazo’s reconfiguration of *Boarding Home* seems to suggest a counter narrative to the political crisis separating the at-large Cuban family. Such narrative may be that during a crisis people often get bogged down either trying to asses blame or failing to accept responsibility; instead of blaming it on the invisible little man and thereby getting beyond the crisis. It also may offer a message of reconciliation across the Florida Straits, which despite the inevitable legal entanglements over ownership of property, may result in benefits for the aging Cuban-American community.

In previous examples, where Pardo Lazo appropriates and reconfigures other narratives, his aim seems that of presenting the results of his Havana wandering narratives and tasking the reader with identifying the results of his political inquiry; however, some of his other narratives are designed to confront directly the object of his political inconformity: upbeat official revolutionary rhetoric masking Havana’s urban chaos. For example, in “Wunderkammer” a narrator simply identified as “yo,” is going through his recently deceased father’s belongings with the help of Ipatría. They find containers full of clippings Cuban newspaper headlines. Ironically, they do not think much of this cabinet of curiosities and start to burn the clippings; however, they read some of them prior to tossing them into the flames: “En Cuba la mayor manada de leones en cautiverio en el mundo,” “Inseminarán vaquitas en miniatura” y “¿Debe Cuba bombardear a Estados Unidos?” To Cubans, these headlines recall the official line boasting of Cuba’s exceptionalism in animal husbandry, technological expertise, and military prowess; quickly followed by another clipping, “¿Cuba postcastro?” (177), of dubious authenticity and more likely a Pardo Lazo bombshell. These headlines express official governmental rhetoric, and when Pardo Lazo brings them up to the attention of the reader, he is in fact placing in doubt these kinds of triumphal revolutionary messages.

A more direct challenge to official rhetoric appear in the first short story of the collection, “Decálogo del año cero,” Orlando despairs, is in fact sickened by how much a wilderness Havana has become: “Estoy perfectamente sano, pero día a día La Habana me enferma más. . . . Así se llama esta nueva crisis: Habanada” (5). He is frustrated by the city’s lack of cognitive processing which impacts his craft, “Esa Habanada entre amnésica y anestesiada que él en vano trata de describir” (6).

His malaise makes him opt for photographing the city's miserable conditions: "las tendederas raquíticas, los tanques mohosos donde se crían los aedes, las palomas entre el robo y el sacrificio ritual" (6). What Bourriaud had called the ethics of precariousness, Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo repackages as "la estética del desastre;" that is, how he describes the Cuban situation in his *Manguito Review* interview. For him the Cuban Revolution has brought tragic consequences for a little country suffering from a bad case of global utopianism, or as he proposes: "Antes fuimos pre-burgueses en fuga existencialista, pero ahora ya todos somos post-proletarios de la debacle: angustias atrapadas en el ajetreo albañileril de una revolucioncita provinciana que se soñó (no sin éxito) planetaria" ("Entrevista" n.p.).

Orlando's photographic project is not easily carried out. He surveys the city and observes a funeral-like scene, "la punta filosa del monolito de la Plaza de la Revolución: su pararrayos cósmico siempre coronado de auras" (7). The fact that buzzers are flying in circles around the monument, where the "Maximum Leader" has made a reputation as a speech maker, makes this urban scene another topological moment. By injecting an element of gloom, a wishful reference to the impending death of the leader, he suggests that the Revolution too is old, decaying and heaping chaos on the country. His photographic project is just not worth the effort. In the style of one of Herman Melville's characters, Orlando decides not to take any photographs, "Se sintió otra vez Bartleby cansado de tanta ingrátida carga" (7). He ends with a worn out revolutionary slogan: "Fotos, ¿para qué?" A slogan that originally signified revolutionary vitality in seeking new structures of government, "elecciones, ¿para qué?," now it lies discredited as either no more than a collectively accepted "sour grapes" syndrome, or as a veiled call for democratic reform.

"Decálogo del año cero" is, above all, a statement to the social emptiness, the absence of a coherent civil dialogue, afflicting a writer-photographer named Orlando. Here he rhetorically asks if he could ever again photograph a city that is no longer part of Earth, "¿Alguna vez volvería a fotografiar la barbarie desnuda de un planeta llamado Habana?" He also questions if he could ever write about a Havana that looks like a "caparazón de concreto," a metaphor suggesting that Havana is a kind of hard-headed entity for emasculating reason. This leads him to an outright satirical commentary on the ever present revolutionary rhetoric. The slogan that once proudly boasted, "Cuba, first free territory of America," now is nothing more than a skeletal corpse: "primer exoesqueleto libre de América" (9). In the end, the story "Decálogo del año cero" maintains the traditional ending for dystopia narratives by having the wandering protagonist defeated. Orlando shaves his beard as a sign that he too chooses to join the rest of the brain-dead citizenry (13), but

notwithstanding this symbolic defeat for the fictional Orlando, Pardo Lazo does write his wandering account of the city as part of the national allegory and within the scope of the “estética del desastre.”

Pardo Lazo takes a somewhat different approach in “Lugar llamado Lili.” This is the story of a wandering man, who while pushing his 1959 Chevrolet Impala that has broken down at 3:00 AM in a darkened street, experiences a dream-like encounter with a little girl. Now, this child is no ordinary child. She happens to be a human-size, animated plastic doll, seven years of age that, despite the unusual time for a child to be up, is playing the role of mother pushing her own toy baby, in a toy baby-stroller, down the dark street. The girl convinces the wandering protagonist to leave his car and to follow her to an abandoned doll factory that a United States company operated in Cuba prior to the Revolution.

The language of this story quickly engages in topological displacement as the wandering protagonist describes their entrance into the old factory, “Así que entramos al lobby [sic] como si de verdad regresáramos al hogar después de un largo viaje desde otra época” (43). The protagonist then sees an old revolutionary mural, depicting the early idealistic revolutionary agenda, enraptured with the euphoria for the upcoming task of building a just society, which he describes with more than a hint of irony: “Una epopeya de leyendas urbanas y guerrilleras, verdadero memorándum contra la necia amnesia del [siglo] XXI” (44). The mural’s compositional focus is centered on Marxist myths of the proletariat’s building of Paradise on Earth, “Allí algún obrero del arte había reunido chimeneas ecológicas de humo verde, ríos de leche pasteurizada, pirámides fraguadas con hojas de tabaco y caña.” As the wanderer takes note that the mural depicts oxymoronic descriptions of green smoke, rivers of pasteurized milk, and pyramids made of tobacco and sugar cane leaves, he makes fun of Marxist criticism by transforming Socialist Realism into “irrealismo social.” In fact, the 1959 Chevrolet Impala is a symbol of Cuban consumerism before the 1959 Revolution, while the ruined doll factory is a reminder of the pre-revolutionary capitalist economy. Despite the idyllic message portrayed in the mural, the factory closed long ago, and the Revolution has not kept its promises of social and economic prosperity.

In conclusion, OLPL has given us a linguistic reworking of the dystopia account as it pertains to contemporary Cuban society and adds a troubling chapter to the national allegory. No one doubts that words can be dangerous to the status quo, but for the critical writer they are generally safer than political action. Nevertheless, it is obvious that Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo takes his chances in this travelling narrative. The title of the collection, *Boring Home*, supports a critical objective of cleaning while perforating with Radicant tools into a revision-hardened social fabric.

Pardo Lazo acknowledges that this is dangerous, that the critic runs a risk, but this role is critical in preparing an undemocratic and repressive society for future changes: “Y más me hechiza el rol del testigo que da testimonio a priori, que nombra lo que hasta entonces parecía innombrable, que allana el camino para la acción.” This is particularly true for the writer photographer, the one who captures the future with his multi-medium form, “que fotografía el futuro,” who tries to recapture what has been taken away, “Con el tictac triste de todo el tiempo cubano que Cuba nos escamoteó,” and who does this despite the apparent lack of support, “Del clarín escuchad el mutismo” (“Entrevista” n.p.). This last sentence is taken from the national anthem, but it has been transformed. It should read: “Del clarín escuchad el sonido,” which begs for the inclusion of the next line, “¡a las armas valientes corred!” But to Pardo Lazo, recalling Simon and Garfunkel’s famous song from the 1960s, all he hears is *The Sounds of Silence*. As Nicolas Bourriaud hypothesizes in his *Radicant* aesthetics, Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo is a wanderer-writer who has accepted responsibility for bearing witness, and for crafting a discursive alternative that bores through half a century of stifling revolutionary rhetoric.

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