

SEVEN NOVELS OF
ANGEL MARIA DE LERA:
THEIR TECHNIQUE AND STYLE,
THEIR CHARACTERS,
THEIR MEANING

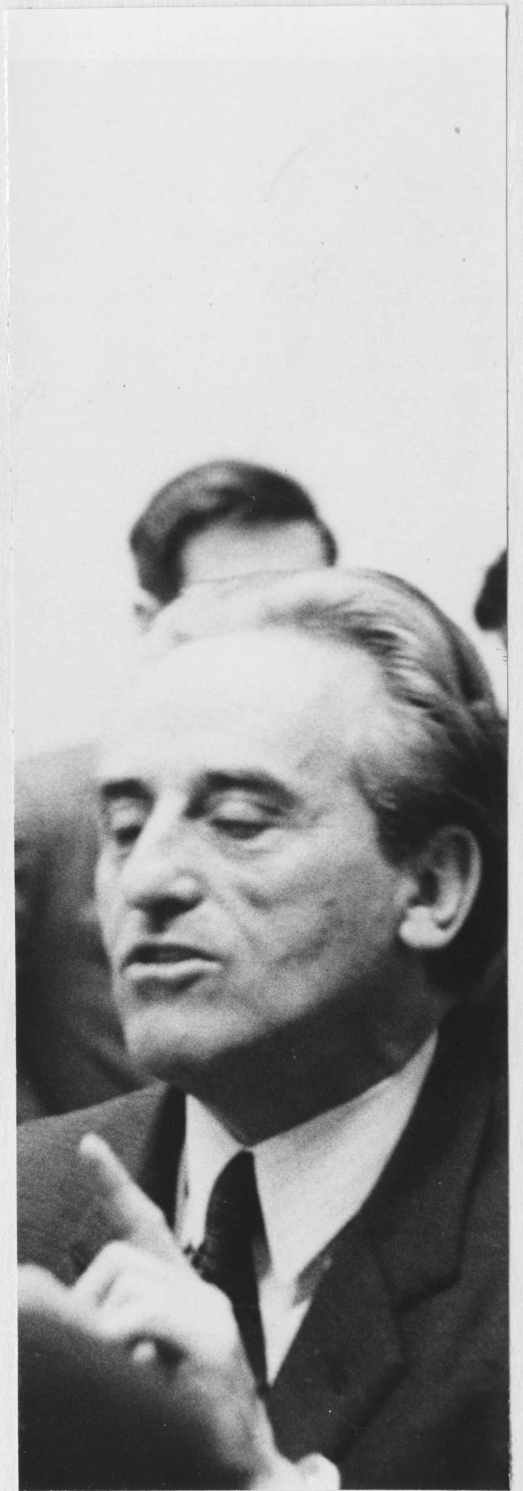
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INTRODUCTION

The following paper is an analysis of seven novels of the contemporary Spanish writer Angel María de Lera. The intention is to evidence the maturation of Lera as a writer during the ten years that the seven novels cover and - foremost - to present a whole picture of those ten years to evaluate what Lera is essentially writing about. Tracing development and evaluating the whole presented a problem of method: the solution used is division of the paper into four parts - the first (and by far the largest) treats the seven novels separately and differently in chronological order, while the last three sections treat respectively the technique and the style, the characters, and the meaning as a whole.

SEVEN NOVELS OF
ANGEL MARIA DE LERA



Angel María de Lera's first published novel is Los olvidados, printed in May, 1955. There are many incidents in it which seem incredible - at least unlikely - and extraneous, and Eugenio de Nora described it as "un relato no desdeñable, pero todavía abocetado e inmaduro,"² although he did not explain what he meant by "unfinished" and "immature!"

Briefly, this is the action of Los olvidados:

Antonio is the asentador of a small business in Legazpi, a man who has a background of anarchist activity and a high set of ideals. Once, in his revolutionary days, a girl named Minerva almost seduced him - but his high revolutionary ideals kept him from yielding.

One rainy night a girl suddenly arrives in his doorway. She is tired and wet, and very wary of Antonio, but he takes her in as if she were his niece. Her name is Mercedes. She left home because her stepfather had tried to force himself on her shortly after her mother had died. A friend of hers named Martina had increased her dislike of men. Mercedes is very beautiful.

Over a period of time Mercedes acquires a young novio named Emilio, who is almost an accountant, but hardly suitable for her. Instead, she becomes the novia of Pepe el Granaíno.

Pepe Sánchez, called el Granaíno, is the rather shady owner of a transport company in Legazpi, who has always lived by his audacity and brute strength. He likes Mercedes, and although she fears and almost hates him, she is also attracted to him, and comes when he - literally - whistles for her. Mercedes sees her future in him (he wants to marry her), and when he demands her virtue or nothing, she complies.

The heat, flies, and gypsies all arrive at the same time. Antonio is given to nocturnal walks by the river, and contemplates the possibility of marrying Mercedes, although he is much older than she. He is crestfallen when she tells him of her plans to marry Pepe el Granaíno.

Pepe wants to be able to begin life somewhere else with Mercedes, but his hold-up attempt of Kilobilletes is unsuccessful, and when Mercedes visits him in jail, the shock of his failure has driven him out of his mind, and he does not even recognize her. Mercedes (who is pregnant), swoons, and dies a short time later right before the eyes of Antonio and the doctor, don Jesús.

Don Jesús confides in Antonio that his "housemaid" Sara is really his wife who suffered brain damage and amnesia to the point that she no longer knows the doctor as her husband, and can only respect and help him from a distance. He likens her "death" to Mercedes'. But Antonio drowns in the river that night.

Even from so brief a summary of the action, several incidents that seem incredible or extraneous are evident. For example, Mercedes' sudden arrival and Antonio's immediate acceptance of her, the course of the relationship between Mercedes and Pepe el Granaíno (e.g., he whistles, she comes), and the "deaths" of Pepe, Mercedes, Sara, and Antonio, are all very difficult to believe. Similarly, there are many actions which seem extraneous, unnecessary, and unrelated to the progress of the novel: is Emilio essential to the novel? Why is the doctor, don Jesus, such a minor character when the novel ends with his thoughts alone, and with him alone surviving? Or what does the doctor's narration of Sara's tragedy contribute? It was the shock of Mercedes' sudden death that drove Antonio to his death walk, not the story of Sara.

There are many such actions and characterizations of Los olvidados that can be called incredible or extraneous, and it is perhaps the sum of these that prompted de Nora's description of the novel as "abocetado e inmaduro." In any event, this sort of disjointed structure - the developed actions as well as the extraneous ones - and unpredictable characterizations - in that the characters may act incredibly - is a characteristic of Lera's style which I call perirealism, and which will be discussed in detail later.

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Lera's language sounds as much poetic as prosaic very often - in a sense, some of the imagery is also "incredible," and the richness of the language is almost extraneous to the bald plot development. Consider the description of Mercedes' feelings after she had given herself to Pepe el Granaíno on the breastwork by the river:

La tristeza del amor es siempre una tristeza de madrugada. El cerebro está oscuro y cansado, y los nervios buscan el redil del sueño como un rabaño perdido en la noche. Las frías nieblas medulares apagan todas las lumbres de la pasión. La carne pende de los huesos, y los ojos miran como espejos empañados.

Mercedes siguió unos momentos aún, muda y atónita, contemplando las ruinas de la noche de los deseos. De las márgenes del río llegaba un soplo ligeramente húmedo que la hizo estremecerse. Y los ecos de la copla postrera se hincharon en el aire por última vez. (p. 243)

The rich natural imagery is reminiscent of Lorca. The close connection between the seasons and the stages of the development of the action - the wind and rain of Mercedes' arrival, the spring when her relationship with Pepe began, the summer when the gypsies and the heat and Pepe's lust came, the end of the year and the end of the lives of four people - remind the reader of Lorca's Libro de poemas. In Impresiones y paisajes Lorca describes the river in Avila as a blend of a bishop's prayers and something cold and shadowy and hidden; ³ similarly, the river in Los olvidados drew Antonio to it for meditative walks, and it drew him to his death.

Lera spends much of his novel on the backgrounds of his characters, and signals those passages with italics. The back-

grounds seem significant not as explanations of action, but for an understanding of the character and his or her actions. Let us consider the three major characters briefly:

Mercedes' life began very happy and secure, but as her father died and her mother remarried (to a brute of a man named Baltasar), and then her mother died, Mercedes progressively lost her happiness and security and acquired an abiding fear of men. Martina, Mercedes' employer and friend, deepened Mercedes' mistrust of men and instilled in her the idea that marriage is a woman's only hope to escape loneliness and the beastliness of men.

So Mercedes wants security, but fears men - who are the only answer to her need for security. For this reason she fears Pepe at first, and even hates him, but when he promises marriage she overcomes her fears and can only cling to him and give him whatever he wants. Significantly, when Mercedes gives herself to Pepe, she does it without remorse, coldly - Baltasar's attempts to molest her right after her mother died must have made sex abhorrent to her. In any event, Mercedes ties her hopes and her need for security on Pepe el Granaíno, and when Pepe loses his mind, she dies of apoplexy.

Pepe Sánchez, called el Granaíno, is possessive, shrewd; he has an eye for detail, and great physical strength. At first he demands that Mercedes never be coy with him, and that he rule in their relationship; later he demands everything or nothing, first from Mercedes, then from Kilobilletes. Mercedes yields all she has because she gets what she wants in return. But Kilobilletes

refuses to yield, and Pepe cannot accommodate failure. Pepe had acquired his business by sheer audacity; he rules Mercedes audaciously; but Kilobilletes does not yield to boldness, and failure is beyond Pepe's strength and sanity.

Antonio is honest, and dedicated strictly to no more than one thing at a time. As a revolutionary he was dedicated to revolution, and even the wiles of Minerva could not sway him from his ideals. He had been committed to his revolutionary comrades because they were a part of the same dedication he felt, but one by one they fell short of his unswerving dedication and Antonio was no longer committed to them. In Legazpi, the doctor offers Antonio some friendship and companionship, but it is Mercedes who enters his home and becomes the object of his unswerving devotion again. Immediately on her arrival he puts the trust in her he once had in his anarchist comrades, to the point that he asks no explanations or questions of her, perhaps out of sheer trust, perhaps fearing that she might also fall short of his ideals.

Antonio knows how shady el Granaíno is, but instead of hating him for his hold on Mercedes, Pepe is just another person outside of Antonio's realm of trust. When Mercedes blurts out one night early in the novel that Antonio should marry her, it catches him completely by surprise. No doubt he spends a great deal of time during the next months trying to believe that she really does want him to marry her, that he is not too old, and that he would not be falling short of his ideals. When some months later he blurts out to Mercedes that he will marry her, her announcement of wedding

plans with Pepe is a terrible shock. In addition, Lera implies that Antonio witnessed Pepe and Mercedes making love on the breastwork by the river, which must have been another terrible shock to him.

When Mercedes returns from seeing Pepe in jail, she calls for the doctor, don Jesús, not Antonio. And when Antonio tries to cast some light near her, she shouts at him to take the light away. Shortly afterward she dies. There is a funeral, and Antonio - who never drinks - has a stiff drink with the doctor. The object of Antonio's unswerving devotion is dead, and Antonio is drawn towards the river and his own death, where he sees a vision of the hopes and ideals of his friends fulfilled. He talks to Minerva there, too.

These are general and brief descriptions of the characters, because to define them too closely is to miss the mark. Pepe's partner surely tipped off Kilobilletes to the hold-up, and Antonio must have witnessed Pepe and Mercedes on the breastwork (on which Antonio died), but Lera says none of these things, just as the characters are not defined into rôles - rôles where their actions become predictable and "credible." Through the sensuality of his words, his poetry, Lera has created an atmosphere in which his characters act not rationally, but unexpectedly - like humans. Perirealistically.

Los olvidados is indeed "un relato no desdeñable."

Los clarines del miedo

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Los clarines del miedo is a novel about fear. It does not talk about fear abstractly, but shows fear precisely as it grips the two toreros, "el Filigranas" and "el Aceituno," and they feel the fear Lera expresses in the commonplaces of "la última corrida," and "la enamorada del torero." Jose María de Quinto has described it like this:

El miedo es la medula de la narración; un miedo angustioso, casi físico, que penetra y se apodera del ánimo del lector, por virtud de la fuerza expresiva de un lenguaje sin desmayos líricos ni retóricos. Es el miedo que trata de explicar uno de los espectadores de la corrida ante la calma y el angustiado silencio del pueblo. "Ahora todo está lleno de miedo - dice -. La muerte ha entrado en la plaza y se ha sentado a mirar dónde nadie sabe. Esto puede parecer literatura, es la verdad. Y todo el mundo sabe que es verdad. Si no fuera por el miedo, esto no valdría la pena. La muerte es quien pone aquí su sal." Es el mismo miedo que retuerce el vientre de los dos torerillos, que van a actuar de uno a otro momento. El mismo miedo que les descompone el rostro y hace que salten uno sobre otro en un ataque de histerismo, cuando están en capilla. El mismo miedo que sobrecoge al médico del pueblo ante el temor de que sobrevenga una cogida para la que no está preparado ni profesional ni técnicamente. 5

Both toreros feel fear, but they show it in different ways. Rafa, "el Filigranas," rarely verbalizes his fear, but demonstrates it in his penchant for success and being the dashing torero. During the bullfight Rafa happens to see Antoñita, the beautiful daughter of the mayor, and stares at her intently; the bull makes a sudden turn and drives his left horn into Rafa, whose eyes are still fixed on Antonita. "El Aceituno," who was always terrified by bulls and felt and expressed his fear constantly, is dumbstruck

with horror when Rafa is gored, while the crowd shouts "Coward! Coward!" at him. Miguel Fernández Almagro of the Spanish Royal Academy has described the scene like this:

"Aceituno" ha perido a su compañero de penas y fatigas, ya que no de ilusiones. "Aceituno" teme al toro, a los guardias, al público iracundo, que le apostrofa y amenaza ... con garrotes y estacas. "Tengo miedo", gime el cuitado. El "Aceituno" intento por última vez hacer pasar el toro cogiéndole por un pitón. No lo pudo conseguir, pero entonces se dio cuenta de que tenía la mano pegajosa. Había cogido el pitón de la sangre de Rafael ... Hombre y bestia se confundieron en una sola sombra. El estoque, mientras tanto, se había hundido hasta la empuñadura y el "Aceituno" sintió en la mano el primer borbobón de la sangre caliente del animal ..." El toro dobla y el torero es aclamado. Angel María de Lera saca de la situación extraordinario partido, con el patetismo de una "solear" terrible, solo que desarrollada mediante un certero análisis. 6

Fernández Almagro observed also that "Aceituno" appeared to be a relatively simple character until his moment of crisis arrived, and it was then that the true complexity of a human being emerged. Despite his innate fear of and intimidation by the crowd, and despite the fact that his friend and partner has been killed, "el Aceituno" is able to make his passes with the bull, and to kill it. The crowd acclaims his feat roundly, but "el Aceituno" feels the hollowness that is grief - or perhaps his fear has filled that hollow until then. "Aceituno" is the victor and the town rejoices, but the torero does not feel victorious, and the town has a corpse and a funeral in the midst of its fiesta. A novelist and a columnist from Madrid want to publicize "Aceituno's" feat widely, and offer him a future in the national arena, but the torero refuses:

Torero yo, ¿eh? ¿Dicen ustedes que torero? Cuando oí las campanadas, no sé que es lo que pasó por mí. Me acordé

de mi amigo despanzurrado por mi culpa y me fui derecho al toro para que me matase también. ¡Para que me matase! Pero ¡ca!, el toro era aún más cobarde que yo. Y le gané la partida sin querer. Por eso no tiene mérito lo que hice. No tiene mérito ninguno. Aquello era como suicidarse, ¿entienden? Yo estaba desesperado. Eso es todo. ¿Y quieren que vuelva a repetir eso? ¡Ni hablar! ¡Yo, be-tunero para siempre! Ese es mi oficio, porque no he válido para más. ¿Qué es lo que quieren ustedes? ¿Que vuelva a sentir angustias de muerte cada vez que tenga que salir a la plaza? ¿Que se me revuelvan las tripas y que luego eche a correr delante del toro? - (p. 223)

The tone of statements like this of "el Aceituno" suggests that the torero is not the only man who "feels the anguish of death," but he is representative of all men for whom death is the reverse side of the same coin that is life. Similarly, the obverse is a town fiesta, the reverse is a man's fear, or a bullfight where a man makes sport of the nearness of death. On the other hand, though Rafa did not show fear, he did express it in his actions; where "el Aceituno" consciously felt fear, he was capable of great courage at a particular time.

"El Aceituno" is drawn to the cemetery and the corpse of his friend partly out of grief and partly to avoid the townspeople and their fiesta. In effect, he had gained a glimpse of the nearness of death at all times and recognized it as such, but the townspeople had gotten no such insight, and had learned nothing from the death of Rafa.

At the cemetery "el Aceituno" meets Fina, the local prostitute who had been very much attracted to Rafa. She, too, had learned something from the bullfight that day, and "el Aceituno" describes it thus:

- ¡Qué pena de vida! Cuando quise torero, no pude. Y cuando lo tenía olvidado, me mandan a este pueblo a acompañar a Rafa. El sí que tenía ilusiones. Pero a él le mata el toro. Yo hubiera querido huir entonces, pero me obligan torear. Otras veces me daba miedo el toro, pero ésta es el toro que me tiene miedo a mí. Yo quería morir y no pude. No me importaba triunfar y triunfé. Y tú ... ya ves: le esperabas a él y me presenté yo. Y aquí estamos. ¡La vida! (p. 243)

Again the reader sees this coin of life simile. Fina expected to meet Rafa that night, but the coin has turned over: Rafa is dead. Instead, another turn put "el Aceituno" in Rafa's place in the arena, and now presents him to Fina in place of Rafa. They both have learned about this chance of life ("el Aceituno" exclaims, -¡Hay que ver qué cosa es la vida! -) (p. 245), and taking advantage of whatever turn of the coin has put them together, they stay together that night.

The next morning is dawn of a new day, and new hope:

...el canto de los gallos, múltiple y frenético, era un himno de clarines saludando la esperanza del nuevo día. (p. 244)

The bullfight begins with trumpets, Los clarines del miedo, and the bullfight is symbolic of the confrontation with death that every man has. Now the day begins with trumpets, and the hope it offers is universal, too.

Lera's technique of perirealism is prevalent in Los clarines, and is close to what de Nora called "pure and simple realism:"

El mérito principal de esta novela reside en su autenticidad. Lera no aporta ninguna novedad técnica, temática, o de enfoque ... se diría que parte de tópicos: el realismo puro y simple y la expresión sobria, directa, como métodos de captación y comunicación de la realidad; el tema taurino

enmarcado en el ambiente de sol y moscas de un pueblón castellano en fiesta; el ángulo crítico implícito, de examen de conciencia y de palinodia dolorida, precedente del 98 y de la novela social. 7

So through a day and a night, through stages of fear which seem almost physical, through characters that are simple until crisis shows their actual complexity, through naturalistic imagery, and in realism "pure and simple" - Lera has created a novel that is clearly more than "un relato no desdeñable, pero todavía abocetado e inmaduro," as de Nora described Los olvidados.

La boda

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La boda, which was published in the summer of 1958, is very tightly structured, and the structure is strictly functional to the development of the story. Consider this outline:

Preludio - introduction of potentially conflicting groups:

1. Luciano arrives in town, seeks Iluminada in marriage.
2. Rosa, Luciano's siter-in-law, disapproves of the marriage.
3. Flashback to train station incident where Pelocabra family expressed their dislike of Negroes (Luciano's family).
 - a. Luciano and Margarito meet on the street.

La mañana - polarization of the groups:

1. Luciano gets disapproval from José, his brother.
2. Townspeople object to marriage because Luciano is a forastero, a viudo, and a Negro.
3. Iluminada fears her old novio Isabelo will return and disrupt the wedding; Margarito spreads such rumors.
4. People think Luciano is robbing them of money and a girl.
5. José admits he would kill a man spreading rumors like Margarito Pelocabra.
6. Pelocabra clan and friends meet, plot, await Isabelo.

La tarde - wedding seals conflict as inevitable:

1. Iluminada shows her wedding gifts to her friends.
2. Luciano recalls his first fateful marriage to Milagros: a drunken Portuguese stabbed and raped her, Luciano shot him.
3. The wedding and fiesta.
4. Isabelo arrives but uninterested in the wedding; Margarito sets out to break up the marriage.

La noche - the conflict:

1. Marriage is consummated.
2. Pelocabra clan and friends rouse newlyweds with shouts, insults.
3. Luciano faces the crowd; he is stabbed by the drunk Escaso, but shoots Margarito; they both die, Margarito calling for Iluminada.

There are three groups, basically: (1) Luciano, who controls the town economically, and who wants to marry Iluminada, although the memory of his tragic first marriage is still very strong;

(2) the townspeople, who resent Luciano because he has economic control, and because he is a forastero, viudo, and Negro; and
 (3) the Pelocabra family, especially Margarito, who owe Luciano money, and who particularly feel an attachment to Iluminada.

Luciano disturbed the status quo of the townsfolk by wanting to marry one of them without being one of them. Margarito polarized and aroused the separate groups with rumors about his brother Isabelo and coplas like

Pelo de cabra has tenido.
 Pelo de cabra tendrás.
 Que los pelos de esta cabra
 Nadie los puede arrancar. (p. 71)

The pueblo was roused to the point of forming a crowd to look at the slain bodies of Margarito and Luciano, but dispersed and did not change. Two ironies are evident here - the pueblo was crucial to the conflict, but did not change from it; and a novel entitled La boda ends with two deaths and no marriage.

Now this very tight structure seems to contrast sharply with the rather disjointed structure of Los olvidados, and surely there is very little action in La boda which could be called at all "extraneous" to the development of the story. Instead, La boda seems to be a more sharply focused look at the same perirealistic world of Lera in Los olvidados. Consider the actions of some of the characters;

How does Rosa contribute to Luciano's development - in light of the first scene with her in the prelude? Is it believable that Escaso was the one to kill Luciano, and is it consistent with the structured conflict between Luciano and the Pelocabra family?

Do Luciano and Margarito act credibly at all? In each case, the characters do not act credibly (being not predictable, clearly defined and typed characters), but as irrationally as humans do. Within his structure, then, Lera again has allowed his characters to live and act perirealistically.

Iluminada, for example, appears very weak. She virtually allows Luciano to marry her, without ever expressing her own desires one way or the other. It is a surprise, then, when she says on her wedding night:

-- Pero yo quiero que lo sepas de una vez: yo me he casado contigo porque eres el más hombre y el más guapo de todos. ¡El más hombre de todos los que he visto en mi vida! ... Muchas veces no sabemos las mujeres cómo hacer ... Y yo, entonces, menos que otra cualquiera ... Tenía que callar porque no podía demostrartelo. Pero ahora sí te lo podré demostrar. ¡Isabelo me dejó porque yo nunca le dejé tocarme el pelo de la ropa siquiera! (p. 221)

Iluminada has seemed all along to be another part of the lethargy and unchangingness of the pueblo, but in fact has very natural feelings herself and defends her silence well. If she were a stereotyped part of the pueblo, such emotions and explanations would be impossible; perirealistically, they are understandable.

Luciano is an egotist, a virile and capable man, and one used to victory over the odds against him. If anything, his concept of justice is the two bullets that killed the Portuguese assailant of Milagros, and the arrogance of that concept can be seen also in his business success and in the following dialogue with his brother José:

--- Dime, ¿qué te parece todo esto? ...
 Como José no replicara, Luciano, dándole una palmada en el

muslo, siguió diciendo:

--... Me siento mozo, ya lo creo. Anigo mío, cada uno llega cuando puede. ¡Qué más hubiera querido yo que alcanzar esto cuando lo alcanzan otros! Pero tuve que fastidiarme y esperar año tras año, viendo como en mi cabeza iban asomando las canas ... Para unos, todo es fácil. Tú mismo te casaste en la edad propia, después de acabar tu carrera, cuando y estabas encarrilado. Rosa era una muchacha de tu gusto, de tu raza, de tu clase, elegida entre cien. Una muchacha virgen ... Pero para mí, todo fue difícil. Es que cada uno nace con un sino. Y que no te lo puedes quitar de encima. ¡Ca! Es como si fueras nadando y sintieras que una mano te coge por el cuello, y que unas veces te hunde y otras te saca a flote, cuando estás a pique de ahogarte. Tu braceas, das patadas, te esfuerzas ... Tu quieres sacudirte la mano esa. Pero no puedes. Claro que, si no luchas, te ahogas ...

-- Claro, pero te lo tomarán a mal ...

-- ¿Quién me va a tomar a mal que haga lo que me da la gana?

-- Parece mentira que no lo comprendas, hombre: toda la gente del pueblo.... Mira Luciano: aquí se mira mal todo lo que no es corriente. Yo los conozco muy bien.

-- ¿Y qué? No creas que es nada nuevo y extraordinario. Eso mismo pasa en todas partes.

-- Puede, pero tienes que tener en cuenta una cosa ... Tú eres forastero aquí*. Llegas un buen día y, sin más ni más, te empeñas en casarte con una muchacha del pueblo, cosa nunca vista. Pero no es eso todo. Es que eres viudo y casi doblas la edad a la novia, y, para que la cosa no pase inadvertida, te preparas una boda por todo lo alto, como no se recuerda otra boda en el pueblo, y construyes tu casa, la mejor, en coma, como si dijéramos, de las demás ... Eso para esta gente es el inri ... Es como si gritases a la cara: "No me importáis un pepino". (pp. 54, 57, 58)

The passage above raises an interesting question: is Lera telling his readers that people are fated to a life of difficulty and tragedy? Or perhaps because Luciano believes that he is fated towards tragedy he unconsciously wills that tragic end? There is evidence on both sides: Luciano is drawn to Iluminada and marrying her as if he were irrevocably fated to do so, and despite the facts that his past, his brother, and the atmosphere presage the tragedy that does take place. On the other hand,

Luciano constantly reflects on the death of Milagros, he is too ready to point his rifle at the Pelocabra group, and his terrible anger is based on the past: all these suggest that Luciano wills his own destruction.

For his race, his ego, and his demise, then Luciano is reminiscent of Othello. The reader, however, lacks the yardstick for gauging the demise of Luciano because there are no apparent alter-egos like Iago and Desdemona to gauge from. Is there no way of judging the sources of Luciano's destruction?

In a sense the feelings of the townspeople that Margarito stirred up so well, are the yardstick by which we can see what happens to Luciano. He is a stranger, an outsider, in that he does not share the values that the town place in belonging, in moderation of money and show, in unity. And as a widower, in his own mind he has precedent for tragedy and a sense of desperation at the prospect of growing older, alone and useless, none of which his ego and arrogance can accept. Moreover, it is virtually true that he has been robbing the town of money -- psychologically, economic power may be a substitute for potency -- and of their most beautiful girl - it was sort of his supreme display of control and masculinity. The local prejudices against Luciano, then, reveal the seeds of Luciano's destruction.

Margarito has many reasons for hating Luciano: overtly, he feels the prejudices mentioned above; personally, Luciano has a virility that Margarito lacks (his name is a stigma - his mother had wanted daughters - and his chest, it is mentioned, is almost

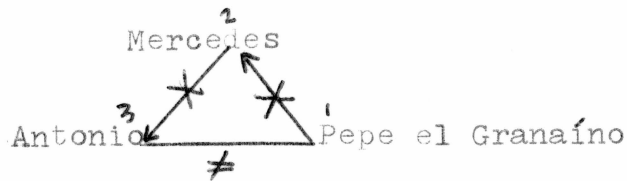
that of a young boy), Luciano has money (indeed, they owe him money), and Luciano has Iluminada whom Margarito loves (in his nighttime prowls Margarito probably spends a great deal of time watching Iluminada's house, he mutters "Ilu, Ilu," under his breath when he thinks he is alone, he relishes the lies that Isabelo has told him about supposed exploits with Iluminada, and with his dying breath he says "Gentle Ilu...").

Margarito offers as much as he can to Iluminada, and his death is tragic in some ways. Consciously, Margarito seems really to believe that his motives against Luciano stem largely from the connection between Isabelo and Iluminada, in addition to the money and local prejudices. When Isabelo says he is unconcerned with and unattached to Iluminada, it pricks Margarito into conscious recognition of his love for Iluminada and hope - for the first time - of winning her for himself. All that prevents success is this forastero, this viudo. Where Isabelo has been Margarito's sexual substitute with Iluminada - he loves Isabelo and loves Iluminada, but is physically unable to make love to her himself, hence the substitute - Margarito is virile at least in his hate, perhaps. In any event, Margarito exercises control over his followers, shows bravery in the face of Luciano's rifle (symbolic perhaps of Luciano's virility), and heroically drags himself up the steps towards Iluminada with his last strength. His cry is pathetic:

"--Ilu, cor - de - ra ..."(p. 258)

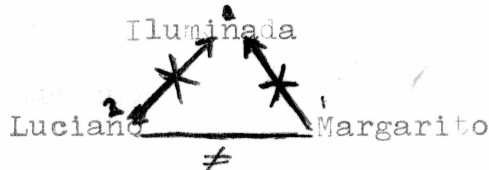
An index perhaps to understanding the sort of tragic ends to

Los olvidados and La boda is a technique I call triangulation, denoting the three-way relationships. In Los olvidados:



Pepe and Antonio are not in relation, and Pepe's madness severs his relation to Mercedes - he "dies" in effect - which kills her. Antonio relies on his relationship with Mercedes: her death leads to his.

Similarly, in La boda:



Here, the woman again controls the deaths of the men, but instead of a progression of deaths from one man to the other by way of the woman, in this case the two men kill each other. Nevertheless, in each instance their relationship to the woman is the cause of the death of the men.

In La boda again:



Luciano and Margarito are not in relationship, and Margarito's hatred of Luciano and love for Iluminada (a part of the pueblo) lead to the conflict that kills him and Luciano. From the other direction, Luciano has disturbed the situation of the pueblo, and adds a will and an anger towards the conflict and death.

Finally, La boda is valuable for the insights it provides into

rural life in a small Spanish town, a theme that is to recur and develop in Tierra para morir, characteristically treated without "localismo excesivo" according to de Nora.

Bochorno

9
Bochorno is named for the late summer heat of Spain that can persist for days on end before finally breaking. It is a sultry heat, the kind that prevents comfort and recalls yesterday's tensions. When it breaks, the whole land relaxes in the cool rain. Briefly, this is the action:

Miguel is restless. He feels as if he is surrounded by objects, mechanical party-goers, who show few restraints and little purpose to their lives. The parents of them all would be horrified to watch them at work, and the lady on the floor below does complain.

Miguel leaves quickly with Cristina, and begins dragging her with him on a mad run across the parks, past the stores, and down the streets. He stops and begins kissing her madly, feeling the desire rise in him, but stops and apologizes, shamefaced. He thinks sadly what a terrible thing it is to be young, and takes her home.

At home Miguel is embarrassed when his father tries to give him money, is bored by the talk at dinner, and frustrated in trying to express himself to his father. He goes to his room to study, but feels strange. Later he creeps to the door of his sister's room, listens to her sleeping for a minute and returns to his room, muttering "Imbecile!" to himself.

Two men who claim to be business friends of his father's ask him to come to the office of a don Leandro. He does, and talks to the secretary Merche until don Leandro arrives, at which time all he is told is: "Your father is a completely honest man: I need to talk to him."

When Miguel sees Cristina again he is ashamed of his impetuosity the night before. She is not ashamed, but she does blame herself for letting such a scene happen, and is only too aware what could have resulted if they had not stopped. She fears they might not be able to keep it from happening again, if she should stay, but she is probably going to North America for a year.

Miguel's father, Luis, is something of a state worker who reviews applications for building and development, and selects bidders and contractors. He is absolutely honest, and feels pressure because of it - even his wife wishes he would fix the accounts enough for a little more money to live on, but Luis refuses. Miguel tells his father of meeting Leandro and Salazar, and of Leandro's desire to talk to Luis - none of which pleases

Luis. Looking very grave he tells Miguel that they are crooks, and likens their appearances to Miguel's youthful confusion of sparrows and finches.

His friend Manolo confides in Miguel the fact that - at the same time and under similar circumstances as the passionate scene Miguel had with Cristina --he got his novia Luz pregnant. He feels very strongly the shame he has brought on their parents. Meanwhile the heat of the bochorno grows worse.

Since Cristina is bound for North America, Miguel begins to see Merche, don Leandro's secretary. He goes up to her apartment and waits while she dresses to go out with him. She wants them to be novios and describes to Miguel how she has waited for someone like him to come along. Her narration of how she has sold herself to Leandro hardly pleases Miguel, and when she takes him shopping on her money, he is embarrassed. Nevertheless he is very much attracted to her.

Luis did meet with Leandro and Salazar in the latter's office, but rejects Leandro's proposition for a building permit and 10% cut in his project. In the darkened office after Leandro leaves, however, Salazar reminds Luis of the money owed him, and how little Luis earns at his job. Luis calls Salazar a coward for bringing all that up.

Miguel and Merche go to a dance hall-night club, and Miguel is appalled by the public displays of affection couples show all around him. Indeed, he is nearly in a rage when he sees his sister Piluca there with someone other than her boy friend Bernardo. Piluca only remarks that Merche is not Cristina. Later, Merche promises her novio Miguel that she will throw Leandro out that night when he comes to her. Miguel goes home, stops to look at Piluca asleep, goes to his own room and cries.

Next morning Miguel feigns illness in hope that he will not have to face his father. Finally, however, Luis calls his son to his office and announces to him that he has decided to approve Leandro's plan because he needs the money desperately, and hands Miguel the sheaf of papers to take to Leandro. Miguel tears up the papers and angrily leaves the house.

The bochorno is about to break.

Miguel goes to Merche to tell Leandro - through her - that his father is one man who cannot be bought. He finds the apartment a mess and Merche beaten and raped by Leandro. She is frantic when he arrives and swears that she endured it all for him. But when she begs him to prove his own love for her, he cannot, or will not - and leaves.

It is raining; the bochorno has passed. Miguel happens to

meet Cristina on the street (she is not going to North America after all); he rebuffs her and accuses her of being foul, too, but she persists and they walk off in the rain together.

Miguel is between boyhood and manhood, and the reader admires him for his strength of character, but can only laugh at his frustrations. He is old enough to have the sex drive of a man, but so young that his drives know no goal and only frustrate him, and his vain attempts to find a goal - such as the clumsy episode with Cristina - only frustrate him more.

The outstanding quality that Miguel shows is that he knows what he does not like, and it is only a matter of time in the novel before he learns to respond effectively. He dislikes intensely the aimless sort of life of the party set and the fact that it offers him no release of his frustrations, much less a remedy. Even when he breaks out of that setting, dragging Cristina with him through the streets, his passion only conflicts with his moral feelings and frustrates him all the more: in other words, he recognizes what he does not like, but does not remove the source of his distaste.

Miguel believes in the honesty of his father, and knows very well that he detests his father's giving in to Leandro and Salazar for money. But he resolves that conflict effectively by tearing up the papers intended for Leandro.

In the third instance, Miguel dislikes the fact that Merche has "sold" herself to Leandro, asserted her initiative on Miguel, and has even taken him shopping: in effect, what he dislikes is himself for compromising morally, for releasing his frustrations

in a way which conflicts with his morals and hence frustrates him more, for venting his sexual desires on a girl who is not moral herself. When he finds Merche beaten and raped he has compassion for her, but when she wants him to make love to her to prove his love for her, he cannot compromise, and breaks out of the situation again.

Finally the heat breaks. In the first case Miguel compromises morally with Cristina to resolve his frustrations - it is ineffective. In the second case, he effectively solves the conflict, the compromise, of his father (he effectively gains the respect of his father and the reader here). In the third case, he has learned enough to solve the conflict with himself over Merche, and the resolution that is Cristina is like the cool rain after the bochorno.

Lera dedicated Bochorno to his children, Angel and Adelaida, and noted that he hopes when they are old enough to read and understand the pages he had written, there will in effect be the sane and human solutions to the problems about which he has written.

He describes two classes of young people that are material for writing: "los jóvenes airados o furiosos," or "angry young men," and what he calls the "jóvenes corrientes," the usual sort of young person. The former, he says, are a non-working minority, negative to a point of offering nothing positive, who protest and rebel without ever affirming or reconstructing anything if it requires their hard work. They bewail their lack of money, but are quick to abandon their comrades if they should get some. They have not been, nor are they, nor will they ever be, really,

revolutionary.

The latter are the majority who face the work and problems of life, who achieve the satisfactions that make life human. It is they who push man towards his destiny, and it is they who have in their possession the best revolutionary balance of today.

A large body of literature has made these "angry young men" into universal myths, according to Lera, and he confesses that he almost fell into that myth-making role himself. But he chose to deal with the second group because they are normally the forgotten ones, although under their prosaic-looking exteriors there beats a human sound that must be heard. Lera says he wishes he had the art to talk about these young people with the strength and honesty they deserve.

Finally, Lera writes that this age - where man is on the threshold of visiting the stars - is the best one to have come, and one that offers much hope for the future, if in no other way than the author is expecting to live on in the blood of his children, and his grandchildren, and their children.

Since he is writing this dedication to his own children, about young people who can expect to get what he thinks is the best in life, in a novel about a young man who learns to rectify conflicts and compromise within himself, the key word in the dedication must be the word hope. Indeed, Bochorno, unlike Los olvidados and La boda, ends on a note of hope.

Bochorno is interesting as a study of an adolescent, and may be useful didactically as a lesson in growing into manhood. It

is appealing also in that it is strictly contemporary, its setting is in a large city, and it deals with a single boy and his father - none of which is characteristic of any of Lera's previous novels.

But Miguel is unconvincing himself, and he does not have the tight structure of nature, time, and chapter divisions - characteristic of each of Lera's earlier works - in which to act convincingly or perirealistically. He seems contrived in the sense that his actions sound more paradigmatic than natural or meaningful: for example, how was his relationship with Cristina different after his experience with Merche and the bochorno broke? Also, is Miguel supposed to be a triumph of one of the average young people Lera talked of in his dedication? Are Merche, don Leandro, and Salazar among the adult versions of the jóvenes airados o furiosos? These seem unclear.

In all fairness, however, the task of revealing the thoughts and frustration of an adolescent boy is a difficult one, and Lera's attempt to take up such different themes is refreshing. Nevertheless, Miguel is too wooden, his three-step progression to learning how to resolve conflicts is contrived, and Lera's point, in the light of the dedication, unclear.

Trampa

Elena is a beautiful girl, the daughter of Germán and Gracia, who married Alvaro, an exceptionally handsome man. Such a match may seem idyllic, but it is not the case: before her marriage Elena had a brief one-night affair with Joaquín, for which she felt terrible guilt. Moreover, after the marriage, Alvaro avoids Elena constantly - he is gone all day every day as well as far into the night - and never allows her to know why. Elena becomes more and more miserable as a result, and her misery is seen and questioned by each member of her family.

Elena finds that she is pregnant, however, and confronts Alvaro, hoping that he will be pleased and desirous of a home life. But his reaction is harsh: "Whose child is it?" and he learns quickly.

In dramatic contrast to this, Mario (Elena's brother) is meeting regularly in a cafe with some friends who discuss politics. Their point of view is leftist, which to his father makes Mario a Communist. Mario, however, instead of the practical dialectician, is sensitive and hurt by his father's feelings, as well as uneasy over the views of his friends. He feels very strongly that he and the well-off people like him must pay for their position of comfort. He expresses this to Elena, and later leaves for Germany to join the Spanish laborers and industrial workers there - to "pay!"

Elena meanwhile faces the advice of her mother, the counsel of her friend Maria Jesus, and is concerned by her disbelief in God: once frantically and tearfully she joined a Holy Week procession in the rain to pray forgiveness and help - but found herself unable to do either. She even spends some time with Joaquín, but finds no solace, and finally returns to Alvaro to beg him to be a husband to her and a father to her child. Alvaro, of course, only leaves.

Elena again turns to Joaquín, who promises this time to arrange a way for her to see where Alvaro spends all his time. He takes her to a bar - a gay bar: Alvaro is a homosexual.

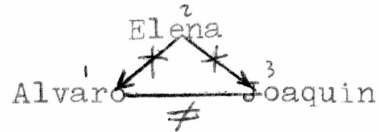
Elena can hardly cope with this. She confronts Alvaro, tells him what she knows and shows him. She turns to her father then, and he suggests a story to her where she was provoked to the murder and her husband was unfaithful. But she spurns all this - convinced that Mario was right and that she has to pay for her easy life - and confesses to the police in such a way that she is fully implicated under the strongest penalty. 10

Of all Lera's female characters, Elena is as much a tragic figure as any. The seeds of the destruction of her marriage are

from her affair with Joaquín, but if that is insufficient, Alvaro's preference for males would suffice. In other words, partly for internal reasons for which she is accountable, and partly for external reasons beyond her control, her marriage with Alvaro cannot last, and since she has her hopes for the future and her life pinned on that marriage, those hopes have scant chance of fulfillment. In addition, there is a theme of violation with retribution: for her illicit affair with Joaquin, Elena pays dearly in guilt and suspicion (Alvaro asks her immediately, "Whose child is it?"); and Alvaro, who has violated the home of Elena's parents (Alvaro and Elena lived at her home) and Elena's bed once - it is a violation because he never reveals his homosexuality to his wife or parents-in-law, but is unable to consummate his marriage more than once because of it - pays for it with his life.

Elena is the pivotal figure to the fates of both Joaquín and Alvaro, and herself. She takes action three times: first in her relationship with Joaquín, then in shooting Alvaro, and finally in the unfavorable account of her crime that she "confesses" to the police. The first is the illegitimate consummation of the love that Joaquín feels for her, and the child she carries (because of the time lapse between that affair and her discovery of pregnancy) might well be his. For this Elena suffers personally, Joaquín endures separation, and Alvaro never forgives them. The second is the illegal resolution to her own frustrations: Elena cannot accommodate to what was Alvaro's problem, and it brings the immediate consequence of guilt under the law. The third, Elena's lie to the

police, is her solution and punishment for violation, seals the fate of the child she carried, and leaves Joaquín alone and with no hope of having her. The triangulation is this:



Lera has omitted lengthy background passages either set off from the text in italics or incorporated into the text in narrative (as in La boda), and they are not missed. The three main characters are more or less a part of a group of young people - though not so young as the comparable group in Bochorno - who spend their time partying, drinking, and the like. So without benefit of childhood circumstances explaining her particular sources of insecurity, we only see how Elena draws from the values of her group of friends to find the security they do not provide her: Alvaro is wealthy and handsome, Elena seems to know very little about love (her only experience has been with Joaquín, nor does she know all that she should have known about Alvaro when she marries him), but marriage and living at home superficially offer security for the future. In effect, she gives her virtue for the wrong reasons, she gets married for the wrong reasons and under misleading appearances, and she is tied up inextricably in the rôle she makes for herself. Maybe killing Alvaro is the only way out, a solution which rings of Strindberg.

Interestingly, there is another Strindbergian echo in Trampa: nobody is sure who the father of Elena's child is. Elapsed time suggests that the father is Joaquín, but he denies the possibility

completely, and the child - like Bertha in The Father - could never be sure who its father is. A question like this is emblematic in a subtle way, perhaps, of the apparent purposelessness among the party group, and of Elena's profound insecurity.

Mario, Elena's idealistic but leftist brother, reminds us of Antonio, the reformed anarchist in Los olvidados; Sixto, the fugitive striker in Tierra para morir; the revolutionary setting of Las últimas banderas; and of Miguel, in Bochorno, in being able to take action in terms of his idealism, and his youthfulness. In addition, Mario's fundamental belief that the people of leisure must pay greatly for their position because of the number of poor people, recalls Luciano in La boda who pays for his success and seems to be absolutely fated for disaster.

In any event, it is significant that Elena feels at the end that Mario has been right - she has paid dearly for her position. Above all, Elena experiences guilt, and she realizes that all her personal guilts are the natural consequence of her not working and not wanting. She is not unlike Mercedes in Los olvidados (whose guilt and disaster kills her) until that realization, but it does not seem clear what the connection is between personal guilts and economic status.

In the course of Trampa Elena hears Alvaro speak the name "Manoli" in his sleep. She thinks of course that he is spending his days and nights with another woman - a waitress perhaps, nicknamed Manoli - and that that is the cause of his alienation from her. She searches for and curses Manoli, but cannot foresee that

Manoli is not a woman. The reader follows Elena in her search and her pain. But from Alvaro's point of view, the situation is even worse. Elena creates the rôle in which she is bound, but Alvaro is born into his. The shame of being a homosexual is so great that he cannot reveal even to his wife what his affliction is. The shame must also have driven him to wanting a wife and home so that on the surface he can seem a man with a man's role. Indeed, Alvaro's conviction that he could not have been the father of Elena's child must stem from his native feeling of impotency. He would have believed that the only consequential phallus of that marriage was the pistol that killed him.

Perhaps Elena should have married Joaquín. He is of the same group of friends, he apparently has the necessary virility, and he is probably in love with her. But he is not her husband. With characteristic perirealism - realistic to the point of having human inconsistencies and quirks - Elena does what she does, not what in retrospect she perhaps should have done.

So Trampa recalls all of Lera's earlier works in such familiar themes as the three-way relationship, tragic endings as retributive punishment for the sins of alienation and broken relationships, the idealistic anarchist or youth, and a beautiful girl's being the cause of a death. Mario even recalls Miguel of Bochorno for taking action on his youthful idealism, and although the bochorno does not break for Mario, he is more likable than Miguel. Nevertheless, to say that Trampa is consistent with Lera's previous novels also says that he has tried very little that is new, and Trampa indeed represents no significant improvement or change in Lera as an artist.

Hemos perdido el sol

Paulina and Ramón, like so many other Spaniards, have left their son Ramoncito and Spain for Germany to work with the PLUPO corporation, but by some mistake Paulina is sent to the factory in Munich, and Ramón to the one in Hamburg. The error is too tied up in red tape to be righted, however, and the first few days for each are a torment.

Ramón is a spirited and handsome young man, and feels he can go only so long without a woman: so when Marleen approached him in a restaurant-bar, they become lovers. In contrast, Paulina feels that all the restrictions instilled in her from childhood are good, and she spurns all the young wolves attracted by her beauty. Georg Schneider, a successful business executive with the PLUPO company, is particularly desirous of her, and her moralness only makes her more attractive to him.

Ramón has a friend, Rafa, who meets a German girl, Barbara, the same night Ramón meets Marleen, and they also begin living together, intending to marry eventually (he even gives her a ring). Paulina's friend Regina has left her husband Basilio and daughter in Spain: Regina's lover is named Gonzalo. Gonzalo, however, kills Luis el Fotogénico (who is something of a Spanish business pimp, luring Spaniards in Germany to other jobs for a fee - using his nationality and native tongue to great advantage), and then is fatally injured in an auto accident. Barbara later miscarries; then her husband Basilio arrives suddenly in Munich to take Regina back to Spain with him (the 15-year old daughter has gotten completely out of control).

Paulina realizes through the tone of his letters and her own intuition that she might be losing, or has lost, Ramón, but does not quite have the courage to go to Hamburg to find out for sure. Ramón has tried to tell her about Marleen on the telephone once, but could not. And Marleen, tormented as a woman would be over the fact that Ramón is married and unfaithful to his wife, wants earnestly to bear a child - Ramón's child - and is heartbroken when the gynecologist tells her she is barren.

The legacy of the Nazis is in startling relief to the Spaniards' situation in a foreign land. Marleen is barren because she was raped at the age of eleven while unconscious after a bombing raid that killed the rest of her family in the war. Similarly, Georg Schneider had witnessed the death of his family at the hands of the SS during the Hitler days. So where the Spanish migrants feel the brunt of the cultural shock and alienation that comes from being in a foreign land, they can only see and sympathize - they cannot identify - with the pervasive legacy of the Second World War.

Lucio, a friend of Ramon's, has his right hand crushed accidentally in the factory one day. He symbolizes explicitly the Spaniards' plight of having left one hand in each of two countries,

never belonging in Germany (separated by language from the Germans, appalled by the liberal and aggressive Frauleins, and always yearning for the poorer days in Spain where they had their families and ties), but prevented by contract and need from returning to Spain.

Marleen throws Ramón out of her house finally, though later she regrets it and goes looking for him. But meanwhile Paulina has come to Hamburg, and when Marleen arrives at Ramón's house, she sees Ramón and Paulina embracing and talking of their son. 11

Hemos perdido el sol is dedicated "to all those Spaniards who have to emigrate beyond the borders of their country, to earn a living, and, especially, to those in Germany, who are such a shining example of industry and the spirit of sacrifice." In sharp contrast to the "angry young men" in the dedication to Bochorno, these migrants have had to sacrifice to the point of leaving family and homeland for one year or more to earn enough money to live better in Spain perhaps, or maybe to go into business for themselves. And if the young men yield to the more aggressive and liberal women of Germany, it is understandable because they are human; although it is sad too, because ultimately there is no substitute or compensation for their families and absence from Spain.

If there is a villain in Hemos perdido it is Luis el Fotogénico who prostitutes his nationality to entice other Spaniards into new jobs that are not as good as they sound (Pili, a friend of Paulina's, for example, is lured into a dry cleaning job, but conditions, salary, and hours are much worse than had been advertised).

The title "We Have Lost the Sun" suggests the plight of the Spanish aliens, and is consistent with Lera's technique of wedding naturalism with dramatic action. Germany's snow ~~is~~ a blanket

that makes all things look alike and kills sounds and smells and sights - a straitjacket on the spirit and individualism of Ramón and Rafa and the others. And German women, large, well-built and attractive, take the initiative in sex. Small wonder that Ramón and the other who rebel against the blanketing snow and the sameness of the factory assembly line find an outlet in these women. In contrast, Paulina and her friends - who have been raised rather strictly and traditionally -- are not so liberal, are attractive to the German men for their conservatism, and face great frustration because their spirits are domestic and in Spain. In each case the sun of Spain - that climate and atmosphere where there is little dulling snow, where women are not aggressive, and where their families are - is truly lost to the Spaniards so long as they are in Germany.

It may seem curious that Lera admires people who leave behind so much for the sake of earning money, but there is no such condemnation in what he has written. He is not the judge, but the reporter: there is no condemnation of these people because they have left Spain; the fact is they did leave, they are in Germany, and because they face difficulties as a result, and because they are human and alive, they deserve our attention. It is this sense of the dignity and respect every person deserves by being human that Lera, essentially, is pointing out: he is like Antigone, except that he goes to Germany not to bury his brothers, but to afford them the comparable ritual of his concern and commiseration.

It may seem curious again that there is, then, no condemnation

of Germany's mass production economy where individual men are only workers on an assembly line, and women approach men with their virtue's latchstring hanging out. But again, Lera is not the judge: Marleen saw her country go mad, her home bombed, her family killed, and herself raped - at the age of eleven. Can she be blamed for the fact that twenty years later she is still looking for the security, home, and family that she lost because of a war she had no control over? And if she is sinning, she is also paying for it in her memory and in the remembrance that a barren woman carries with her. Georg Schneider witnessed the destruction of his family and almost died himself: surely his desire for a girl who is pure, a job that is secure, and a world well ordered, is understandable. Lera affords these people the dignity of being human too, and there is no condemnation in him for those that walk not after the flesh for its own sake, but out of their spirit.

Finally, perhaps a word is necessary on Lera's ability to create fiction that describes an idea connotatively through a precise denotative picture. For example, Paulina and Ramón have been separated by a quirk of red tape, suffered greatly at first because of their separation and then from their substitutions for one another, and finally are reunited despite all obstacles. What better analogy could there be for the plight of Spaniards separated from their home, sentenced for a year to the cold black and white world of red tape, but reunited happily, in most cases, as a result of their endurance and perseverance? As another example, Lucio literally "left" his left hand in the factory because of the

accident: similarly, should Paulina and Ramón return to Spain and their families, there would always be a part of each of them left in Munich and Hamburg respectively. Lera's artistry here cannot be denied.

Hemos perdido el sol, then, represents considerable growth on the part of Angel María de Lera. By transporting the action out of Spain he has added not internationality to his themes, but universality. La boda, and Los clarines del miedo, his best earlier works, were valuable for their integration of natural imagery, plot structure, and character development, but their value hardly extends beyond themselves; Luciano represents the man alienated by economics, customs, and race - a universal and worthwhile theme- but the characteristically Lerian perirealism makes that theme interesting for its application to that particular town: that application does not make the universal theme much more understandable or meaningful to the reader. In short, where Lera's localismo is interesting and artistically presented, it is too localized. Until now.

Moreover, the Spanish migrants to Germany are original subjects for a novel, yet seem to merit the coverage, and their transferred localismo is more meaningful when contrasted with the German legacies of World War Two.

Finally, through Ramón and Paulina - transplanted and separated - Lera has made a very compelling statement about the dignity that every human being has: the fierce spirit of Ramón cannot be blanketed by the snow, nor can Paulina be enticed into values

that are not hers - not to mention the compassion that must be felt for Georg Schneider and Marleen for the memories they carry.

Tierra para morir

The doctor, don Pedro, arrives at the house of Claudio, the mayor, whose wife is ill. He diagnoses it as a malignancy, and she dies shortly afterward. Claudio appeals to his daughter Noemí for comfort but she spurns him summarily, saying, "You don't need me - you never have!" The truth is that Claudio has spent his life acquiring lands and wealth and has never turned to anyone for help or comfort. Noemí thinks she hates her father, and surely hates all his possessions, hoping to leave them all if she can.

One day Sixto appears. He needs work and Claudio gives it to him; he has no companionship, being a stranger, and Claudio gives him that, too. Sixto is a strong man, a nonbeliever who avoids Mass, and a fugitive for having been involved in a strike with a Communist group (he comes to Claudio's town because it is too small to have the guardia civil), all of which is noticed or discovered progressively. Sixto and Noemí become lovers, and their dream is to renounce Noemí's inheritance and connection with the town and her father, and to leave; but meanwhile he is Claudio's hired hand and she the controlled daughter.

Claudio's mistress is a woman named Obdulia who has driven her husband Santos away from herself and their three children to Germany to work (her own frigidity has hastened his departure). But she gets a letter saying that Santos is returning: he is in the last stages of a bronchial disease and wants to return to town to die. The whole town, of course, knows about the affair between Claudio and Obdulia.

Meanwhile Julio returns to town - he is the grandson of Javier, from whom Claudio has acquired most of his lands - from Germany where he works, to convince his mother Virtudes that she should move to Barcelona where he will later join her. Julio offers their last piece of land to Claudio (who finagles a good deal from the boy before he even asks about what will happen to Virtudes), although his mother refuses to sell out. Virtudes also believes very strongly that Noemí is the only girl for Julio - certainly not that German girl he has met - no doubt in part because it would keep the lands in their family, and she even approaches Claudio with the problem.

Claudio, however, walks in on Noemí and Sixto in Sixto's bed. He orders Sixto to leave, of course; but he blames Noemí for going to him. Then the report comes that all of Claudio's granaries are on fire. Claudio immediately shouts for Sixto, and the whole town echoes his cries; but Sixto, wherever he is, must think that he would be blamed for setting the fire, and cannot be found. In fact, Obdulia's daughter Flora has accidentally set the fire, but in any event, Claudio is ruined.

Noemí announces to Claudio that she is pregnant, and plans to

leave in search of Sixto, but her father covets a grandchild above all things now that his grain is burned, and he forbids her to leave until his grandson is born. Meanwhile, Virtudes hangs herself, and Julio drives off in the middle of the night.

It is fiesta time, and Noemí leaves a note for her father. She has gone to find Sixto. 12

Tierra para morir is a powerful collection of death symbols - and death itself - and life issues, to state it very generally. The title betrays the significance of the land's role in this drama of symbols and personalities, and the novel exemplifies Lera's device of using seasonal and weather changes as dramatic indicators.

The backdrop of death throughout the novel is simply individual deaths: Claudio's wife first; then Santos, the husband of Claudio's mistress Obdulia, whose only purpose for coming to town is to die; and Virtudes, the daughter of the man from whom Claudio has acquired most of his lands. These people are a part of the town, and seem to represent that town's dying off, person by person.

Of the three people who come to the town, the one who stays - Santos - dies, and the other two - Sixto and Julio - leave hurriedly, with good reason never to return. The only children in town who are mentioned are Obdulia's. Of these, Flora was the one who set the fire that "kills" Claudio financially, and the fire probably seals the fate of the town if it were not sealed before. Moreover, Noemí's unborn child, representing, perhaps, hope for the future, never sees light in that town.

In effect, the town is strangling because the people in it are consumed by Claudio's passion and choked off from life. George Kennedy writes that in a time of change, some people adapt, while

13

others die with the old: in this case the change is towards death, and Santos, Virtudes, and Claudio represent the sameness that is passing away, while Julio, Sixto, and Noemí adapt to the change and, by leaving, avoid having the life choked out of them.

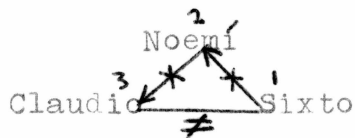
Claudio's life is centered on his possessions, his lands, and he is so successful there that he fails in simply having a family. When his wife died he sought comfort - although the distinction is difficult to see clearly - for his grief, rather than for her death. Noemí is another one of his possessions and he does all he can to thwart the few things she wants herself - especially her leaving town and her loving Sixto. Claudio even wants Noemí to have Sixto's illegitimate child for the wrong reasons, that is, to have another possession, and a descendant to carry on the ownership of his possessions. Claudio counts Obdulia among his possessions, and contributes to the dismissal of Santos from her house and the failure of another family. And where Claudio is consumed by fiery desire to own all the lands, and that passion destroys his family, Virtudes and her family, and Obdulia and her family, it seems almost just that Flora should light the fire that consumes Claudio's wealth. The ironies are that Claudio is too successful as a businessman to be successful as a human, and this passion of his which consumes all those around him, consumes him.

And the ironies continue. To generalize, death is ironic in that it is both destruction and security (a repose to be counted on), and where the town is the site of destruction of so much, it is the site of security for Sixto the fugitive. But significantly,

he opts for the danger outside of town to the security which the town is. Conversely, where Claudio seeks security in owning the town and the lands, he finds only destruction. Somehow Claudio is reminiscent of Luciano in La boda in that he either is fated, or fates himself to his own destruction, and finds his only real security in that destruction. The classical analogy is that of Midas, who sought his security in gold, and eventually killed his daughter, his most prized possession, because she also turned to gold at his touch.

In a recent lecture Lera was asked whether Noemí found Sixto, and if not, what did she do? Lera's answer was, "I don't know!" His point was that he created the character, and the environment, and some structure, but the character was supposed to act freely within that framework: beyond the framework, how could even he the creator know? It is this sort of ultra-realism, where Noemí is so consistently realistic in a human sense that she is unpredictable, which I call perirealism, and Noemí - as the author suggested - is a prime example of a perirealistic character of Lera's.

Tierra para morir also contains a three-way relationship at the center of interest, Lera's characteristic triangulation:



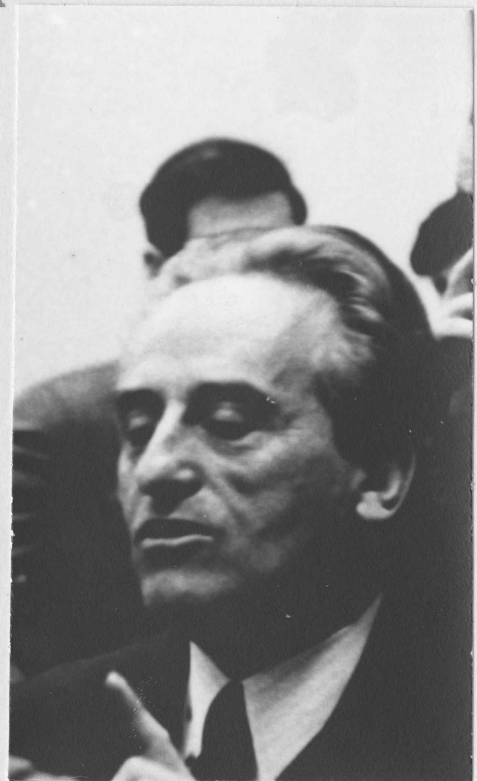
In this instance, although Claudio is the dominant figure as far as overt control over the other two is concerned, Noemí, the female, is the pivotal figure. Noemí wants love, and her hope of leaving her father needs only a man to take root. Sixto is that

man. When Claudio fires Sixto and ruptures the relationship between Noemi and Sixto he intensifies her hate. In Claudio's mind Noemí bears the guilt in the adultery by having taken the initiative, not Sixto, and so is the cause of Sixto ceasing to live there. And then she ruptures all relationship with her father by leaving and killing Claudio's hopes of male heir. In other words, Noemí is the cause of Sixto's departure, abandons Claudio herself, and in effect kills her father in the person of his grandson.

It must be noted that the triangulation itself is not significant, but it is a picture of the three-way relationships which are central to those of Lera's novels that end in death or departure. Understanding those three-way relationships -- and perhaps this device of triangulation is helpful -- must be critical, then, to understanding Lera's representation of death and tragic situations.

Lera dedicates Tierra para morir to "my parents, who taught me to love all that is human in this world," and adds to the title the parenthetical statement "and the hundred closed homes that will never open." The contrast suggests that Lera approaches his audience didactically, intending to instruct, or to reveal something about man's dignity, but also implies that he has no illusions of being able to open all the doors that have been closed by people ignorant of human dignity. This sort of practical idealism we have seen already in Miguel in Bochorno and now in Noemí and Sixto, to some extent. In each case they are young, they have a youthful and vital spirit, and pragmatically take action to avoid losing that spirit.

THE TECHNIQUE AND STYLE OF
ANGEL MARIA DE LERA

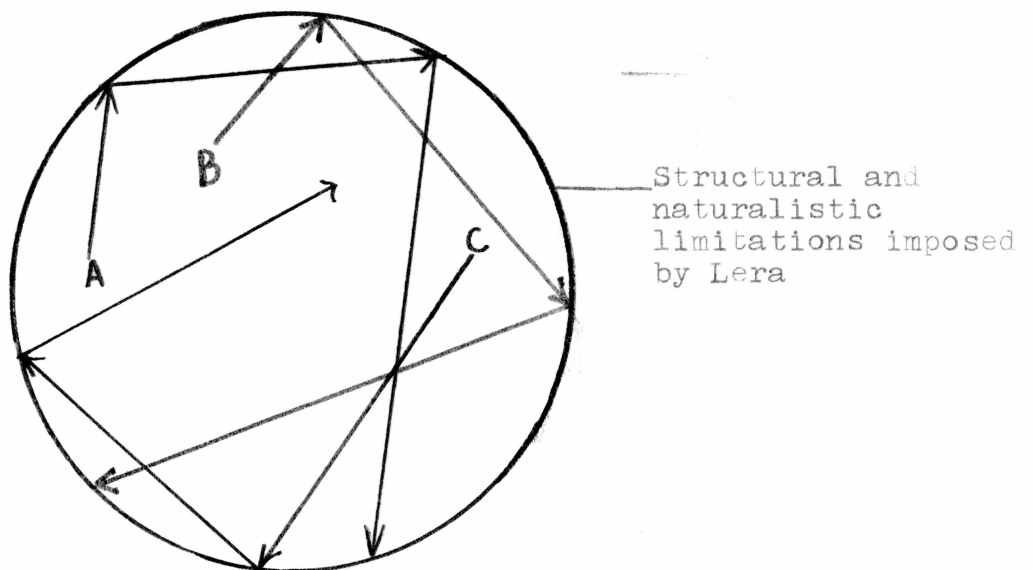


I

"Perirealism" is a term coined to describe an ultra-realism that characterizes the novels of Angel María de Lera. Many characters within his novels act credibly and predictably most of the time; but there are particular instances when they act rashly and incredibly, like living persons. Moreover, there are particular actions that seem wholly extraneous to plot development at times - which is related to the perirealism of the characters stylistically, but appears only in Lera's earliest works. In many works Lera increasingly creates tight structural settings that blend environment (weather, seasons, etc.) with rigid chapter divisions (where each successive chapter clearly marks an additional balanced step towards the conclusion) and character development. The characters, then, theoretically are free to act and react perirealistically - i.e., sporadically, supposedly with the foibles of humans - within the rigidity of their naturalistic and artistic environment. Consider this diagram, in which the characters go in any direction, though within definite structural limits:

Perirealistic Environment

Letters denote
characters



In Los olvidados, as has been suggested, Pepe's madness could not have been predicted by the reader, although it is easily seen from his background and his attitudes towards Mercedes that he could not accept failure in any way. Similarly, the sources of Mercedes' need for security and her basic fear of men are evident and easily understood - but the shock of seeing her hopes for her and her unborn child's future dissolved in Pepe's madness, which causes her to die of apoplexy, is hardly predictable. In addition, the fact that Antonio is drawn to his death because the object of his absolute devotion has died is consistent with his earlier disillusion and defection from his anarchist friends, but it is still unforeseeable.

Los clarines del miedo imposes strictures of a small town and a time span of twenty-four hours upon three characters who learn that fear and hope are always at hand. And within these strictures (like the circle in the diagram) Rafa happens to find death,^{and} "el Aceituno" and Fina chance to be together and to gain a similar insight from Rafa's death, although the townspeople continue their fiesta, either unaware or unwilling to face the nearness of death.

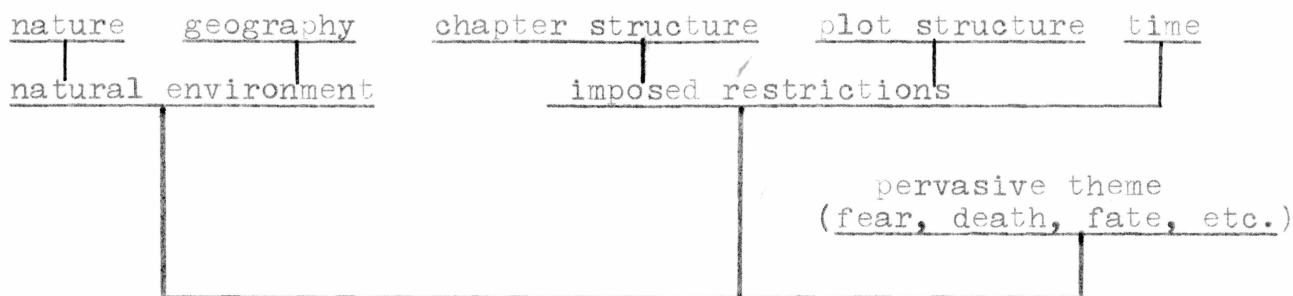
La boda is the most rigidly structured of them all in time and chapter divisions. Again within the confines of a small town and a single day, morning, afternoon, and night progressively bring the preparation, polarization, and consummation of a conflict. This is perhaps the most penetrating focus of the circle in the diagram of all the novels, and raises the question whether ultimately a man wills his own death, or is guided to it.

Bochorno focuses more on a single person within the larger setting of a city and a longer time span, but Miguel seems paradigmatic for knowing the boundaries of his own world and learning to will which direction he takes within it. He is perhaps too wooden to be effective, but Lera's attempt to answer the question raised in La boda by a re-focus of the circle in the diagram is encouraging nonetheless.

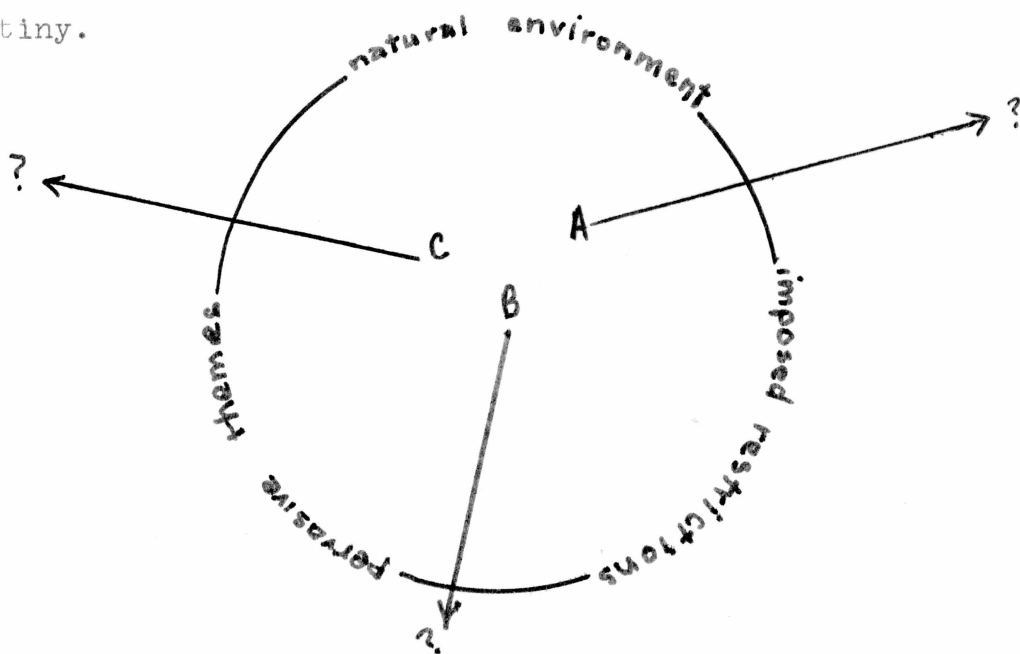
Trampa in the main focuses tightly on Elena and Alvaro, on Joaquín to a lesser extent, again in the city. Elena is bounded by the values of her group - such as having a handsome husband, but marrying him without knowing what he is like - values which include security and the appearance of a normal home life. Alvaro cannot break the bonds of homosexuality and his attempt to do so (his marriage to Elena) ends in disaster.

In Hemos perdido el sol Ramón and Paulina are in wholly new and strange circumstances, and seek substitutes for each other and Spain. The substitutes, however, are as temporary as their stay in Germany, and they could not willfully recreate the boundaries they had always known. Their unbreakable bonds are their natures and the very spirit which is embodied in the sun they left in Spain. They will to go to Germany, to break out of the circle they knew, but by chance are thrown into circles not of their own choosing; Lera lets them try to substitute, but they fail; they then recreate the circle they once had by reuniting and intending to return to Spain. In essence then, chance supersedes their wills.

Tierra para morir effectively blends natural imagery, the boundaries of a small town, and a single pervasive theme into an environment which Claudio wants to control, and which Noemí and Sixto must escape. Death is omnipresent - Claudio's passion for possessions destroys three family units, three characters die, the town itself is in the last stages of dying - and where Claudio loses himself in owning things moribund, Sixto and Noemí opt for life and leave that environment. In summary, then, these are the elements of the perirealistic environment in Lera's works:



The characters are created with all or some of these elements as backdrop. They react in accordance with these elements, or against them, or try to change them, depending upon the character. The question again, however, is whether Lera's characters represent man as able to will his destiny, or whether he can only obey his destiny.



II

Triangulation is a device for investigating the three-way relationships that are central to most of Lera's novels, especially the ones that end in tragedy or departure. It is a diagram of the progression that goes from, typically, rupture of the relationship between two of the three actors, which leads to the death, departure, or incapacitation of another character, which leads to another death, departure,^{or} incapacitation. A female usually is the pivotal figure of the progression (cf. diagrams in the discussions of La boda, Trampa, and Pierra para morir).

Triangulation demands the question, "Why are three-way relationships central to Lera's novels?" - the answer to which is central to understanding Angel María de Lera as an author. The first step in the destructive progression which triangulation diagrams is a broken relationship or the absence of a relationship: Antonio and Pepe are out of relationship, are virtual rivals for Mercedes, and Mercedes leaves Antonio out of her plans for the future; Rafa dies and leaves "el Aceituno" alone; Luciano and Margarito have no relationship other than as virtual rivals for Iluminada, and Iluminada leaves Margarito out of her plans for the future; Miguel severs his relationship with Cristina and forms one with Merche, then reverses himself, severing the relationship with Merche and reforming one with Cristina; Joaquín and Alvaro have no relationship with one another, except as virtual rivals for Elena, and Elena eliminates Joaquín from her future by marrying Alvaro, then kills him; Ramón, separated from Paulina enters a relationship with

Marleen, but reverses himself, severing the relationship with Marleen and reuniting with Paulina; Noemí is the cause of Claudio's ending his relationship with Sixto, both of whom have sought a relationship with Noemí, and Noemí eliminates Claudio from her future by leaving him.

The significance is that Lera places a premium upon the relationship between two human beings, and feels that any two persons can understand each other - they can enter into a relationship. When such a relationship is broken it is through lack of understanding of each other, and further misunderstanding can ensue. When the relationship is re-formed (as in Bochorno and Hemos perdido el sol), life goes on; when the relationship is not re-formed, the progression is towards death, departure, or incapacitation (as in Los olvidados, La boda, Trampa, and Pierra para morir). For example, Pepe and Antonio, Luciano and Margarito, and Joaquín and Alvaro have no relationship each with the other in the pair, hence have no understanding of each other, and could only rival one another for Mercedes, Iluminada, and Elena, respectively. Miguel does not understand his relationship with Cristina - or his reasons for entering such a relationship - but re-forms it when he learns what a relationship based on lust (not on understanding) is like. Ramón feels he cannot maintain his relationship with Paulina because of their separation, but re-forms it after he has experienced the relationship with Marleen (which is based on lust). Claudio tries to break the relationship between Sixto and Noemí - he does not understand how much Noemí needs to be loved

by a man - but ultimately only severs himself from them.

The conclusion, then, is that Lera places the highest premium on the relationships between people, including grasping and possessive relationships (Pepe and Mercedes, Claudio and Noemí), platonic and idyllic relationships (Antonio and Mercedes, Miguel and his father), and others. Significantly, a relationship involves two people; where three are involved, the possessive nature of human beings, or whatever, causes a breakdown of the triangle; the relationship may be re-formed between two, to the exclusion of the third, or it will break down utterly.

III

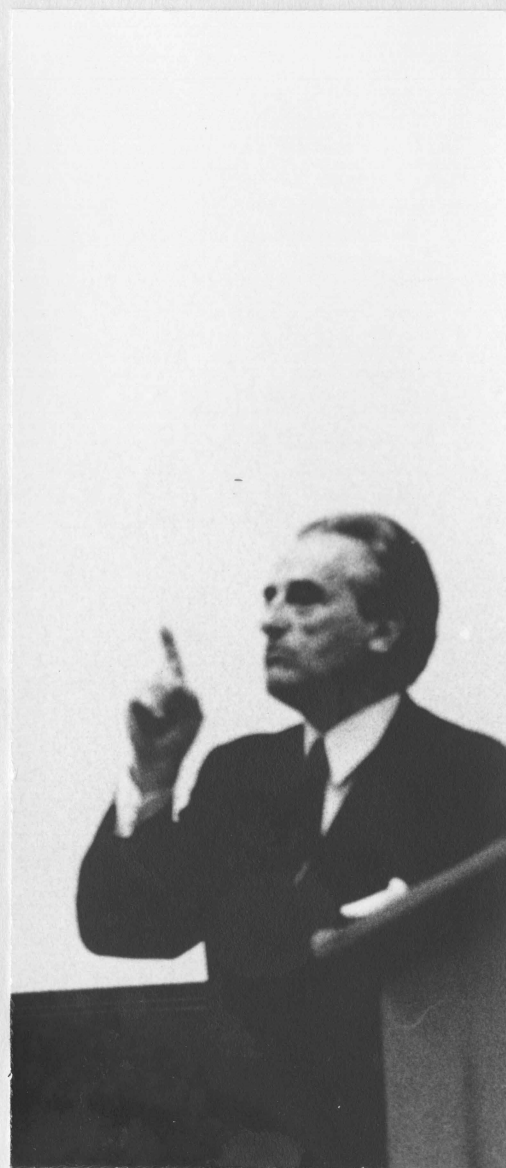
The language of Angel María de Lera often seems poetic as much as prosaic, and references have been made to particular passages which are at least reminiscent of Lorca and Shakespeare. The reader of this paper should pay particular attention to the passages quoted in Spanish (cf. discussions on Los olvidados, Los clarines del miedo, and La boda) to illustrate the strength and imagery of Lera's language.

As Lera matured in the ten years that separate Los olvidados from Tierra para morir he grew away from the chapter divisions strictly paralleling and revealing the stages of character and plot development so evident in, for example, La boda. He also outgrew the lengthy background insertions - always signalled by being in italics - that mark his first three novels, and learned to incorporate necessary background information into the current narrative. Finally, the use of italicized slang words (such as inri in the passage quoted above in the section on La boda) disappears after the earliest novels.

Nevertheless, the strength of the language and images which characterizes Lera's style is evident from the first chapter of Los olvidados through the last chapter of Tierra para morir.



CHARACTERS OF
ANGEL MARIA DE LERA



At the risk of serious oversimplification, four distinct character types, and at least three secondary character types can be found in the novels of Angel M^a. de Lera:

- (1) beautiful young females;
- (2) males central to the plot who die or are left;
- (3) those who "lose" by dying, failing, or leaving;
- (4) winners - those who gain insight.

The secondary types include:

- (1) females who seek security foremost;
- (2) males who are primarily possessive;
- (3) anarchists.

These divisions are drawn on the basis of common characteristics as diagrammed below:

Beautiful young females				
Name	Pregnant	Dies	Fatal*	Rejected
Mercedes	yes	yes	yes	no
Iluminada	no	no	yes	no
Antoñita	no	no	yes	no
Cristina	no	no	yes	no
Elena	yes	no	yes	no
Paulina	no	no	no	yes
Noemí	yes	no	no	no

* Fatal in that she causes the death of at least one man.

The chart reveals that each of the novels has one critical character who is female and beautiful, and, although they vary

considerably within the few characteristics cited, all except Noemí are either rejected by a male, or cause the death of a male.

There is a similar group of male characters:

Central males who die or are left			
Name	Dies*violently	Has a rival	Death** caused by a woman
Pepe	yes	yes	yes
Rafa	yes	no	yes
Luciano	yes	yes	yes
Alvaro	yes	yes	yes
Claudio	no	yes	yes
Sixto	no	yes	no

**or lose their sanity, as in Pepe's case

** or abandonment, as in Claudio's case

This second chart shows that these male characters are alike in more cases than the females: for example, half of the males die or lose their sanity because of violence, have a rivalry with another male over a female, and die or are abandoned because of a female.

Consider now the last two stereotypes:

Those who "lose out" (by dying, failing, or leaving)
Antonio
Emilio
Margarito
Leandro
Joaquín
Marleen
Sixto

Those who "win" (i.e., gain an insight)
don Jesús
"Aceituno"
Fina
Miguel
Ramón
Noemí
Sixto

It is worthy of note perhaps that the characters of the first five books classify rather easily, while those of Hemos perdido el sol and Tierra para morir either are not at all so easily classified, or appear in several of the classifications (Sixto, for example). This suggests a marked growth on the part of Lera: Mercedes, Antonio, and Pepe, for example, are each directed toward one thing: Mercedes seeks security above all else, Antonio is dedicated to but one thing at a time, and Pepe has to possess all that is near him. In contrast, "el Aceituno" appears simple until a crisis reveals his true complexity. In still further contrast, Claudio exhibits all the possessiveness of Pepe, but the complexity of the reasons for his possessiveness, its manifestations and its consequences are evident at all times.

Hemos perdido el sol might also be the beginning of characters who do not destroy themselves so violently. Pepe el Granaíno's holdup attempt, Luciano's final showdown, and Alvaro's murder seem staged, and excessive. In contrast, Marleen witnesses the reunion of Ramón and Paulina, but can only cry; and Noemí leaves Claudio to consume himself with his passion for possessiveness. As the above analyses show, these last two novels end for reasons similar to the other novels - the tragic implications are still there - but their endings are not so melodramatic.

The secondary character types are simply distinct rôles that occur in more than one novel. Mercedes and Elena, for instance, each ties her entire future to a single man, and in each case that future is thwarted. As mentioned immediately above, Pepe and

Claudio share an extreme possessiveness, and that characteristic is what brings about the downfall of both. Third, Antonio, Mario, and Sixto each have some connection with an anarchist group. It is interesting that this theme in Lera is a central one in a later novel, Las últimas banderas.

A recurrent quality in at least one character of each of the seven novels is that of sexual perversion, or sexual immorality: Baltasar tries to seduce Mercedes, his step-daughter; Fina is for hire; Margarito had a womanish name, a child's chest, and sexual substitutes; Merche says she literally "sold" herself to Leandro, and is raped by him; Alvaro is homosexual, and Elena and Joaquín have had an affair; Ramón and his friends each has a mistress; Sixto and Noemí commit adultery, as does Claudio with Obdulia. Indeed, of the three pregnant women (Mercedes, Elena, and Noemí), none of their children would have been legitimate.

There is one other characterization present in many of the novels - it is a general personification of a town, or a river, the land, or a feeling, etc... For instance, the river in Los olvidados is almost human for its attraction for Antonio, representing both rest and death. Fear, in Los clarines del miedo, is virtually a physical being, as Jose María de Quinto has shown. The pueblo of La boda is virtually a body at the center and all around the encounter between Luciano and the Pelocabras. For Elena in Trampa anxiety and fear are more familiar bedfellows than her own husband. And in Tierra para morir the land is something of an agent for death - it is what Claudio has to own, yet it is also

something Santos has to return to so that he can die. Personifications such as these create much of the atmosphere of the novels, and they show a similarity among nature, death, and people that Lera seems to believe in.

In summary, then, Lera has produced four more or less typed characters that perform similar functions in these seven novels, and at least three obvious secondary characters. In addition, there is a theme of sexual perversion and immorality that occurs in at least one character of each novel, and a personification of nature, death, or group of people that shows the similar function Lera ascribes to them. Finally, the characters are more complex and the endings less melodramatic in the last two of the seven novels - indicating a definite maturation on the part of Angel María de Lera.

CONCLUSIONS



I

The ten years that separate Los olvidados and Tierra para morir represent a time of growth for Angel María de Lera.

We have already seen the development of the concept of perirealism, in which elements of weather, of geography, of chapter and plot structure, and of time are combined with particular thematic backgrounds to form a framework within which the characters act and react - perirealistically. The early novels seemed experimental in focusing especially on the structural and environmental elements, while Hemos perdido el sol and Tierra para morir showed marked development in the thematic usages.

The key to this development is a broadening of the thematic environment. Specifically, Lera transfers the action of Hemos perdido el sol from Spain to Germany, dealing very originally with Spanish migrants, treating cultural shock, personal isolation and alienation in a universally meaningful way. In Tierra para morir the locale is a typical Spanish town, but the thematic reference - death - pervades the setting and the characters in such a way that the application seems exemplary rather than just localized, and characters such as Claudio are much more fully developed within the fuller thematic framework.

The redeeming factor at times in Los olvidados and Trampa - which are the most localized of the novels - is the artistry of Lera's language. Where Los olvidados does indeed seem "un relato no desdenable, pero todavía abocetado e inmaduro," the imagery is as explicitly stated and rich there as in all the novels. Indeed,

that is exactly the outstanding quality of Lera's language: he very explicitly presents a precise image (consider the analogy cited above in which sleep after making love is likened to a sheepfold in the middle of the darkness of night).

So where we can trace the maturation of Lera in his characters, in his environmental settings, and in his themes, his language and imagery are outstanding in every novel.

II

But the central problem is still unsolved.

Luciano says in La boda that he is fated to a life in which all things come with difficulty. Yet his constant reflection on his first marriage (which ended in disaster), the fact that he was too ready to face Margarito with his rifle, and his insistence on going through with a marriage that forebodes the disaster which does take place - all these suggest that Luciano is convinced that he is fated for disaster, and hence wills that disaster himself.

Los clarines del miedo shows the closeness of death at every turn in life, and how easily any man can find death at any time. In addition, "el Aceituno" and Fina come together by chance, but know enough to take advantage of their fortune. Similarly, Ramón and Paulina chance to be separated, and it requires most of a year for them to be able to reunite.

Elena marries Alvaro in Trampa without knowing enough about him - she marries him because he is handsome, wealthy, and suitable, exactly the values of her party friends - and tortures herself over his reasons for rejecting her. Alvaro is born a homosexual, but Elena cannot accommodate herself to that fact or to Alvaro, and shoots him. Whether she paves the road towards that murder herself, or she is fated to it, is precisely the question.

In Tierra para morir Claudio wants too much to possess a dying town and the lands, hence in effect neglects and loses the living unit that is his family. But again the question: does he seek his own destruction, or does he but fulfill his destiny?

This question is central to the seven novels discussed above, and for that reason it can be assumed that it is the essential point that Lera is trying to make.

We have seen, by way of triangulation, the three-way relationships that are crucial to the novels, and we have isolated the progression towards tragedy or reunion: a ruptured relationship between two of the three critical figures leads directly towards tragedy involving all three of the characters in four novels (Los olvidados, La boda, Trampa, and Tierra para morir), to a reunion of the separated two with the exclusion of the third in two novels (Bochorno and Hemos perdido el sol), and a union of two based on the insight provided by the tragedy of the third (Los clarines del miedo). In short, personal relationships between two people are given the highest premium, but a third corner to that relationship does not work.

It is significant that an immoral or illegal act, or a profound misunderstanding of one person by another precedes the death (except Rafa's), madness, or abandonment of a character: Mercedes commits adultery and Pepe attempts a hold-up; Luciano arrogantly violates the social code of the pueblo, and Margarito hates him for his virility, money, race, the stories Isabelo has fabricated about Ijuminada, and for his success with Ijuminada; Cristina and Leandro are immoral; Elena and Joaquín have committed adultery; Marleen commits adultery; Luis el Fotogénico has prostituted his nationality and is killed for it, while Gonzalo dies in an accident after murdering Luis; Claudio does not understand that Noemí cannot

be one of his possessions.

The point is that there is retributive justice in every case: no one is punished who does not deserve it under a code of irrevocable laws.

The answer to the central question of fate, then, lies in the three factors of chance, will, and justice. The death of Rafa is the only one without one of the causes listed above - he dies by a quirk of fate, and deserves it in the sense that he pays the price for entering a bullring and defying death. Chance can change any life at any time - consider Ramón and Paulina - but that change must be accommodated (Ramón and Paulina do accommodate, but Pepe cannot accommodate failure, nor could Elena accommodate Alvaro's homosexuality). If accommodation is not made, there is retribution. Luciano does indeed will the confrontation with Margarito, but pays with his life after he shoots Margarito. Claudio also wills his way towards death - his wealth is consumed immediately after he has refused to accommodate Noení's need for love. And so on.

In essence, the quirks of chance must be accommodated, or that lack of accommodation will require atonement. A man can will what he wishes - he is the sum of his achievements and desires - up to a point. When he wills out of a lack of understanding of another human being and tries to reject him or hurt him, he must pay the price. Fate, according to Lera, is not a guiding hand that prohibits a man from changing his own direction; it is what a man wills, and if he wills to change another man's direction by himself, he, like Mario, must pay.

The sin of interrupting a relationship with another human being because of misunderstanding points directly to Lera's feeling that there is an essential dignity that is a man's because he is human. Although Marleen lives extramaritally with Ramón, and although she is punished by her barrenness and by finally losing Ramón, there is no condemnation on the part of Lera. Her "immorality" is understandable in light of the Nazi legacy, and it is her problem; Lera does not commit the very sin he writes about by condemning her.

III

Angel María de Lera is a humanist in the fullest sense. In the Dedication to Hemos perdido el sol he credits his parents with teaching him to love all of humanity. As a novelist he offers his readers ways of performing this pan-human love, and gives them reasons for doing so.

He suggests that life is perirealistic. Indeed, a circle could be drawn around any man delineating the world he knows, the stages of his life, and the span of years he has to live, and within that circle he may will any direction he wishes. He may even will to transgress that circle, but he will face retribution for it.

The relationship that can be formed with another person is the finest thing a man can have, and that relationship makes possible increasingly greater understanding of each other. To violate such a relationship, however, is to negate that understanding and to impose one will upon another: it requires atonement, whether reunion or death.

A man must know that death is omnipresent and must cherish the apparently chance acquaintances that occur. In any event, there can be no condemnation of another man, because that demonstrates an actual lack of understanding and presupposes one man's ability to judge another. Essentially, every man is entitled to the dignity that is his innately, for he is also mortal.

Angel María de Lera has substantiated these views with great artistry in these seven novels.

Footnotes

- 1 Angel María de Lera, Los olvidados (Madrid: Aguilar, 1966).
- 2 Eugenio de Nora, La Novela española contemporanea, (Madrid:
Editorial Gredos, 1958) p. 224.
- 3 Federico García Lorca, Impresiones y paisajes, (Dell: New York, 1965).
- 4 Lera, Los clarines del miedo (Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 1967).
- 5 José Mariá de Quinto, Cuentos Hispanoame^{ricanos}, (May, 1958), p. 188.
- 6 Miguel Fernández Almagro, ABC (Jan. 20, 1958) p. 64.
- 7 Eugenio G. de Nora, La novela española contemporanea (Madrid:
Editorial Gredos, 1962) Vol. 2, p . 224.
- 8 Lera, La boda, (Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 1959).
- 9 Lera, Bochorno, (Madrid: Aguilar, 1960).
- 10 Lera, Trampa (Madrid: Aguilar, 1964).
- 11 Lera, Hemos perdido el sol (Madrid: Aguilar, 1966).
- 12 Lera, Tierra para morir, y las cien casas cerradas no se abriran
ya nunca (Madrid: Aguilar, 1965).
- 13 George Kennedy, The Art of Persuasion in Greece (Princeton:
1963) p. 236.