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Review Of "Dreaming In Cuban" By C. García

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con lo cual se le otorga una nueva importancia como aquí queda demostrado. El segundo, la entrega de una entrevista en donde se pone, por medio de la palabra y el diálogo, a un escritor frente a su propia obra y en la cual se dan a conocer elementos importantes que contribuirán al estudio de la misma. No cabe duda, entonces, que *Conversaciones con Nicanor Parra* se ha de transformar en una lectura obligatoria para los estudiosos de la poesía chilena en general y de la poesía de Parra en particular. Una vez más el profesor chileno Leonidas Morales reafirma aquí su sensibilidad como crítico en el campo de la literatura chilena.

Arturo C. Flores
Texas Christian University

Cristina García. *Dreaming in Cuban*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992. 245p.

It comes as no surprise that *Dreaming in Cuban* was selected as one of the finalists in this country's literary competition for the National Book Award of 1992. What is surprising, however, is that this is the first novel written by Cristina García, who was born in Havana, grew up in New York city and who now lives in Los Angeles. I say "surprising" because this novel is an unusually sophisticated piece of work both in its use of language and structure as well as in the creation of characters who persist in the reader's memory long after we have turned the final page. The book is without doubt the most important first novel of a Cuban-American writer since the publication of Oscar Hijuelos' *Our House in the Last World* in 1983. As a member of the Cuban-American community García has tackled the thorny issue of political exile and cultural identity without ever falling into cheap political rhetoric and easy answers. The novel's tension is aptly expressed by the youngest of her protagonists who states: "Every day Cuba fades a little more inside me; my grandmother fades a little more inside me. And there's only my imagination where our history should be."

This, then, is a novel of roots, of cultural assimilation and of countless voices that echo across the short but overwhelming distance that separates Cuba from the U.S. mainland. It is the story of two Cubas, of two histories so closely intertwined that one cannot be understood outside the context of the other. In spite of the tragic nature of her characters' lives, García manages to soften the blow through the use of a highly lyrical language that imbues the text with wit, charm, and a certain magical flair that envelops her prose and the lives of those she portrays.

Structurally, the novel is a kind of counterpoint that moves back and forth between Cuba and Brooklyn, New York, depicting three generations in the life of the del Pino family. Practically the entire story is told, whether in first or third person, from the point of view of four richly portrayed and very different women. Celia, the aging matriarch of the del Pino family, spends her days in service to the Revolution: cutting sugar cane, serving as a neighborhood judge and scanning the northern coast of her country in case of a new Yankee invasion. Her daughter Felicia is obsessed not with El Líder and his Revolution but with the mysteries of "santería" and an array of men to whom she is drawn like a mother to the flame. Her madness infuses the book with an eerie ingredient that mesmerizes the reader and subverts every attempt to enclose this character within our rational grasp. Lourdes, Celia's oldest daughter, is the epitome of the entrepreneurial immigrant living in exile whose hatred for Fidel is matched only by her belief in the growing decadence of the U.S. and her conviction that what her adopted country needs is another Joe McCarthy. In contrast to her, Lourdes' teenage daughter, Pilar, is a fast-talking, rebellious, street-smart New Yorker who yearns to be with her grandmother again and see all of her family one day reunited on the island whose reality seems to exist only in dreams.

Dreaming in Cuban is a fast-paced text that moves with precision and

confidence as it encloses its reader within a highly ambiguous world where time and space of the living are continually usurped by the spirits of the dead. While family politics constitute the foreground of this text, we cannot help but perceive between the lines a commentary on the madness of political ideologies in general and their impact on the individuals that they attract. The novel leaves us with the sense that the del Pino family and, by extension, Cuba's family, will never be reunited nor whole again, if indeed, they ever were. But one thing is for certain: Pilar, its youngest member and hope for the future, recognizes now where she belongs and, unlike her elders, is no longer torn between her present and dreams of the past.

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José Leandro Urbina. *Cobro revertido*. Santiago, Chile: Editorial Planeta, 1992. 200p.

In his first book, a collection of short stories entitled *Las malas juntas*, published in Canada in 1978, Urbina depicted the repression and violence endured by his fellow Chileans following the military coup of September 1973. What stood out in these stories was the author's total mastery of narrative technique, his success in treating a highly politicized subject without succumbing to propaganda and his ability to paint an unforgettable picture of what State terror does to people on both sides of the political fence. Almost fifteen years went by between publications but the reader of his new novel, *Cobro revertido*, will find that the long wait was certainly worth it.

Montreal, a city well-known to thousands of Chilean exiles, is the setting of Urbina's novel in which the life of one of these exiles known only as "The Sociologist" is suddenly interrupted by a phone call from Santiago informing him of his mother's death. The year is 1979, a period in which the military's reign of terror is at its peak. The twenty-four hours following the phone call constitute the novel's present

in which Urbina offers us a moving and often satirical account of life in exile that culminates in a grotesque act of violence during the city's Caribbean Festival.

Far from the country of his birth, his mother's unexpected death unleashes in the unnamed protagonist a chain reaction of memories that have been placed on the cognitive backburner for the previous five years of his life. The deceased becomes his direct link with Chile once again, the bridge to all memory. To a great extent, the dead mother is Chile, that physical space which has left an indelible and contradictory imprint on the psyche of her sons and daughters. She is the nurturing, maternal figure that saves her son from drowning as a young child and the domineering, repressive presence that strangles his every attempt at personal independence. She is the Chile that can be both charming and alluring as well as the Chile that denounces her neighbors to the military gestapo. She is the mother whose fury, when aroused, punishes her children severely for any perceived transgressions against the established order, casting them from her bosom to the unknown.

And it is into the unknown that the novel's protagonist has been hurled. In the twenty-four hours that constitute his turbulent present and his recollection of a distant past, Urbina immerses us in the vacuous world of the political exile, a world of endless political discussions interrupted only by the consumption of an equally infinite number of bottles of wine. As the author takes us through the streets, bars and smoke-filled nightclubs of Montreal, we come to understand the existential paralysis of "The Sociologist" and his friends. Curiously, his doctoral thesis in sociology, of which he has not written a word, takes as its principal theme the integration and assimilation of exiled groups into a dominant culture. His inability to write reflects his inability to find his niche in a world that will never be his entirely, a world that he will always be looking at from the outside.

We follow this protagonist into the depths of a present that will link up with a no less tragic past. Structurally Urbina