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BELL, KEITH RICHARD

THE NOVELS OF SALVADOR GARMENDIA: A CRITICAL STUDY

The University of Oklahoma PH.D. 1980

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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE NOVELS OF SALVADOR GARMENDIA: A CRITICAL STUDY

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

KEITH R. BELL

Norman, Oklahoma

1980

THE NOVELS OF SALVADOR GARMENDIA:

A CRITICAL STUDY

APPROVED BY

Lowell Dunham

Jimi P. Artman

Seymour Feiler

James H. Abbott

James D. Fife

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

THE NOVELS OF SALVADOR GARMENDIA:

A CRITICAL STUDY

BY: KEITH R. BELL

MAJOR PROFESSOR: LOWELL DUNHAM, Ph.D.

This study is divided into four main parts in which the five novels of Venezuelan Salvador Garmendia are analyzed on the bases of theme, characterization, structure and style. The novels are Los pequeños seres (1959), Los habitantes (1961), Día de ceniza (1963), La mala vida (1968) and Los pies de barro (1973).

As a leader of the Sardio group after the fall of the Marcos Pérez Jiménez dictatorship in 1958, Garmendia seeks to create a novel which parallels more adequately Venezuela's entrance into the mainstream of modern life. His influence helps to redefine the Venezuelan narrative by rejecting popular regional and socio-political themes, idealized type characters, primitive structural devices and rhetorical eloquence, la escritura bella.

The novels of Salvador Garmendia are thematically homogeneous. Although they take place in different barrios of Caracas, they are similar in their portrayal of the anguish of modern city life. Garmendia recreates the traditional Venezuelan protagonist into an alienated and frustrated antihero. This character demonstrates both individual and universal qualities to the most intimate

details. Garmendia's unmasking of his ironic heroes reveals the emptiness, lack of direction or meaning in life and the mediocrity of modern man's existence.

The structure of Garmendia's novels is an original adaptation of contemporary European and American techniques involving the assumption of reader complicity, simultaneity, interior monologue and cinematics. His style is typified by terseness, an unembellished prose, grotesque imagery and a consistently strong appeal to the senses.

Salvador Garmendia's authentic, original and sustained novelistic production has earned him the recognition of critics in bringing the Venezuelan narrative firmly into the mainstream of contemporary literature.

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I am indebted also to Sr. Salvador Garmendia for his kind correspondence with me, to Dr. Pedro Grases for helping me to contact Sr. Garmendia and to Dr. Gonzalo Palacios for his assistance in obtaining bibliographical materials. Mrs. Carolyn Quintero of Caracas' Palacio de las Academias provided invaluable aid in research as well.

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THE NOVELS OF SALVADOR GARMENDIA: A CRITICAL STUDY

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When Salvador Garmendia began writing his first novel in 1958, he initiated both a personal literary career and a new era in Venezuelan literature. Since the publication of Los pequeños seres a year later and subsequent works including both short story and novel, Garmendia has earned international acclaim. Most critics recognize him today as the chief representative of the new narrative in Venezuela.

The new direction which he represents is clearly not an instantaneous change. It is the product of influences both historical and contemporary which culminate in the mid-fifties. The year 1958 is a significant date for observers of Venezuelan life. The fall of the Marcos Pérez Jiménez dictatorship signals in a symbolic way the turning from a tired pattern in that country's existence to an enthusiastic

campaign to bring Venezuela firmly into the mainstream of the twentieth century.[1]

In retrospect, historians and critics interpret this period as the end of despotism, poverty and cultural deprivation. It is a confirmation of the waning of agriculture's position in economic life; it is the ultimate rejection of regionalism and a provincial mentality. Venezuelan life now centers in the large urban areas and especially in the capital city of Caracas. Political democracy offers the literary world a new air of creative freedom, and the intellectual community vigorously joins in the recognition of international literary trends. The enormous economic wealth due to oil discoveries and rapid increases in production make the prospects for a cultural renaissance seem very promising.

It is into this framework that the group called Sardio comes in the beginning of the second half-century. The new life beginning to ferment as Pérez Jiménez' power weakens has need of a group such as this to express adequately its hopes for a new Venezuela. Some of the outstanding personalities who join Salvador Garmendia are Adriano González León, Guillermo Sucre, Luis García Morales, Elisa Lerner, Rodolfo Izaguirre, Rómulo Aranguibel, Ramón Palomares, Gonzalo Castellanos and Manuel Quintana Castillo. They produce a journal in which their doctrines and creative works are shared. "Sardio aspiró a representar la nueva

sensibilidad y a orientar a las promociones intelectuales recientes. Sus secciones editoriales tituladas Testimonios, enunciaban ideas, formulaban críticas, proponían valoraciones, definían el compromiso."[2]

The new generation of writers calls for a rejection of traditional themes and approaches to literature which dominate Venezuelan letters from Modernism to the contemporary Arturo Uslar Pietri. They realize their debt to the past, for, as Ernesto Sábato has said,

> Nada es totalmente novedoso. . . . Lo habitual es que un gran creador sea el resultado de todo lo que le precede, entrando a saco en las obras de arte de sus antecesores y realizando finalmente esa síntesis que caracterizará al nuevo prócer. . . .[3]

Sardio represents a desire for Venezuela's literary renewal and coming of age after a long struggle.

The roots of a modern Venezuelan novel begin in Modernism in the works of Manuel Díaz Rodríguez (1868-1927) and continue in Rufino Blanco Fombona (1874-1944). D. F. Ratcliff sees the latter's writing as a first step toward universality and in his El hombre de hierro an "unconventional, yet profound, philosophy . . . born of a lively sense of reality."[4] While this sense of reality is important to Garmendia and the Sardio group, Blanco Fombona's novels, as Mariano Picón-Salas notes, suffer a confusion with "el reportaje político; la ilusión satírica, el constante recargo de las tintas para vengarse de los personajes odiados, disminuye y ofusca en estos libros, su

verdad artística."[5]

Most discussions of the modern novel in Venezuela begin with the contributions of José Rafael Pocaterra (1868-1927). He reacts violently against the aesthetics of Modernism and holds literary art in contempt.[6] Juan Liscano traces his historical importance to the new novel in terms of language.

> Sea éste el momento de precisar el rasgo fundamental en que se apoyó el concepto de actualidad para este panorama: el del lenguaje, el de la ruptura con la escritura modernista, y la iniciación de una nueva escritura, más despojada y directa, más adecuada al propósito de descubrimiento y penetración en nuestra realidad.[7]

Ratcliff notes Pocaterra's early use of monologue in the third person of indirect discourse as a technique of the stream-of-consciousness novel, so fundamental to later twentieth-century approaches.[8]

The significance of interior reality in the contemporary novel is presaged in the works of Teresa de la Parra (1890-1936). Angel Mancera Galletti describes her novel Ifigenia as an intimate diary. Written entirely in the first-person, it is conversational in tone. Its link to the modern novel is its lack of préciosité, its universal themes and its careful attention to the things which surround her.[9] She is also a precursor of a contemporary view greatly emphasizing the role of the yo and subjective reality.

These early attempts at writing a significant novel are generally considered to be weak. Luis Harss points out that as late as 1920 "we can still not speak of a Latin-

American novel."[10] The next two decades produce a wide variety of novelistic styles which are classified generally as the traditional novel. It is against the contributions of this literary production that Garmendia's new novel takes on such revolutionary qualities. The high regard in which the former are held for so many years makes his rebellion that much more difficult and determined.

Rómulo Gallegos (1884-1969) represents the greatest achievement of the traditional school. His most successful works, Doña Bárbara, Cantaclaro and Canaima

> le hacen el venezolano de la obra más ponderada del presente siglo y que rescata del pasado el silencio para lo artístico de nuestro ambiente intelectual y lo eleva y lo ennoblece en una manifestación extraordinaria de avanzada cultura.[11]

They depict themes of a "regreso al campo y del repudio a la guerra y a la ciudad disociadora."[12] Ratcliff describes Gallegos' work as having "convincing characters, logical, rapid action and pictures of rare beauty."[13] He treats local customs, gives lyrical descriptions of observable reality and utilizes limited simile and metaphor. Characters are archetypical, and structural development is lineal and uncomplicated. Gallegos earned international recognition for his Venezuelan novel.

Gallegos' influence persists into a transitional period as represented by the novels of Uslar Pietri whose works cover three decades.

> Arturo Uslar Pietri se revela en 1931 como uno de su generación, al entregarnos su novela Las lanzas colo-

> radas. El estilo en esta obra señalaba matices distintos a los de la prosa galleguiana. Se imponía en la obra de Uslar, una prosa fuerte y cortada de vanguardia.[14]

Although by no means an imitation of Gallegos' novelistic technique, Uslar Pietri's novels contrast as well with the new novel of Garmendia. In a study of this disparity, Manuel Caballero compares his Estación de Máscaras with Garmendia's Los habitantes.

Uslar Pietri continues to write what Jean-Paul Sartre calls a bourgeois novel.[15] It parallels the format of nineteenth-century works whose conflict, scenario and characters are all well-ordered by an ever-present, all-knowing author.

> Los personajes no se rebelan, obedecen ciegamente a la pluma que los ha creado y que, con el mismo poder, puede borrarlos de la faz de la tierra, enviarlos al extranjero, enaltecerlos y humillarlos. A cada paso, estará presente Uslar Pietri para explicarnos qué íntimos pensamientos sacuden a sus fantoches, qué hermosa y culta teoría se debe tejer alrededor de esta o aquella actitud de alguno de ellos.[16]

Caballero sees the contemporary differences between Uslar Pietri and Garmendia as an indication that "two nations" coexist in Venezuela where only recently a new approach appears to be gaining in favor.

The critic Mariano Picón-Salas observes this trend beginning in the early 1940's. In Kathleen Chase's article, "Venezuelan Writing Today," he states, "Our novelists are now seeking reality, no matter how ugly, and they are becoming more and more preoccupied with this country and its

recent past. Their novels are deeply psychological and universal."[17]

Writers such as Antonio Arráiz (1903), Ramón Díaz Sánchez (1903), Miguel Otero Silva (1908), Julián Padrón (1910-56), Guillermo Meneses (1911), Antonia Palacios (1908) and, more recently, Adriano González León (1931) contribute to the reorientation of the Venezuelan novel as it culminates in the leadership of Salvador Garmendia. "Corresponderá a estos escritores nacidos más o menos en una misma década, recoger la herencia galleguiana y tender puentes hacia posibles renovaciones de la narrativa."[18] Their themes include political repression, the absurd, rural and city life, psychological and historical emphases, progress versus the reactionary and racial/sociological dilemmas. The role of sex achieves growing importance in a literature heretofore curbed by public modesty. Some works are labeled obscene because of their failure to adhere to current standards of social acceptability. A corresponding change in characterization produces protagonists resembling the antihero. Meneses especially assumes "una posición insólita de pintar la cruda realidad sexual, de ahondar en las caídas, de no interesarse por los héroes sino por pequeños seres fracasados, solitarios, corrompidos o frustrados."[19] There is limited technical experimentation during these years, but there is a subtle progression from the traditional novel toward radical structural and stylistic

changes. Plots become less rigidly constructed. The influence of North American, Latin American and European writers slowly begins to capture the admiration of younger Venezuelans.

These developments in the narrative seem to crystalize through the formation of the Sardio group. In the fifties it helps to bring together the divergent forces weakened by a decade of dictatorial repression. In one of their Testimonios the members seem to turn their backs on all that comes before them.

> Es imperioso elevar a perspectivas más universales los alucinantes temas, de nuestra tierra. La anécdota, el paisajismo, la visión pintoresca de la realidad, no son más que fraudes a los requerimientos de la época. Debemos alimentar una firme voluntad de estilo, una vigilante dedicación al estudio y una ideología más original y moderna. Nuestra cultura aparece ayuna de ideas y problemas como si aún viviéramos en una Arcadia de imperturbable regocijo. Hay que poner de relieve una conciencia más dramática de la realidad y del hombre.[20]

The techniques of the new narrative in Latin America fit both the thematic preoccupations of contemporary writers and their desire to bring Venezuela into the realm of contemporary approaches to writing.

> Intentan acendrar el estilo existente mediante la creación de un lenguaje literario nuevo, remozado en lo espiritual y en lo ideológico; proyectan sus escritores en busca de un auditorio joven y contemporáneo en inquietudes e ideas doquiera en el país estén.[21]

Their models are Kafka, Faulkner, Woolf, Proust, Sartre, Camus, Borges, Asturias, Carpentier and the "novelistas 'objetivos' del nouveau roman."[22] New themes, new protag-

onists and the appropriate backdrops relate well to cinematics, flashbacks, slow-ups, interior monologues, dream sequences and all the related devices common to the new narrative.[23]

For the younger generation in the latter fifties, Salvador Garmendia represents a revolutionary response and the beginning of a definitive renovation of the Venezuelan narrative. The novel Los pequeños seres is the first of five novels written over a fourteen-year period which, though they appear boldly experimental at first, reflect contemporary Venezuela in a manner not yet surpassed.

Garmendia was born on 11 June 1928 in Barquisimeto, State of Lara, Venezuela. Since the founding of the Sardio group and the publishing of a review of the same name which he founded and edited, he has been a contributor to principal literary journals of Venezuela. In the early sixties, he participated in the "Techo de la Ballena" movement composed primarily of poets and novelists who were seeking revolutionary literary experimentation.[24] He has been secretary of the magazine Actual of the University of the Andes where he also served as director of the Department of Publications.

In 1959 he won the Premio Municipal for his first novel Los pequeños seres. He has since published Los habitantes (1961), Día de ceniza (1963), La mala vida (1968) and Los pies de barro (1973) for which he was awarded the

Premio Nacional de Literatura in that same year.

His immediate success as a novelist is due, in part, to what Liscano judges not "una ruptura con el pasado, sino un desarrollo experimental de nuevos procedimientos con una temática que, en más de un caso, llevará a su culminación y agotamiento tendencias tradicionales venezolanas."[25] Garmendia's strong commitment to realism, though always centered on the crude and sordid, is part of a Venezuelan tradition of a general dissatisfaction with "la pura fabulación, el realismo fantástico, la experimentación surrealista."[26]

Although varied in setting and plot, the novels of Garmendia display considerable homogeneity. His themes of alienation and frustration speak loudly to modern man in general and in particular to Venezuelans dominated by vast metroplexes. His protagonists are the hollow, faceless men of modern urban areas. Their wretched, nearly psychotic, drama is played on a stage of confusion and chaos. Appeal to the senses is intense, capturing the sights, sounds, smells and sensual experiences so much a part of the milieu. The writer utilizes a variety of narrative techniques to depict forcefully the modern human condition in which the imagination, memory and internal time acquire a new importance.

Recent articles by leading literary critics such as Angel Rama, John S. Brushwood and Emir Rodríguez Monegal

place Garmendia in the top rank of contemporary Latin-American and Venezuelan novelists. His works exemplify an amalgamation of past influences and current interpretive trends. He reflects the harsh realities of human experience utilizing the modes of expression and structure which are identified with the so-called narrative boom in Latin America.

A more detailed analysis of theme, character, structure and style in his novels enable the serious reader to appreciate more fully the reputation he has earned "a la cabeza de la narrative moderna de su país . . . por su autenticidad y la originalidad de su investigación literaria dentro de la prosa latinoamericana."[27]

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

[1]Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1914), a professional soldier, began his political career in 1944 and eventually assumed the presidency after a military coup in 1948 which ousted President Rómulo Gallegos. His regime, marked by extravagance and repression, lasted from 1950 to 1958.

[2]Juan Liscano, Panorama de la literatura venezolana actual (Caracas: Publicaciones Españolas, S.A., 1973), p. 122.

[3]El escritor y sus fantasmas (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 1964), pp. 224-25.

[4]Venezuelan Prose Fiction (New York: Instituto de las Españas, 1933), p. 171.

[5]Formación y proceso de la literatura venezolana (Caracas: Editorial Cecilio Acosta, 1940), p. 202.

[6]Ratcliff, p. 135.

[7]Liscano, p. 36; hereafter cited as Panorama.

[8]Ratcliff, p. 137.

[9]Angel Mancera Galletti, Quienes narran y cuentan en Venezuela (Caracas: Ediciones Caribe, 1958), p. 310.

[10]Luis Harss and Barbara Dohmann, Into the Mainstream (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1967), p. 6.

[11]Mancera Galletti, p. 5.

[12]Juan Liscano, "La literatura venezolana," Cuadernos del Congreso por la libertad de la cultura, No. 66 (1962), p. 32.

[13]Ratcliff, p. 262.

[14]Aurora M. Ocampo de Gómez, ed., La crítica de la novela iberoamericana contemporánea (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma, 1973), p. 97.

[15]Qu'est-ce que la littérature? (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), ch. 3.

[16]Manuel Caballero, "Uslar Pietri, Garmendia: 'Two Nations,'" Cultura universitaria, XC (enero-marzo, 1966), pp. 28-29.

[17]Américas (November, 1958), p. 39.

[18]Liscano, Panorama, p. 69.

[19]Liscano, Panorama, p. 91.

[20]Liscano, Panorama, p. 123.

[21]Lubio Cardozo, "Memorias de Altagracia, un cambio en la narrativa de Salvador Garmendia," Cuadernos hispano-americanos, 289-90 (julio-agosto, 1974), p. 443.

[22]Cardozo, p. 443.

[23]Kessel Schwartz, A New History of Spanish American Fiction, Volume II (Coral Gables: The University of Miami Press, 1971), p. 96.

[24]Liscano, Panorama, p. 126.

[25]Liscano, Panorama, p. 127.

[26]Liscano, Panorama, p. 127.

[27]Angel Rama, "Salvador Garmendia: Culminación de una narrativa," La Palabra y El Hombre, Nueva Epoca, 10 (abril-junio de 1974), p. 17.

CHAPTER II

THE ANGUISH OF URBAN LIFE

Sardio's insistence upon universal themes and the end of a so-called Arcadian vision of Venezuelan reality finds emphatic affirmation in the novels of Salvador Garmendia. This rejection of themes more typical of the nineteenth century corresponds also to a geographic change from the predominance of the interior countryside to the habitat of modern man, the city. The story of contemporary Venezuela is indeed that of the city and more specifically the capital city. For Garmendia, the fabled idyllic simplicity of the past is irretrievably lost to the anguish of urban life.

The city provides a fitting backdrop for the novels of Garmendia for at least two reasons. First, it is symbolic of the enormous and sudden changes in modern man's perspective of life and his place in it. Second, it is clearly an important factor in Garmendia's own life experience.

Venezuelan philosopher Pedro Duno sees the massive migration to the capital and the resultant chaos in the midst of phenomenal growth and wealth as significant factors in the contemporary dilemma portrayed by writers such as Garmendia.

> De hecho, es posible apreciar algunos datos elocuentes: la desintegración del campo y la ciudad, la supervivencia de diferentes épocas, la total ruptura entre los intelectuales y los demás sectores de la vida nacional, la carencia de una evolución sistemática, la quiebra de toda tradición activa y en proceso, la discontinuidad generacional aniquilante del pasado, la anarquía de valores, el anacronismo o la exaltada pasión por estar al día, el tener que plantearnos como problema nuestra relación con la nacionalidad, el no saber--en suma--en qué consiste o debe consistir nuestra manera de ser.[1]

This is much of what Garmendia seeks to depict. His constant theme is man's alienation, frustration and failure to achieve a meaningful life. Furthermore, life offers no clear resolution to this crisis, only "un padecimiento generalizado que los atormenta y destruye."[2]

Garmendia feels personally the abrupt changes in Venezuelan life. For him, they reflect the end of an era as well as the sense of loss of human beings who attempt to confront this new reality. In a conversation with Emir Rodríguez Monegal, he tells of the importance of these years in his personal development.

> En el término de diez años la transformación fue absoluta, apareció una nueva ciudad antes que se apagara el estruendo de los compresores y cayeran las últimas viejas paredes. Eso es algo que tenía que afectar a los escritores y en vez de estar en la capital escribiendo sobre el campo que no conocían, era tiempo de que se sentaran a escribir sobre la ciudad que tenían

> enfrente. Personalmente tuve oportunidad de apreciar ese paso violento de una ciudad bastante apacible y estrecha a otra congestionada, convulsa y mecanizada, y los productos humanos que originó esa transformación son sumamente visibles. Yo viví, trabajé y viví intensamente en la ciudad en toda esa época y ello me afectó profundamente.[3]

As Garmendia implies, Venezuelan literature prior to this convulsive period is dominated by a fascination with the drama of man against nature in the vast stretches of mountain, river, plain and jungle. The rapid growth of the oil industry and World War II catapult Venezuelan culture into modern international affairs. The resultant gradual shifts in literary expression constitute "una ruptura con la tradición."[4] Mario Vargas Llosa labels this development an end to the primitive novel and the reaching of maturity. "Man's problems, his nightmares, and his ambitions are the essential themes of this fiction, rather than the pampas, the plateaus, or the cane fields, as was the case in the primitive novel."[5]

For the younger generation of writers, the problems facing man in the countryside or in quiet colonial cities do not adequately reflect their understanding of life. Fernando Alegría describes this fact:

> Si leemos hoy esas novelas, con su colorismo recargado y sus abusos dialectales y, al mismo tiempo, recorremos la América Hispana en toda su extensión, advertimos que algo en ellas ha quedado definitivamente fuera de foco: un nuevo mundo ha crecido velozmente transformando campos y ciudades; el complejo de factores culturales, sociales y económicos ha creado una forma de vivir que no es la descrita por esos novelistas del pasado; hay un lenguaje que nos es común a todos y que, en vez de

> ahondar las diferencias locales, tiende a ponernos en comunicación más estrecha con los pueblos del mundo contemporáneo.[6]

Man's creation begins to replace God's creation. The city becomes the stage for brutal clashes between social and economic forces. Anonymous lives drift toward an existential nothingness with no sense of permanency, no epicenter of values. "The essential theme of this literature is not man against nature, nor indeed man against man, but rather man against civilization or man against himself."[7] Man makes his own hell in the midst of apparent prosperity and relentless progress.

> Nuestra gran ciudad busca angustiosamente su expresión . . . en el derrumbe del edificio colonial y en el rascacielo que lo suplanta, en la calle que se ensancha, en las grúas y tractores que socavan implacablemente las entrañas del pasado criollo.[8]

The jungle now comes to the city.

Venezuelan city life as a narrative setting is not, of course, an invention of Sardio or Garmendia. It appears first in Miguel Eduardo Pardo's Todo un pueblo, in Manuel Díaz Rodríguez, in Rufino Blanco Fombona, in Teresa de la Parra and more recently in José Rafael Pocaterra.[9] While for the older novelists the city is no more than "a remote presence, arbitrary and mysterious," for Pardo, Blanco Fombona and Pocaterra the city is only the quiet, South American town of red tile roofs and not the bustling metropolis of the fifties and sixties.[10] The new novelists, and Garmendia in particular, see the modern city as an important

aspect of the contemporary human predicament. Jean Franco interprets the new writers' affinity for the city setting as underlying "the modern Latin American's anxiety to share the dilemma of all contemporary human beings . . ."[11]

William Barrett, in his study of modern man's condition, Irrational Man, summarizes these characteristics as

> . . . alienation and estrangement; a sense of the basic fragility and contingency of human life; the impotence of reason confronted with the depths of existence; the threat of Nothingness, and the solitary and unsheltered condition of the individual before this threat.[12]

He mentions the decline of religion and an organized church hierarchy as a cause of man's loss of "the concrete connection with a transcendent realm of being" setting him free to face a hostile, impersonal environment.[13]

Vargas Llosa traces the vigor of the Spanish American novel in the mid-twentieth century to this same crisis. He claims that

> . . . the most propitious moment for the development of prose fiction is when reality ceases to have precise meaning for a historic community because the society's religious, moral, or political values, which once provided the foundation for social life and the master key for perceiving reality, have entered upon a period of crisis and no longer enjoy the faithful support of collectivity.[14]

With the precipitous entrance of Latin America into the world community comes a new interpretation of existence. With the weakening of external social and religious systems and a revolutionary awareness of the self comes the attempt

to rediscover mankind stripped of all facade and pretense.

Ernesto Sábato describes this attempt in literature as "un descenso al misterio primordial de la condición humana; y, dadas las características de esa condición, un descenso a su propio infierno."[15] Garmendia and his contemporaries take up where Modernism leaves off by dealing with a literature of anguish and doubt, "una honda preocupación metafísica de carácter agónico que responde a la confusión ideológica de la época."[16] Their unresolved questions are: Why am I here? What is Life? Where am I going? They propose to try to find answers by delving into the innermost recesses of human experience, "develar el hombre verdadero debajo de las ficciones y convenciones, metiéndose con bravura, con fidelidad, en las entrañas del hombre para redescubrirlo."[17]

Garmendia's novels consistently picture man in his contemporary crisis and utilize the setting of a "demented Caracas."[18] By refusing to deal with themes no longer meaningful to readers in an age of more universal concerns and by rejecting the characteristics of predominately rural works, he establishes firmly a new direction for the Venezuelan narrative. Rodríguez Monegal judges the importance of Garmendia within this thematic framework:

> . . . la incorporación de un ambiente ciudadano (la Caracas explosivamente creada por sí misma en los últimos quince años) y de unos seres enajenados por esa ciudad, a un género que todavía tardaba en salir de la

> habitual dicotomía retórica: campo-ciudad, telurismo criollista versus cosmopolitismo urbano.[19]

Although Garmendia's immediate predecessors make certain thematic advances, his novels mark a definitive break with the traditional novel.

> Cuando la novela Los pequeños seres de Salvador Garmendia irrumpe en la narrativa venezolana, en 1959, hay una suerte de tardía orquestación paisajística en el país que cuenta tragedias de peones y que se regodea y se prodiga en elogios a la flora con un pintoresquismo anacrónico y sin ninguna fuerza estética.[20]

While Guillermo Meneses adopts some modern narrative approaches in "el estilo cargado de una poemática atmósfera, el profundo drama psicológico, con sugerencia de magia y de misterio," none makes such a dramatic departure as Garmendia.[21] Uslar Pietri actually continues the traditional novel with the publication of his Estación de Máscaras in 1964.

Garmendia is the first novelist in Venezuelan literature to write solely of the alienation of urban man. Lovera de Sola discounts this specialization of theme as a weakness and instead calls it "precisamente el centro de interés, el tema focal."[22] Furthermore, Garmendia's focus is on the routine, mundane aspects of modern life and is devoid of current issues or eloquent drama. "De Garmendia me parece en primer lugar destacable el haber instalado la narración en la cotidianeidad y en el individuo, cuando--antes y después--sus compañeros de creación estaban dedicados a lo sociopolítico y a los temas."[23] He not only

insists on the appropriateness of portraying modern man in the confines of a cosmopolis, but he also sees the crises as fundamentally intrapersonal.

Los pequeños seres is the story of such a crisis in the life of the protagonist, Mateo Martán. After serving his company for fifteen years and receiving the promotions due him, he now anticipates being placed in a high position of responsibility. When his superior dies making the matter a certainty, Mateo faces for the first time his routine and empty life. Instead of representing the triumph of his career, the prospect of this new position signals the approaching end of his own life. His mind now races out of control as he wanders aimlessly through the city in an effort to reconstruct the events of his past life. The anguish which he suffers climaxes in his inability to face either external realities or internal psychological collapse.

The novel is a recounting of "su atroz monólogo, su desesperado viaje."[24] It opens as Mateo finishes dressing, "luchando todavía por acabar el nudo de la corbata."[25] His struggle is only beginning, however, and he moves nearer to defeat as the events of the day move on. He feels the need to be alone, to think. The death of his superior is incredible to him. He recalls recent meetings with him and contemplates the suddenness of the unexpected death.

The grey, solitary sky seems to echo the emotional darkness of the hour as he drives to the funeral. Alone at

last, he has the opportunity to think. His mind wanders from business affairs to his son Antonio, to his childhood days and to his wife, Amelia. In the confusion of conversations after his arrival, his anxiety to think out these events seems to heighten.

> Su necesidad de pensar seguía siendo apremiante: reconstruir mentalmente grandes trozos de vida, tiempos enteros donde se sucedieran acontecimientos notables, dignos de contar. . . . Pero los hechos, las situaciones que lograba aislar en un momento, no se avenían a su propósito y, en cambio regresaban continuamente hacia ellos mismos como atraídos por una cuerda elástica (p. 34).

Memories of the office only picture his comrades seated at their individual desks, routinely completing eight-hour work days. In a vivid symbol of his meaningless and predictable promotions through the ranks of the company, he sees himself "pendiente de la cuerda, desflecado en el aire, tratando penosamente de impulsarse" (p. 42).

At the cemetery, Mateo's disorientation takes outward form. As he wanders among the tombstones, his thoughts turn to his father's death and the vivid experiences surrounding that event. It represents for him a period of stability and childlike simple reality: "en un lugar oculto entre raíces, estaba la tierra pantanosa, negra, el barro tibio donde los dedos penetraban provocando un ruido de ventosas" (p. 50). Finally, at dusk, he stumbles out of the cemetery into the city.

The two sections which follow depict Mateo's growing

distress. As he walks from one bar to another, the effects of alcohol intensify the feeling of confusion and chaos. He relives the time when his father and his uncle found him talking to himself. This relates to recent incidents at work which have led to suggestions that he visit a psychiatrist. His mind jumps from past conversations to imagined scenes of normal life at home. While walking in a state of bewilderment through the brightly lighted streets, he comes upon a shocking figure. He suddenly realizes that it is his own image in a large mirror: "Qué aislado y solitario parezco, detenido de improviso en medio de esta acera. Soy la única figura en relieve sobre una pantalla ilusoria" (p. 71).

When he comes to a bench in a relatively deserted plaza, he feels a strange sensation of well-being. For him, the bench is a welcome kind of solidarity. "Un pequeño mundo invariable, fijo en medio de la noche. Un límite estable que no se prolongaba más allá de sus bordes y donde era posible reposar al fin sin zozobras" (p. 74). In his delirium, Mateo attends his own funeral service. Even in death, the obsession to clarify his situation continues. Finally he admits, "todo lo ocurrido hasta ahora a través de mi vida, no pasa de ser una yuxtaposición de contingencias absurdas de las que nunca podré extraer un total convincente y esclarecedor" (p. 82).

Now completely drunk and perhaps attracted by the

noise and lights, he enters a circus. It is ironic that the action moves to this particular setting. The circus is representative of a fantasized reality, of magic and masks, of death-defying and superhuman feats. Mateo stands in horror, however, as a trapeze artist slips and falls to her death at his side. Even the illusions of a circus fall victim to the reality of death. This is an evil omen in terms of his own crisis. The scene ends in the panic of the excited crowd of spectators.

> Corrió Mateo bordeando la carpa hacia la reja de madera que daba a la calle, hasta que tropezó con una cuerda tensa fijada en el suelo y cayó hacia adelante, golpeándose en la cara. Allí permaneció sin moverse, la mejilla pegada a la tierra, tratando de olvidarlo todo (pp. 97-98).

The next day he awakens in the bedroom of a brothel. He remembers nothing except the death scene at the circus. He imagines his wandering through unknown streets following the confusion at the scene and then begins to look for a place in which to gather his thoughts. He remembers his duties at the office and his wife who, no doubt, is searching for him, but he is strangely unable to return to the normal routine of his daily schedule. He spends some time in a train station which brings back memories of his childhood. The reader is aware of Garmendia's ability to "captar la angustia, la melancolía y la 'barbarie' del hombre perdido en los laberintos de las inmensas y heterogéneas urbes."[26]

He becomes so totally abstracted from reality at

this point that he moves more as a phantom observer. He spies on his own home, watching its activities from a distance. He hides in a pharmacy to avoid being seen by his son. His thoughts drift not to the needs or preoccupations of his family but to his own experiences as a child in his father's barbershop. The narrative then breaks into an extended paragraph vividly capturing the madness which slowly grips Mateo in "una especie de voluntario y atormentado exilio."[27]

In the final scene, Mateo lies helpless at the base of a tree. He is unable to find an explanation or a reason for his existence. His middle-class success is a hollow reward for years of meaningless tedium. The past is, as is this single day of his existence, merely the accumulation of incoherent fragments. He is alone in "la crisis implacable de la nada."[28]

Garmendia's second novel, Los habitantes, published in 1961, is another view of failure and isolation. The story revolves around the closed existence of the López family in a working-class barrio of Caracas. The father, Francisco, is unemployed and continually suffers from not being able to support his family. While his wife, Engracia, tries to hold the unit together, her children, Aurelia, Matilde and Luis, reflect the realities of their adolescent world: sex, guilt, alcohol, night-life and peer pressure. They are all trapped in lives of hopeless frustration "donde

llega a confundirse la miseria aplastante de los cerros de Caracas con la angustiosa medianía de una desdibujada clase social."[29]

A relaxed day of fiesta begins slowly as the various members of the family awaken. Aurelia debates the urgency of getting out of bed on a holiday, Luis reviews in his mind his responsibilities toward Matilde and her friend, Raúl. "El no toma las cosas en serio y mucho menos es capaz de echarle una broma a tu hermana. Lo que debes hacer es hablar con tu hermana y prohibirle que se vea con él y, sobre todo, que no vaya a su casa."[30] Francisco takes a shower and leaves the house pondering his desperate condition: "Sin un trabajo fijo no se puede vivir" (p. 21).

As Aurelia dresses, she remembers happier days when her father brought them gifts from his travels as a truck driver. From the bathroom, she can spy on Raúl as he takes his shower. Matilde becomes impatient as Aurelia lingers in the bathroom, but she encounters Luis who threatens to expose her recent rendezvous with Raúl. "Lo de Raúl, sinvergüenza; ¡lo de Raúl, nada menos! ¿No vas a saber? Se meten en la casa solos" (p. 34). In the meantime, Francisco returns from the market where he has met Modesto Infante, an old friend. Luis gives up his plans for the present to denounce Matilde to his father and abruptly leaves the house.

Action then moves next door to Raúl's sister, Irene,

who is, according to Aurelia, "una mujer de mala fama que sirve de blanco a todos los comentarios de la cuadra" (p. 32). While she sits in front of her bedroom mirror, she reviews the previous evening with her friend, María, and their dates. Her ailing father, whose illness inspires only irritation and disgust, lies helpless in another bedroom.

Francisco's constant worry is the financial stability of the family. He fears they will lose their house and finds comfort in knowing creditors will not bother them today since it is a holiday. This contrasts with Luis' life of leisure and frivolous adventure. Francisco's desperate "¿Qué vamos a hacer?" echoes ironically in Luis' and his friends' tireless search for new experiences, in the ritual of male rivalries, in Luis' concern for his sister's honor, in learning to hold alcohol, in pornography, and in sexual experimentation.

The memories which Francisco's chance encounter with Modesto Infante bring back serve only to increase his distress over the present situation.

> Quien tiene la culpa de todo es la Compañía. No había derecho a despedirme en esa forma y mucho menos a negarme lo que me correspondía por varios años de trabajo. Yo soy un profesional. Mi único capital ha sido siempre el trabajo (p. 49).

For Francisco, the early days can never be repeated: the camaraderie, the profits, the women, the sense of value in doing a job. He feels closed in and powerless to extricate

himself from this dilemma.

Raúl decides to spend the first part of his afternoon in the street seeing the sights on this fiesta day. His friends invite him to play ball, but he is uninterested. When Engracia and her daughters pass by on their way to Mass, his thoughts turn to Matilde and their relationship.

> Matilde lucía alegre y juvenil con su falda flotante que se mecía al compás de las caderas. Sus ondas castañas reflejaban el sol. Cambiaron una sola mirada que en ella estaba cargada de advertencias y Raúl las siguió despaciosamente y a buena distancia, caminando con abandono (p. 72).

Their romantic encounters are filled by their fear of Matilde's brother Luis and of condemnation by the strict moral code so much a part of society.

Engracia's personal tragedy comes to light as the Mass progresses: she prays una Salve, her eyes fixed on the altar, and remembers her godparents, don Alfredo and doña Hildegardis, and her younger sister, Ludmila. She is an infant, a fifteen-year-old, then a young lady being courted by Francisco shortly after don Alfredo's death. Suddenly the bells awaken Engracia from her transfixed state, tears in her eyes. She thinks of don Alfredo's wealth, doña Hildegardis' gradual ruin as a widow, her permission--although reluctant--for Engracia to marry. "Cuida de mis hijos, Señor; no nos abandones. . . Mete tu mano por Francisco. Ten piedad de nosotros, Señor" (p. 86).

In an act of desperation, Engracia decides to visit a friend of the family in an effort to cover their financial needs. The lavish home decorations remind her of earlier days in Puerto Cabello. Her request for help receives little attention from the former friend of the family.

> A Engracia le pareció, en su aturdimiento, que era otra persona quien le hablaba: un extraño que acabara de entrar y sentarse delante de ella. La cara, carcomida, estaba recubierta por una capa de impermeable severidad (p. 126).

She leaves sobbing. Her bus ride home is short when she inadvertently and mistakenly gets off in a strange neighborhood. When no bus comes, she begins to walk the rest of the way home. Even Engracia's best efforts end in failure and frustration.

Francisco continues, as in the past, to sit and drink beer while staring into space. His irritation causes him to react to Aurelia's laziness and Luis' constant wanderings. "Todo ahora es distinto. Los muchachos. . . Uno batalla y se mata por ellos y después resulta que no los entiende" (p. 145). A listless, routine visit to a local bar, a game of dominoes, and the proud refusal of help from a friend finish his day. When the children return home, the house is already in silence except for Francisco's occasional snoring. Nothing has changed and their final words indicate the sterility of the next day's hopes: "Aurelia se levantó y dijo: Hasta mañana, mamá. Engracia respondió: Hasta mañana" (p. 196).

This is the story of distinct individuals, but their similarly pathetic lives seem to drift aimlessly and out of control. There is no adequate resolution of problems. "Allí no pasa nada y todo sigue, pero no hay una 'tesis' social, un sermón o un mitin."[31] Their existence holds no meaning beyond that of the title. They are precarious inhabitants of a small space in an impersonal city who seek only to survive to the next hopeless day since with this one day "hemos asistido a toda su vida."[32]

Although it lacks the psychological introspection of Los pequeños seres, Garmendia's third novel, Día de ceniza (1963), describes the same anguished search of an individual for the meaning of his existence. Miguel Antúnez, a lawyer and would-be poet of considerable creative talent, is unable to break away from a life of dissipation and sordid frustration as seen against the crazed carnival atmosphere prior to Ash Wednesday. The pristine surroundings of young executives in the new Caracas cannot camouflage the truth "que existen falsamente por encima de sus posibilidades existenciales."[33]

The events of Día de ceniza cover a period of approximately seventy-two hours of work and diversion during this time of festival. Miguel's morning begins routinely in friendly conversation regarding business dealings in a local bar. It is soon 10:30 and the room fills with the typical "mangas blancas, juegos de pluma fuentes y corbatas osci-

lantes."[34] The pattern of his life is soon clear as office personnel inquire about the previous night's celebrating. "Parrandeas demasiado. -Pues si he de morir, moriré ahogado . . . ¡en alcohol!" (p. 27). Then he telephones his mistress, Pastorita, to explain last night's absence. The slowly moving clock and an abrasive office colleague intensify his impatience to be with her. He makes his way to their rendezvous through streets crowded with automobiles and people.

Pastorita suffers considerable emotional stress because of her clandestine affair with a married man. She receives little consolation from an office friend who says,

> Yo conozco a los hombres, Pastorita. En el fondo, son todos iguales, especialmente cuando son casados. Se aquerencian contigo, pero son demasiado cobardes y egoístas. Quieren que tú lo des todo, como si una tuviera la obligación de quererlos y sacrificarse por ellos (p. 48).

Her mother suspects she is seeing a married man and continues to question her closely. As Pastorita and Miguel eat lunch together, they talk of finding an apartment together, of Leticia's inability to give him a child, of love poems he has written. Pastorita is torn between ecstatic happiness and perplexing bewilderment.

Later that day, Miguel's physical and emotional distress finds momentary relief in the bathroom; he notices a neighbor in her bathrobe, and he reminds himself of appointments and the necessity of celebrating with Pastorita.

When he lies down to rest, his thoughts go to his days in law school, his life as a pensionista, his courtship of Leticia, a visit to the house of La Duquesa, a prostitute. When he awakens, he finds Leticia seated on the side of the bed. They discuss the unhappiness of their marriage: "Tú has cambiado mucho desde que nos casamos. Ya apenas te ocupas de mí" (p. 79). Their progressively angry confrontation is interrupted only briefly by a telephone call. Miguel slips back into a semiconscious state and remembers his boyhood days in Barquisimeto. He finally admits his unbearable situation and confesses: "Pero yo mismo no sé lo que pasa. No quiero que te amargues. La verdad es que, a veces, me siento fracasado. Bebiendo, al menos, se me pasan las horas" (p. 85).

The role of alcohol is fundamental in this novel. The section of the work which follows shows Miguel's increasing dependence on alcohol to soothe his nerves and help him face his problems. As one of his friends says: "¡Hay que beber! ¡Hay que beber todos los días, si es posible! Lo decía Baudelaire: hay que estar siempre ebrios. ¿Qué más se puede hacer en este país de mierda?" (p. 93). Intoxication reaches a climax in Chapter IX when Miguel and his friends attend an all-night drinking party characterized by obscenities and Herrera's crudeness. After hours of drinking and reminiscing about the past, Miguel, now tired from a night of indulgence "con pupilas enrojecidas y

mustias" (p. 108), leaves Herrera and his prostitute in their postorgiastic stupor and finds a cafe. Stimulated by hot coffee, he and his friends make plans to meet later that day at the beach.

Miguel's visit with Anzola to one of their clients, Filippo Paturzo, who thinks someone is trying to kill him, and Leticia's discovery of a revolver among her husband's belongings hint at violence later in the work. At the beach Miguel offers to sell the gun to his friends: "Tengo una pistola alemana, excelente. Quisiera salir de ella, venderla a buen precio. No hago nada con ella" (p. 135). Leticia, who now shares her anxiety with her sister, Olga, seeks the advice of a medium, Madame Pinaud. "Veo un gran sufrimiento, una consternación en su hogar" (p. 126). The two couples make plans to attend a party together that night, perhaps to reestablish at least the appearance of family stability.

At seven o'clock in the evening, Miguel calls Pastorita from a telephone booth. She is unable to talk since her mother is suspicious of her whispering on the telephone. He begins to walk aimlessly and finds himself in a barrio where he once lived. "Eran las mismas calles angostas y mal iluminadas; la misma confusa impresión de que caminaba sin objeto por una ciudad muerta e interminable" (p. 140). The sight of a hotel from his university days brings to mind experiences as a pensionista, especially with

certain fellow students. An accidental meeting with another old friend, Pingüino, forces him to spend more time in pointless and superficial conversation. Finally, he is able to escape from his temporarily distasteful predicament but finds no real escape from a greater one. "Desembocó a la plaza. La esquina vacía. La plaza desierta y silenciosa. -¿Qué hago ahora?" (p. 159).

The degree to which Miguel's neurosis has grown is evident in the remaining chapters. A nightmare filled with sordid detail drives him to convulsive vomiting. As the images continue to recur, he weeps uncontrollably. He begins to hear voices calling him from the distance. When Filippo Paturzo hangs himself, Miguel seems to defend his action: "Hay golpes muy duros para un hombre" (p. 178). The growing impracticability of Pastorita's companionship drives him to a violently passionate scene with Leticia. Another party follows which is filled with strangers, drunkenness and the sudden news of his apparent suicide. His family and friends, stunned by this turn of events, futilely seek a rational explanation: "Sinceramente--preguntó Paredes--, ¿crees que Antúnez haya sido capaz de darse un tiro? Sólo una persona desequilibrada es capaz de hacer eso" (p. 210). The symbolism of Miguel's own día de ceniza is dramatic and powerful.

Garmendia's fourth novel, La mala vida (1968), is in many ways a synthesis of his first three. The narrator-

protagonist is nameless and bears a resemblance to Mateo Martán, to Luis/Francisco and to Miguel Antúnez. His chaotic view of city life and its experiences portrays a similar self-contempt, the superficiality of human interaction, the totally routine and mediocre quality of existence and the failure to establish a semblance of psychological balance and meaning to life. "Resume, sin afán de conclusión, todos esos pedazos de angustia y de supervivencia y se entrega a realizar el gran rompecabezas de unos seres que viven parasitados por su propia incompetencia humana."[35]

This work is a montage of characters and events. Its diary-like approach involves the reader in the simultaneous writing of the protagonist's novel. John S. Brushwood sees this characteristic as a basic theme: "El asunto es la composición de la obra que se está componiendo."[36] The writer involves himself in little action and depends almost exclusively upon his vivid memory for the body of the narrative.

> La vida que nos caracteriza como género y que, con perspectivas diferentes, es la misma en cualquier hombre. Extrayéndolos de lo que el mismo Garmendia ha denominado 'reservas de memoria', los elementos materiales fluyen y se unifican a una especie de soterrada nostalgia, que en su caso particular es un ingrediente indispensable.[37]

The narrator's diary-story moves in a smooth conversational tone from one incident to another. Although it begins with passing comments about Stela, a secretary in the

office, it could begin at any other focal point.

> Advierto de una vez que no poseo ningún motivo deliberado para haber echado a andar mi relato a partir precisamente de Stela (como no sea por el hecho immediato, acaso dominante en extremo, de ser ella quien se mueve en este momento ante mis ojos).[38]

From here the reader follows the narrator in mental associations, encounters with friends, and nostalgic memories important to the final scene which summarizes, in an allegorical sense, La mala vida of the title.

> Jimmy, con la boca abierta, sin aliento, sacude los dedos. Luego, reponiéndose, lleva la mano debajo, la regresa ahuecada, lenta, pesadísima cargando una enorme porción y de un golpe se le aplasta en la cara. Cualquiera que esta noche, igual que yo reposara en silencio, sonriendo para sí de alguna travesura de su mente, podría oír, entre tantos sonidos distantes, el dúo fantástico de nuestras carcajadas (p. 259).

Chronologically, the events of La mala vida encompass a Friday afternoon and evening, from the end of a routine day's work through the final light-headed moments of an office party. The many subplots from the narrator's vivid memory fill the wide perimeters of this framework. At times, it is nebulous where novelized reality begins and where narrator ends as the work moves from one character or incident to another. He seems to be incoherent and "a veces no puede novelar, y se abandona al dictado de lo sensible."[39] Against the setting of Santa Rosalía, an older section of Caracas, the protagonist-narrator describes a life of boredom, uncertainty and futility.

For the protagonist-narrator, the office is a

sterile, hygienically clean and cold place where each is "dueño de su espacio" (p. 9). For his empty friends, the Club becomes the beginning and end of existence: "Todo esto es un esfuerzo perdido. Nosotros, los que hemos luchado por esto, pensando que iba a ser de todos. . . pero mira, mira. . . ya no viene nadie. . . Hay que reconocerlo: hemos fracasado" (p. 255). Days go on in debilitating, identical fashion: "Es, pues, la hora de iniciar la acostumbrada caminata hacia mi casa por la ruta demasiado conocida . . . ese itinerario invariable" (p. 36). His decaying barrio is the relic of a bygone era. He feels the contingency of his existence in his relationship with other people: "La idea de que existo dentro del pensamiento de otro y que en cualquier momento puedo desaparecer con todo cuanto me rodea" (p. 77).

Although the protagonist-narrator of La mala vida is able to escape the limitations of his existence through memory, he must face ultimately his alienation from all that surrounds him, his utter aloneness, his inability to judge his own life. "¿Qué hacemos aquí? No somos parte de ninguna trama. Estamos fuera de asunto, no tenemos caso o lo hemos olvidado o ya no sabemos ni nos importa regresar a él. ¿Tú recuerdas cómo empezó todo? ¿Todo qué, cuándo?" (p. 141). He feels condemned to empty action: "Tanto trabajar para nada. -No creas, es satisfactorio, después de todo, haber cumplido con el deber" (p. 258).

Los pies de barro, published in 1973, is the most recent of Garmendia's novels. Utilizing a novel-in-the-making approach similar to that of La mala vida, the protagonist-narrator Miguel Angel describes the turbulent days of his love affair with Graciela, his work with advertising firms and his compromise during guerrilla fighting. The novel is interspersed with a myriad of personal encounters, memories of childhood experiences, and such varied incidents as the description of a bank robbery, the answering of a want-ad, the relating of a suicide-hanging, a broadcasted boxing match, a visit to the laundromat, music lessons, university life and guerrilla warfare. This "travesía caótica, de situaciones fugaces y desiguales hiladas sin ningún procedimiento" is symptomatic of Miguel Angel's inner confusion and inability to find himself.[40] As Brushwood states, "él repasa muchos acontecimientos y relaciones que parecen identificar su vida, pero nunca logra arraigarse en ella."[41]

The Argentine novelist Eduardo Gudiño Kieffer views Los pies de barro as a novel of questioning, "búsqueda interior, carencia de identidad, inutilidad del amor, dificultades para la acción y el compromiso."[42] The search for one's identity, the impossibility of interpersonal communication, the futility of human love and the inappropriateness or ineffectuality of one's action are the central themes of this work.

Miguel Angel's search for himself is portrayed through his encounter with the city and in the many flashbacks to early childhood experiences. Perhaps the most vivid example of this is in a visit he and his father make from a small town in the interior to the capital city.

> Nos vinimos a Caracas y papá me llevaba de la mano por las calles del centro. Me parecía que no hubiera acabado de despertar del todo. Aquel mundo de antes estaba por dentro de mí y me llenaba. No entendía el ruido, la multitud de gente, las máquinas tumbando las casas, toda esa gente amontonada en las tiendas, corriendo, hablando a gritos. Estaba convencido de que algo anormal tenía que haber pasado, que todo no podía seguir así siempre. Tenía que llegar el momento en que todo eso se calmara y uno pudiera vivir adentro de uno como antes. Un día, papá me dejó solo en la acera mientras él entraba a un almacén. De pronto me sentí perdido, no reconocía nada a mi alrededor, era como si toda aquella cosa confusa y grande hubiera brotado allí de repente. Me dio miedo y empecé a caminar: si seguía andando, tenía que encontrar una abertura, algo por donde meterme y entonces me encontraría otra vez en el solar de la casa y todo ese mundo alborotado que quedó atrás desaparecería; en cambio las cosas y la gente de antes iban a estar allí entre aquellas paredes viejas, como siempre. Yo caminaba sin saber adónde, estaba llorando y sin saber cómo tropecé con mi papá. Me le abracé a las piernas dando gritos y él tuvo que llevarme cargado a la casa.[43]

It is as though Miguel Angel continues to live this experience, but, as an adult, he has no comforting refuge. The city grows in all directions without plan or control. "La locura, el alcohol, la putería invadían todos los pasadizos del laberinto. Era una hendedura pululante que palpitaba bajo el vientre harto de la otra ciudad de torres blancas y vidrieras iluminadas" (pp. 81-82). Like the city, Miguel Angel's interior crisis condemns an external facade of well-being.

Relationships and attempts to establish communication with others are at best superficial. Each person moves in his own impenetrable world. Miguel Angel finds people distasteful; they bore him, as in the case of Cacique:

> Ya no me fue posible soportar por más tiempo la sonrisa que persistía inmodificable en su lugar: una marca en el hueso que imaginaba untada de veneno; de modo que volé a esconderme en el excusado, eché el cerrojo y me planté ante el . . . (p. 256).

He is fascinated, on the other hand, with the lifeless mannequins in store windows. "Es como si el dolor frío que se desprende de aquellos auxilios de pasta y de metal, intentara condensarse en una humana personificación del llanto y la desesperanza" (p. 106). Ironically, he seems to identify more easily with plastic forms or copies of human beings than with people themselves.

Failure to maintain a love relationship with Graciela is an extension of this same alienation. She can never understand Miguel Angel during their affair and finds herself calling him <u>loco</u>. Their love-making becomes a mechanical function. Finally, Graciela tells him they cannot continue in this way.

> Yo estoy segura de que nos ha pasado algo últimamente; de pronto nos ha pasado algo sin que lo viéramos venir, sin que lo pensáramos siquiera; pero se nota en todo, vale; en detalles: en tu manera de mirarme, en cierto . . . temor. . . Es como si empezáramos a vernos diferentes (p. 229).

Miguel Angel's relations with women have only a physical dimension. A. Amorós summarizes the importance of this

portrayal of human love when he says,

> . . . la vida sexual . . . sirve para plantear los grandes temas del hombre: la soledad, la angustia, las dificultades de una auténtica comunicación, el deseo de romper nuestras barreras, la nostalgia de una vida más feliz, el choque con la sociedad, el recuerdo, la distancia, la plentitud vital, la esperanza y la desesperanza.[44]

Although Rama criticizes the explicit sex found in Garmendia's later novels, the writer's purposes seem to be a desire to break down an affected modesty in the literature of his predecessors as well as a determination to depict modern man in the daily, normal experiences shared by all.[45]

Ultimately, Miguel Angel is unable to commit himself to anything in an enduring way. His peripheral relationship to the guerrilla fighting is an example of this. "Yo en el fondo no soy más que un cobarde o quizá no sea un cobarde propiamente, sino un tipo cualquiera y uno que quiere vivir su vida sin meterse con nadie ni importarle que haya o no dictadura . . ." (p. 117). The final paragraph focuses, as does La mala vida, on a symbolic contempt for life as he discharges human excrement: "me reviento de risa y además sería extraordinariamente divertido que pudiera bajarme los pantalones frente a todo el mundo, mientras Pancho grita desesperado, suplicándome que tenga compasión . . ." (p. 308). Moments later he needlessly sacrifices himself in a burst of machine-gun fire. The violence and degradation of the final scene is an allegorical summary of Miguel Angel's life, "sumergiéndolo también en un clima de ametralladoras,

mierda y putrefacción. La despedida al otro mundo, el adiós sin fin."[46]

The novels of Salvador Garmendia are thematically homogeneous. Although they take place in the various barrios of Caracas, they are similar in their portrayal of modern city life. Los pequeños seres is one man's struggle to maintain his psychological equilibrium. Rama believes this first work establishes Garmendia's point of departure, his subsequent novels serving to enrich and heighten "esa mirada alienatoria y visceral, signo indiscutible de su escritura."[47] The characters of Los habitantes are trapped and alone in a closed societal structure. Miguel Antúnez, in Día de ceniza, is incapable of finding his way to an authentic and purposeful existence. La mala vida views life as mediocre and worthy only of contempt. In Los pies de barro, Miguel Angel never succeeds in interrelating the events of his life.

Garmendia's themes are an indictment of the life of modern man. He narrates no great events, only modern man's descent into personal infernos. The city, never merely a decorative backdrop, becomes a protagonist--a violent setting, convulsive and mechanized as Garmendia calls it. It stands ironically as a monument to the achievements of the twentieth century. The reality of life in the city, however, is isolation, boredom and alienation. Violence, perversion and emptiness are commonplace. Man finds no

transcendent meaning to life, no joy in his hedonism, no humor in his folly. Insulated from escape, he lives in the anguish of urban life.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

[1]Angel Rama, "Garmendia y la nueva literatura venezolana," Casa de las Américas, No. 54 (mayo-junio, 1969), p. 50.

[2]Rama, p. 54.

[3]Emir Rodríguez Monegal, El arte de narrar (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C.A., 1968), p. 158.

[4]Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "La nueva novela latinoamericana," Actas del Tercer Congreso Internacional de Hispanistas (México: Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas, 1970), p. 51.

[5]Mario Vargas Llosa, "The Latin American Novel Today: Introduction," Books Abroad, XLIV, 1 (Winter, 1970), p. 8.

[6]Novelistas contemporáneos hispanoamericanos (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1964), pp. 1-2.

[7]John E. Englekirk, An Outline History of Spanish American Literature (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1965), p. 139.

[8]Fernando Alegría, Historia de la novela hispanoamericana (México: Ediciones de Andrea, 1966), p. 208.

[9]Lubio Cardozo, "Memorias de Altagracia, un cambio en la narrativa de Salvador Garmendia," Cuadernos hispanoamericanos, 289-90 (julio-agosto, 1974), p. 444.

[10]Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "The New Latin-American Novel," Books Abroad, XLIV, 1 (Winter, 1970), p. 45.

[11]The Modern Culture of Latin America (New York: Praeger Company, 1967), p. 201.

[12](Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1962), p. 36.

[13]Barrett, p. 25.

[14]Vargas Llosa, p. 14.

[15]El escritor y sus fantasmas (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 1964), p. 15.

[16]Ivan A. Schulman, et al., Coloquio sobre la novela hispanoamericana (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1967), p. 90.

[17]Aurora M. Ocampo de Gómez, ed., La crítica de la novela iberoamericana contemporánea (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma, 1973), p. 176.

[18]Vargas Llosa, p. 8.

[19]"Salvador Garmendia, la visión y el lenguaje de un novelista," Imagen, 31 (15 agosto 1968), p. 4.

[20]Francisco Pérez Perdomo, "Prólogo," Los pequeños seres, by Salvador Garmendia (Montevideo: ARCA Editorial, 1967), p. 7.

[21]Ocampo de Gómez, p. 98.

[22]J. R. Lovera de Sola, "Notas sobre Salvador Garmendia como escritor," Zona Franca, Año I, Segunda Etapa, No. 4 (noviembre-diciembre, 1970), pp. 81-82.

[23]Julio E. Miranda, Proceso a la narrativa venezolana (Caracas: Ediciones de la Biblioteca Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1975), p. 101.

[24]P. Pla y Beltrán, "Los pequeños seres," Revista Nacional de Cultura, No. 136 (noviembre-diciembre, 1960), p. 145.

[25]Salvador Garmendia, Los pequeños seres (Montevideo: ARCA Editorial, 1967), p. 11. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[26]Cardozo, p. 444.

[27]Pla y Beltrán, p. 144.

[28]Rafael Pineda, "Garmendia, Nazoa y Pérez Vila," Papel Literario de El Nacional (18-8-1960), p. 8.

[29]"Los habitantes," Revista Cultura Universitaria, No. 82 (enero-marzo, 1963), p. 128.

[30]Salvador Garmendia, Los habitantes (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C.A., 1968), p. 18. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[31]María Rosa Alonso, "Los habitantes," Humanidades, No. 9, Año III, Tomo III (1961), p. 347.

[32]Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda, "Salvador Garmendia," Nueva Narrativa Hispanoamericana, 4 (enero-septiembre, 1974), p. 292.

[33]Osvaldo Larrazábal Henríquez, Diez novelas venezolanas (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C.A., 1972), p. 47.

[34]Salvador Garmendia, Día de ceniza (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C.A., 1968), p. 16. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[35]Larrazábal Henríquez, p. 47.

[36]"Cinco novelas de Salvador Garmendia: El impacto sobre los hábitos perceptivos," Hispania, Vol. 60, No. 4 (December, 1977), p. 888.

[37]Larrazábal Henríquez, p. 50.

[38]Salvador Garmendia, La mala vida (Montevideo: ARCA Editorial, 1968), p. 8. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[39]Gabriel Jiménez Emán, "Los pies de barro," Revista Nacional de Cultura, No. 217-18 (noviembre-diciembre, 1974), p. 137.

[40]Jiménez Emán, p. 137.

[41]Brushwood, p. 888.

[42]"Un sólido oficio," Visión (9-2-1974), p. 44.

[43]Salvador Garmendia, Los pies de barro (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C.A., 1973), pp. 264-65. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[44]Introducción a la novela hispanoamericana actual (Salamanca: Anaya, 1971), p. 206.

[45]Rama, p. 57.

[46]Jiménez Emán, p. 138.

[47]Jiménez Emán, p. 137.

CHAPTER III

MAN WITHOUT A MASK: GARMENDIAN CHARACTERIZATION

Salvador Garmendia's narrative reforms focus not only on theme but also on a redefinition of the fictional character. Rejecting a view in which protagonists act out grand schemes according to the writer's overt and omniscient direction, Garmendia portrays characters with no predictable behavior patterns or moralized type labels who move about in a chaotic world. What emerges, as the titles of his novels suggest, is a consistent presentation of little people, mere inhabitants, men with feet of clay living out an ashen reality in a frustrating, vile life. He considers no facet of this life impenetrable, stripping it of all pretense and facade. He describes man without the mask of classical convention and reveals the unembellished self with all the human ugliness and turmoil typical in an impersonal, antagonistic society.

Though not without precedent, Garmendia's concepts represent a repudiation of traditional character portrayal

and a culmination of recent trends.[1] Historically, the novel in Venezuela and Latin America progresses from depersonalized type characterization, often overshadowed by theme in the primitive novel, to the complex individuals of contemporary works. Modern writers seem to turn their backs on "la tierra 'real' para abocarnos hombre adentro, mostrándonos más a la criatura humana en su 'existencia' que en su 'esencia' o 'trascendencia'."[2]

Until this break with tradition, the Latin American writer follows a Balzacian pattern in which he becomes "a nimble god, moving in and out of his characters, on intimate terms with objects, granting his creatures free will only to the extent that it . . . not interfere with his control of plot."[3] Characters reflect a state of order, rationality and coherence which Anaïs Nin calls a character view of wholeness, "a semblance of consistency created from a pattern, social and philosophical, to which human beings submitted."[4] The so-called hero of that earlier era plays a diminished role leaving him "reducido a la condición de arquetipo: un símbolo de algo."[5]

Part of the Sardio group's intention to bring Venezuelan life into the artistic and literary mainstream involves a re-creation of the narrative character in an attempt to "poner de relieve una conciencia más dramática de la realidad y del hombre."[6] While some continue to follow the prestigious model of Rómulo Gallegos, Garmendia and

Sardio see traditional character portrayal as outmoded and inadequate for the younger generations. With the creation of his first protagonist, Garmendia calls into question the legitimacy of characterizations which allow the American landscape and the terrors of natural phenomena to dominate men's actions. He also rejects the pattern of some contemporaries, such as Arturo Uslar Pietri, who continue to create character abstractions, "ciphers to justify some political or sociological approach."[7]

In a work entitled La novela en Venezuela, the literary critic Uslar Pietri demonstrates the changing role of characters in Venezuelan letters.[8] He notes a decided preference throughout its history for "el personaje rebelde o prometéico, por el héroe civilizador" (p. 23). In the early 1920's José Rafael Pocaterra seeks to disassociate himself from this type of idealized literary character when he says,

> Mis personajes piensan en venezolano, hablan en venezolano, obran en venezolano, y como tengo la desgracia de no ser nieto de Barbey ni hijo del Cisne lascivo, es justo que me considere, y lo deseo en extremo, fuera de la literatura.[9]

Pocaterra's self-proclaimed reforms are soon forgotten, however, amid the power and near immortality of Gallegos' fictional personalities.

During the forties and fifties, a new generation begins to rebel against the persistence of the Gallegos character type. The influences of North American and

European literature, the popularizing of modern psychology, and the spread of existential thought help to diminish the importance of costumbrismo, nature and ideology. Symbolic characters give way to ambiguous characters who appear to be complete human beings.[10]

This change from the image of geography and nationalism to the image of man is characteristic of the Garmendian narrative. The characters and characterization in Garmendia's novels demonstrate the effects of the rapid emergence of city life in the modern national fiber with the resulting treatment of more universal concerns. "Es decir, inícíase el retroceso del hombre perdido en la inhóspita geografía . . . para dar paso a lo que hoy es legítimo objeto de búsqueda en la novela universal."[11] María Teresa Babín describes this fundamental transformation in the Latin American novel:

> Al perderse el paisaje y el paisanaje, la gleba se transforma en urbe de cemento y el campo se torna máquina. La madre tierra pierde sus caracteres y el hombre se hace un ser perdido de cualquier sitio, casi siempre una gran metrópoli como París.[12]

This is the more faithful picture of reality called for by Sardio in its Testimonios.

Although Garmendia initially associates himself with intellectuals who reflect the influences of French criticism between the wars and after the Second World War, he chooses to pursue creative writing and the narrative almost exclusively. His international contacts invest him

with a profound preoccupation with the absurdities of modern life in which the writer "se inserta en un laberinto oscuro, subjetivo, obsesivo o inexplicable."[13]

In his essay on the narrative, Carlos Fuentes traces the beginnings of this new life view to the Mexican novel of the Revolution.

> En la literatura de la revolución mexicana se encuentra esta semilla novelesca: la certeza heroica se convierte en ambigüedad crítica, la fatalidad natural en acción contradictoria, el idealismo romántico en dialéctica irónica.[14]

The gradual erosion of a bourgeois reality is heightened by the change in philosophical premises characteristic of the years between 1910 and 1950. Garmendia's works, a direct reflection of this trend, bring to Venezuela the full impact of the new fictional person.

Charles C. Walcutt describes the hero of the new narrative as a diminished self, one whose day-to-day existence lacks the moral issues of an Antigone or a Hamlet.[15] He is, instead, a character totally devoid of ideal qualities, an ironic hero, moving "from uncertainty into action by accident or impulse rather than moving deliberately through a personal crisis that gives him importance and form" (p. 303).

While E. M. Forster's analysis of the character depends upon the degree to which he can be understood or revealed by the narrator, modern writers tend to view personages as faceless and unknowable. The external signs

by which the reader achieves a degree of acquaintance with his characters no longer serve as a sound basis for the society which Forster assumes.[16] In modern character portrayal, man seems to be "at the end of his tether, cut off from the consolations of all that seems so solid and earthly, . . . at once everyman and nobody."[17]

Garmendia and contemporary novelists share an identity with this ser angustiado universal. Man questions the meaning of his existence, feels isolated from his fellow man, and sees himself trapped in an irrational reality. His despair only heightens when he turns inward where "al ahondar en los tenebrosos abismos del yo encuentra que la intimidad del hombre nada tiene que ver con la razón, ni con la lógica, ni con la ciencia . . ."[18] While novelists' attempts to portray this reality shock some readers who insist on men wearing masks, for others, this view is an honest confrontation of the contradictions, the profound secrets and the labyrinthine condition of universal man's search for meaning.

The new narrative dissolves the artificial unity perpetuated by the traditional novel in which "the selves were masked" and seeks to "achieve a new vision into the relativity of truth and character."[19] The Garmendian character is the product of this vision. He is complex, unpredictable, and unable to identify his place in the world. He operates according to no intelligible plan or

design; he is an enigma to himself as others are to him. He is, as David Grossvogel suggests, a "windowpane hero" having a "transparency whose action will be neither described nor explained, whose only consciousness is perforce the reader's . . ."[20]

Mateo Martán, of Los pequeños seres, is Garmendia's first example of this new Venezuelan hero or antihero, as John S. Brushwood calls him.[21] Throughout the work he is characterized, in a progressively intense manner, as a man unable to justify his existence. His psychic trauma undermines an apparently successful career and an otherwise normal life as husband and father. To demonstrate this crisis, Garmendia characterizes his protagonist by means of several focal points: the myth of success, the reality of death, deep-rooted psychological problems, the rapid descent into irreversible alienation and the final triumph of the antagonist, the city.

When professional success finally comes, Martán falls ironically into a state of severe anxiety. He senses profound emptiness and boredom; his memories are only of bureaucratic drudgery and stifling symmetry. Brushwood points out the frequent appearance of the office worker "as an embodiment of twentieth-century alienation, loneliness, or lack of self-identification. The routine character of his work--as it is generalized in fiction--provides an appropriate lack of distinctiveness."[22] The myth of success is

Martán's startling realization of his meaningless existence.

Martán also becomes aware of the precarious contingence of his life, for his promotion symbolically brings him one step closer to the nothingness of death. From his first words, "Es increíble que haya muerto," and throughout the novel, death is a constant preoccupation.[23] He ponders the inopportuneness of death: "Este hombre era rollizo y saludable. No pensaba en morir" (p. 19). He imagines his own funeral, witnesses a violent death and recalls his mother's death in poverty. When he stumbles into a decaying railroad station, he sees the photograph of a train wreck and the "cadáver de la locomotora" (p. 113). Finally, exhausted and unable to go further, he heeds a strangely distant call to rest, but indefinitely.

The origin of this final call is not clear, but it seems to be linked to various psychological conflicts in his early childhood. The use of flashbacks reveals memorable and psychologically important moments in Martán's life. He finds little identification with the character of his own father, "él era un roble" (p. 22), but rather with that of his comparatively weak Tío Andrés. At a crucial point in his early childhood, Papá and Tío Andrés discover Martán talking to himself:

> En ese momento, en que mi hermoso mundo se desmoronaba y las perspectivas me empequeñecían de nuevo, los vi como odiosos e increíbles intrusos que, de manera inexplicable, habían logrado traspasar el límite e invadir mi dominio (p. 58).

When his father deserts the family, he and his mother are forced to move. She later dies leaving him alone to bear the family's heavy financial obligations.

The final, difficult hours of Martán's life demonstrate the extent of his alienation. His mind fixes on meaningless details. At the funeral, he sees only the forms of people and hears only anonymous comments:

> Una mano desconocida había caído sobre el hombro de Mateo y persistía allí, provocándole una sensación aplastante. Mientras todas las bocas hablaban en confusión, la mano se agitaba en el hombro, con pausas de inercia y movimiento, siguiendo el ritmo de las palabras de su dueño a quien no era posible distinguir en el amontonamiento de las voces (p. 24).

In the disorientation which follows as he wanders through the city, his confusion also heightens due to the effects of alcohol. He remembers the unbearable words of a colleague, "Yo siempre lo he admirado a usted, Martán" (p. 51). He staggers helplessly in the nightmarish reality of city life: "Sobre la esfera de un reloj público, inmóvil en un asedio de reflejos y rastros, las manecillas vueltas al revés, señalaban una hora incomprensible" (p. 70).

Martán's delirium climaxes during a powerful description of the city. His experiences become the common experience of man: "Se asoman seres pálidos a los balcones" (p. 123), "Existencias sin rastro instaladas en un presente enjuto, bochornoso" (p. 124), "los pensamientos, las inquietudes y los deseos de cientos de hombres y mujeres amontonados y solos" (p. 125). He finally asks himself,

"¿Qué significa todo esto?" (p. 130) and surrenders to his desire for ultimate release. The city uproots and separates him from his provincial past, forces him into a routine, unauthentic life style and, in the end, leaves him alone and searching for an unattainable sense of meaning to life.

Garmendia allows only a partial view of his characters, because Los pequeños seres is the story of solitary lives. "Esa soledad es universal. Es la de los hombres exilados en un mundo inhabitable, en una sociedad resquebrajada como un muro viejo y carcomido."[24] Although the narrative follows Martán through an entire day, it gives none of the details of the traditional character. The reader draws certain conclusions about the character from what the latter thinks or remembers and from what he does.

Martán's wife, Amelia, and his son, Antonio, enter and exit from the process of his growing anguish but move as shadows of reality; both seem oblivious to Martán's painful crisis. Amelia concerns herself with domestic matters; Antonio's consuming interests are purely physical, a girlfriend and football. Amelia seems to share a more meaningful interpersonal relationship with her brother, Francisco, than she does with Martán, who suspects a secret intent to isolate him from the family: "Aquellos dos seres lejanos, vinculados por sus confidencias y sus tristezas no le pertenecían. Se encontró extraño, inoperante, aspirando un aire cargado de reservas" (p. 119).

The other characters in Los pequeños seres appear only momentarily. They are half-forgotten memories of Martán's childhood, anonymous actors and mere voices. Details concerning characters, if any, are solely physical and superficial. The shallow presence of these characters further reveals both Martán's alienation from all that surrounds him and his relentless need to look inward. The result is the predominance of one human being whose search for himself speaks to universal concerns but whose failure stands as a testimony to life as una pantalla ilusoria. "Al final tendremos a un Mateo Martán más lleno de sí mismo pero más lejos del mundo. Ha recobrado su humanidad pero está solo."[25]

While Los pequeños seres traces the profound alienation of one man, Los habitantes, Garmendia's second novel, focuses on a family nucleus. Garmendia builds the novel around the fact of Francisco's unemployment, portraying each character as a participant in the hopeless mediocrity of daily life. Instead of the introspection and the traumatic crisis of Mateo Martán, Garmendia presents, in this work, an objective chronicle of non-events acted out by frustrated victims in the modern urban setting.[26]

As a central character, Francisco sets the tone of the novel and provides the focal point through which a tension is maintained in the other characters. He is a man caught in an irreversible dilemma: "Sin un trabajo fijo no

se puede vivir."[27] Yet he will neither be rehired nor accept a lesser means of employment elsewhere. Francisco seems to have two choices: to do nothing or to retreat into fond reminiscences of a happier past relatively free of responsibility. The impending financial crisis facing the family is not his fault: "Quien tiene la culpa de todo es la Compañía" (p. 49), and his frustration colors the entire work as it leads to strained relationships with his wife, Engracia, and with his children.

Garmendia portrays Francisco as a husband in name only. There is no evidence of romantic love in his marriage, no expressed affection. While he recalls the sensual characteristics of prostitutes from his younger days, "El Catire tiene muchas historias de antes de casarse . . . porque aquellos hombres, todos, ¡eran unos diablos!" (p. 124), his view of Engracia is one of distance and recognition of a cold tolerance for his failures: "Adivinó el gesto paciente de Engracia, seca, muda, en el mecedor, como si nada la tocara; . . ." (p. 65). He tolerates yet resents her attempt to fulfill his own obligation to solve the financial crisis by seeking to obtain a loan from an old friend. "¡Yo qué sé! ¡Haz lo que quieras, pues! ¿No se puede tener tranquilidad un momento? Cuando no es una cosa es otra. Aquí todo el mundo hace lo que quiere" (p. 97).

Francisco's characterization of his children, Luis, Matilde and Aurelia, generally reflects that of the writer's.

Luis is in many ways similar to Francisco: he is restless, bored by all that surrounds him, and he seeks to avoid responsibility. He is, ironically, the object of Francisco's wrath in an early episode:

> Te lo rogué y tú como si nada. Como si le hablara a esa pared. Tú prefieres andar de vago con esos, ¿verdad? Por algo perdiste el año en el Liceo, ¡sí, señor! Tengo que decirlo: perdiste el año por flojo y sinvergüenza. No sirves para nada . . . (p. 48).

Luis, in fact, spends the day with his peers wandering aimlessly from one experience to another. As a bartender comments to Francisco, "Todos son una partida de vagos, sin oficio. Lástima que su hijo ande tan mal reunido" (p. 66). He lacks the will to confront his sister's lover and finds the adventures of his male companions too threatening to pursue. Just as Francisco returns home having failed to acquire the courage to improve his desperate situation, Luis literally escapes the threats offered by his peers to the sterile serenity of home.

> Engracia vio pasar la cara flácida, huesuda, reluciente de grasa y sudor y las comisuras de los labios fermentados de saliva espumosa; vio los gajos de pelo amarillento caídos sobre las orejas y el nacimiento arenoso del cuello también rojo y mojado (p. 187).

Matilde shares the same restless spirit with her brother Luis, but she is harsh and aggressive. Her relationship with Raúl, a boyfriend from the barrio, is typically adolescent. "Cambiaron una sola mirada que en ella estaba cargada de advertencias y Raúl las siguió despaciosamente y a buena distancia, caminando con abandono" (p. 72). Their

clandestine meetings reveal an atmosphere of sexual taboos and repression: "Entonces, oyen que el viejo se levanta, tose, carraspea o suelta un viento ruidoso y profundo. Quedan paralizados a mitad del cuarto con los dedos entrelazados" (p. 155). Her idle moments are spent polishing her nails and, at the end of the day, she returns to a despised but tolerated home environment. "Matilde desapareció en su cuarto sin decir palabra. Canturreó unos momentos, mientras se desvestía y luego todo quedó en silencio" (p. 195).

Aurelia contrasts sharply with Matilde and bears some resemblance to her mother, Engracia. Constantly absorbed in thought, she delights in the events of the past. She has none of Matilde's aggressiveness and prefers to spend hours quietly at home, looking through old family photographs. During the afternoon Francisco vents his frustration on Aurelia when he says,

> -No sé, no sé. Siempre respondes: nada, no sé. Así eres tú. ¿Y por qué será que los muchachos son tan distintos unos de otros? Tú eres lo contrario de Matilde. No te gusta salir, no hablas. Tienes buena índole (p. 145).

Like Engracia, she dreams of the family's happier days at Puerto Cabello and longs to recapture the joy they represent. "-¿Cuándo volvemos a Puerto Cabello, papá?" (p. 149). Though she is by far the brightest personality in the novel, her relatively calm demeanor is closer to a mindless acceptance of life than real contentment. Her final words in the day, "Hasta mañana, mamá" (p. 196) are promise of

yet another day of solitude and of yesterday's fond memories.

Though not a member of the López family, Raúl's sister, Irene, participates in the frustration of a closed existence. She and her prostitute friend, María, experience the tragedy of being used by others. Irene is trapped financially since she must support her younger brother and invalid father. She is unable to extricate herself from the hopeless affairs she is forced to tolerate. "Los golpes enseñan; por eso te he dicho siempre que no tomes en serio a los hombres; óyelos, arráncales lo que puedas, ¡goza la vida! ¡No se puede creer!" (p. 160). She has only contempt for her burdensome father and rarely speaks to Raúl. Though she is desired physically by her lovers, she finds no lasting love and is symbolic of the lack of communication and the human indifference in modern society. "Irene volvía sola esa noche" (p. 193).

The reader sees intimately the characters of Los habitantes, but he never knows them in a personal way. Each seems to move about as if controlled by outside forces: economic pressures, peer groups, the past.. "Garmendia nos mete en este mundo triste, mediocre, en que la vida sigue azotando a los personajes como el 'palo' de agua que acogió a cada miembro de la familia en su momento; . . ."[28] He maintains a distance between narrator and character "con la misma objetividad con que lo haría una cámara cinematográfica, esto es, reproduciendo fielmente--sin añadir el menor

comentario, ni intentar el menor análisis."[29] This strictly objective portrayal corresponds well to their lives of solitude and frustration. In this way, their most effective characterization is that they simply are what they do.

With the publication of Día de ceniza, Garmendia returns to the featuring of a central character as he continues to elucidate modern man's crisis. Unlike Mateo Martán's interior and psychological journey in Los pequeños seres, the portrayal of this protagonist, Miguel Antúnez, is powerfully objective. Garmendia seems to detach himself from his characters, allowing them a considerable degree of freedom. He follows at a distance, systematically recording Antúnez's life of dissipation and alienation.

Perhaps a key phrase for the understanding of characterization in this work comes in a conversation between Antúnez and his lawyer-friend, Anzola. The latter plays a mentor role, asking Antúnez to ponder the decision made earlier in his life to leave the artistic world: "Tú estás contrariando tu naturaleza ejerciendo el Derecho" (p. 182). Antúnez's response is, "El arte no admite medias tintas: o se es completamente, o cero. La mediocridad es peor que la esterilidad completa" (p. 182). Antúnez and his friends reveal themselves as men and women sustained in an agonizing limbo of mediocrity. Antúnez is no paragon of virtue; he performs no heroic deeds, he fulfills no inspiring dream. He is, instead, a distracted and troubled spirit who is

unwilling to face his severe discontentment. Not particularly successful in a job somewhat contrary to his interests, he appears adrift and aimless. His relationships are those of an adolescent--impulsive, superficial and self-centered.

Garmendia offers the reader no explanations, not even indirectly, as if "el autor conoce tan poco los seres que ha creado como nosotros mismos."[30] His non-intrusive manner causes the development of character to be gradual and incomplete. The reader may often become confused or surprised by a character's direction or reaction. Character development evidently could progress in any one of many ways, the resulting dominant portrayal being the same in any case. A major emphasis ultimately comes, however, to the triangle affair in which Antúnez, Pastorita and Leticia play the featured roles.

Antúnez's uneven affair with Pastorita is symptomatic of a general dissatisfaction with life, and his marriage to Leticia is shallow and equally frustrating. Though consumed by his desire for Pastorita, he professes a strong bond with Leticia. His romantic affair is characterized by guilt, unkept promises and lack of fulfillment; his marriage is a comparatively peaceful though mediocre arrangement. In exasperation Antúnez admits to Leticia, "Pero yo mismo no sé lo que pasa."[31]

Leticia's words to her sister are a summary portrayal

of Antúnez. She says of him, "No hace más que beber, se está matando" (p. 128). He is a man out of control--not merely in his romantic life, but also at the foundation levels of his existence. The gaiety and frivolity of carnival at once contribute to and mock Antúnez's desperation and confusion.

> La actividad frenética de Antúnez corresponde al espíritu de Carnaval. Sin embargo, se entiende que esta angustia enloquecida no es cuestión del calendario sino de su manera de buscar una explicación de su existencia . . .[32]

At home Antúnez finds estrangement: "En casa no puedo hacer nada, me siento como un extraño, un pensionista" (p. 54). His wife attempts to calm his anxiety, but her concern puts him on the defensive. "Me mato trabajando, bebo con los amigos, estoy metido todo el día en los Tribunales y ni siquiera gano lo suficiente" (p. 80). His relationships with male companions border on the irresponsible and ludicrous, "Ellos atravesaban la calle iluminada, corriendo uno detrás del otro y riendo a carcajadas" (p. 96), and often end in debauchery and depression. Antúnez seeks some respite from his anguish in Pastorita, acting at times as an enamored youngster: "-Te quiero, te quiero, te quiero... -Corrió tras el vehículo, empinándose hasta la ventanilla, besándole las manos-. Tenemos que salir, no te olvides, te llamo" (p. 90). When it is clear that his affair is not going well, he becomes frantic and later ends a telephone conversation with the ironically incriminating

words, "Comprende, estoy solo, ¡no sé qué hacer!" (p. 137).

His failure with Pastorita seems beyond his control. Torn between her mother's accusations of immorality, her own desire to find happiness, and Antúnez's impossible behavior, Pastorita seems to represent yet another unrealized dimension in his life.

> Le apretó una muñeca hasta hacerle daño: -¡Oyeme, óyeme! -sólo por hacerla volver la cabeza; pero enseguida fue él quien bajó la mirada al encontrarse con aquella expresión fría y maltratada que siempre le provocó un violento y amargo fastidio y un deseo casi irreprimible de apartarse bruscamente de su lado (p. 51).

Her warmth and love are an inspiration for Antúnez and help him begin to find himself, if only momentarily, in bursts of poetry: "-Los escribí para ti, y creo que es lo mejor que he hecho porque venían de una gran experiencia. ¡Tú has significado mucho para mí, Pastorita!" (p. 55).

Leticia, similar to Amelia in Los pequeños seres and Engracia in Los habitantes, is only partially involved in her husband's crisis. Like Engracia, she makes an effort to understand and even improve the situation. Her attempts are meaningless, however, and she retreats to the role of a stabilizing manager of the household. When she confronts Antúnez with the inadequacy of their marriage, he reacts sharply and lies to her. Leticia's circumstance is clearly unchanged: "la misma máscara de seda fría le disipaba vagamente los rasgos" (p. 80). Publicly, she is ideal for Antúnez. "Yo no tengo problemas con mi mujer. Es una buena

muchacha, comprensiva, sencilla; la clase de mujer que a uno le conviene en la vida" (p. 121). Their sexual encounter on the night of Antúnez's suicide comes about only because of Pastorita's absence, is forced, and is devoid of anything but physical meaning. "Trató de escapar y la aferró por el talle" (p. 192).

While Pastorita and Leticia and their relationships with Antúnez dominate the first half of the novel, they scarcely appear in the last. The focus turns to Antúnez's behavior as it moves increasingly toward more abrasive incidents, reminiscences of simpler days, and pronounced confusion. A party host says to Antúnez in the final hours of his life, "Usted es joven y lleno de porvenir" (p. 197). It is clear that Antúnez reaches a crisis point with this ironic statement. In a wider sense for him, the lie of carnival must give way to the truth of his own día de ceniza.

The supporting characters in Día de ceniza provide a backdrop for Antúnez's past and present situation. Their scant portrayal is dependent upon his selective memory which "había llegado a formar, con el tiempo, un depósito de trastos revueltos, disociados e irreconocibles" (p. 145). His associations with old friends and acquaintances are fraught with degradation and mutual boredom. They are fellow lawyers, former pensionistas and strangers in the city. As products of the metropolis, they also perpetuate its debilitating effects on other persons: "sus vidas explican la

ciudad y la ciudad explica sus vidas, en un régimen simbiótico que bajo cobertura de libertad y holgura económica, esconde una opresión carcelaria."[33] They are far from their buried dreams, failures in their success, enigmas to each other, to themselves and to Garmendia.

The alienated character dominates to a greater degree Garmendia's La mala vida. Not only is the protagonist unknown by name, and thus literally no one and everyone, but he is also surrounded by individuals who rise no higher than the routine, the mediocre and even the contemptible. In freely revealing himself, he likewise reveals "una humanidad disminuida, gris, algo anacrónica, de pequeños burócratas y comerciantes arruinados, despojos de una farándula radial fracasada, etc."[34]

In an interview with Emir Rodríguez Monegal, Garmendia himself characterizes the unnamed protagonist of this work as "un anti-héroe, personaje pequeño, menudo y sin relieves personales."[35] He narrates in the first-person, and the result is a spontaneous, candid and intimate confession. Since the reader is witness to the writer's attempt to create a novel, he gradually comes to some notion of character and personality. Brushwood points out that "puesto que el narrador y el protagonista son una misma persona, las técnicas narrativas sirven, en parte, para caracterizar al protagonista."[36]

He describes himself as indolent, lymphatic, patient

and pseudo-intellectual.[37] The subsequent digressions and pointless revelations, while intended to provide "un mejor entendimiento entre nosotros" (p. 31), reveal instead a life of emptiness, boredom and meaninglessness. His relationships with people are generally sterile and superficial, and he ridicules himself: "Por las noches, solo en mi cuarto, me reía de mí mismo, pensando: 'qué comedia estoy representando, qué mierda'" (p. 154). For him, life is a series of experiences and encounters leading nowhere. His attempts to establish an orderly world lead to irrational obsessions, as with Level's wart, and they are further evidence of his profound anxiety.[38]

The nameless protagonist's fascination with things extends as well to persons. They are part of the incessant cataloguing which characterizes him as an alienated being in a metropolis frantic with activity. Elisa Lerner sees this as an implied critique of Venezuelan society. As a culture laden and preoccupied with things, it reflects the depersonalization of modern life.

> En La mala vida, los personajes también parecen pertenecer a esa mordaz catalogación (a esa mordaz recordación) que hace Garmendia y es por eso que, prácticamente, no tienen vida interior. Igualmente son objetos.[39]

Nearly all the characters mentioned by the protagonist-narrator pass from the scene as soon as his mind recalls yet another. His office colleagues, Stela, Clarisa, Level and Jimmy, scarcely penetrate one another's existence

since each is "dueño de su espacio" (p. 9). Obdulio, el primo Juan, mamá, tía Jacinta and Nicolasa are random and uneven memories from his childhood. Parrita, Iturriza, don Pepe Cisneros, Guerra, Manrique, doña Rafaela, La China, Sabina, Villa, Lola and Angelino are of momentary importance in a more recent past. The narrator's reaction to his acquaintances at one point easily applies to all:

> Sabía que un momento después iban a desaparecer para siempre de ese pequeño lugar de mi existencia que durante algunos días habitaron sin llegar a ser más que sombras, contornos apenas rellenados por algunos trazos sin vigor (p. 101).

Only two characters achieve some degree of substance: Beltrán and Aurora. His affair with Aurora approximates a sincerity otherwise totally lacking for other persons. She has an effect on him as he temporarily alters his dressing habits, but his return to the normal, shortly thereafter, is indicative of his inability to sustain a meaningful relationship. "Esa noche, en mi cuarto, no pensé en Aurora ni sentí esa aproximación tibia y aromática de nueva vida que me fortalecía en aquellos días extraños" (p. 215). He never hears of her nor mentions her name again.

Beltrán seems to permeate his thinking as the memory of this friend resurfaces throughout the work. He represents perhaps what could have been in the protagonist's life. Though many of the hours spent with Beltrán are indicative of the hero's aimlessness and vagabondage, his persistence in reminding the narrator of a creative potential

haunts him after Beltrán's incomprehensible suicide. Beltrán's literary interests lead him to comment on characterization in a novel in terms precisely those of Garmendia:

> Piensa ahora en sus cerebros: son máquinas de mecanismo tan rudimentario, que el más lerdo aprendería en seguida a manejarlas. Lo increíble sigue siendo que a pesar de su mezquina composición, vivan y se conduzcan razonablemente en multitud de situaciones. Uno puede verlos bajar una escalera, atravesar las habitaciones, subir a un coche o reprender a un criado y tiene cierta envidia de ellos que andan tan livianos y se pasean seguros entre las líneas de la imprenta, viviendo y muriendo sin dolor y sin prisa (p. 140).

The work which the narrator-protagonist eventually writes seems to follow Beltrán's admonition to depict characters directly from life, as part of no plot or at least unaware that any exists.

The characters of La mala vida, as seen through the distilling viewpoint of the central figure, are a monotonous parade of common men and women caught in the routine and the mundane. The writer consistently describes them in physical terms and characterizes them perfunctorily or allows their words and actions to provide a limited portrayal.

> Personaje coherente y sensible averiguador de vidas y hechos, pespuntea hasta lo íntimo todos los detalles de las vidas afines que lo rodean y lo identifican como ser existente. Su heroísmo no es otro. Es centro captativo de aquellas cosas que emanan de los demás como materia energética para su propia supervivencia, que se traslada a una acción constante, y se convierte en materia vital para la novela.[40]

The symbolism of excrement in this work is the ultimate confession. Rama suggests various possible interpretations such as

> . . . los fracasos en que se han tornado las ambiciones de antaño, podrá ser 'la pérdida del reino que estaba para mí', podrá ser la esterilidad, el vacío, la desintegración del punto focal de la conciencia que aún resistía a la cosificación.[41]

In the closing lines of the novel-in-the-making, it is clear the "dúo fantástico de nuestras carcajadas" (p. 259) is resounding testimony of a contempt for life. The impertinent Levels, the ludicrous Obdulios, the ridiculous don Pepes, the frustrated Beltráns, the embittered Parritas and the detested Monteros will continue to form and be formed by an interminable mala vida.

Garmendia's most recent novel, Los pies de barro, portrays the protagonist, Miguel Angel, as a confused, eccentric individual in search of some semblance of personal identity. As in La mala vida, the writer is also the protagonist in an incoherent and apparently chaotic first-person account of a fragmented reality, of violence and love.

Miguel Angel's turbulent affair with Graciela parallels his own personal struggle for identity. Their dialogs provide a framework for much of the novel. A university student, Graciela submits to his attentions only to realize finally the hopelessness of their relationship. An initial, sensual attraction later weakens, leaving only the truth of a fundamental lack of mutual understanding. "Pero siempre estuve clara en una cosa: nunca anduviste conmigo, conmigo, con esta cosa que soy yo, lo que sea."[42] Their inability to communicate is reflected in Graciela's ironic

use of her pet name for Miguel Angel, loco.

> Cuando te digo loco siento que eres algo, te siento conmigo, me gustas. Cuando estoy sola y digo loco, loco, siento que te tengo cariño, que no quiero dejarte. Pero seamos francos; tú y yo no hemos hecho nada más que tropezarnos uno con otro: bun. Nos separamos y bun bun; pero ninguno ha hecho el esfuercito de apartarse para que el otro pase (p. 218).

His disillusionment in love reflects a similar inability to find himself. "La fatiga, más que una fatiga física un aplastante tedio interior, me anula" (p. 276).

In writing a novel, Miguel Angel seeks to bring together the evidences of his life. The result is an array of relationships and events with little or no center of meaning. "He escrito últimamente mucho más de lo que había creído en un principio y, sin embargo, lo admito, nada ha pasado todavía" (p. 111). "Pasa el tiempo y lo que queda es una cosa confusa detrás de uno, un montón de cosas embrolladas" (p. 129). He describes his writing not as a task but as an attempt, a necessity, at the least, an act.

He concludes that he "estaba formado de piezas ensambladas y había caído en una incoherencia llena de vulgaridad y desaliento" (p. 256). Using the same image, he reflects further on his identity-novel:

> Finalmente he comprendido que me encuentro ante un almacenamiento de piezas seccionadas de algún imaginario organismo principal, las cuales, si bien siguen siendo capaces de conservar alguna autonomía de movimiento, éste no consigue hacer memoria de lo que pudo ser un probable impulso inicial (p. 245).

Miguel Angel seems to manipulate parts of a vast puzzle

without ever being able to place all the pieces into an identifiable whole.

The backdrop which the city of Caracas provides is a reflection of Miguel Angel's character, though causal relationships are more subtle than in Garmendia's earlier works. Though he possesses creative potential, he finds no satisfaction in his materialistic work in the advertising world. He feels intellectually superior and thus alienated in most of his associations.

> Si supiera que en este momento le salto como un tigre, le clavo los diez dedos en las greñas y lo sacudo sin misericordia hasta hacerlo llorar, gritándole: "¡Qué le pasa de qué, imbécil, qué le pasa de qué!" (p. 8).

The interconnected yet seemingly unrelated aspects of his life grow, like the city of Caracas, in all directions without order or plan, a massive root expanding relentlessly (p. 81).

Julio, an artist-friend, Reinaldo, his business partner, Pancho and El Tuerto are secondary characters whose lives thread in and out of Miguel Angel's narrative. As such, they exist only in episodic fashion, never touching directly his inner self. Though many concrete facts concerning their lives are revealed by way of Miguel Angel's random thoughts, "nos sitúa en último análisis en un plano diluido, donde caras y vivencias se borran, van y vienen como fantasmas al fondo de nuestras percepciones."[43]

Edith characterizes Miguel Angel in an ironic

statement: "-Usted es admirable, Miguel. Me imagino que no tendrá problemas de ninguna naturaleza. . . . Adoro la gente como usted. Los encuentro increíbles, enteramente fuera de este mundo" (p. 236). Her terse analysis is true to the extent that he knows himself intimately and particularizes no isolated problems. However, the narrator-protagonist "no es capaz de definir su existencia. Los fragmentos de su realidad nunca se juntan."[44] In his violent death, there is only a false meaning and identity for him.

Though the setting, plot and character names vary in Garmendia's novels, it is apparent that he recreates the hero in Venezuelan narrative. For Garmendia, he is the expression of modern life, an alienated and frustrated being caught in the ugliness, isolation and mediocrity of the contemporary city.

The Garmendian character is an end in himself: he represents no idealized type, he carries no political or sociological banners. He has no spiritual dimension and is a stranger to love without physical possession. While the reader may come to know his actions in even the most private of situations, he perceives no motivations nor comes to easy generalizations offered by glib authorial intrusion.

He is an expressionistic hero, a real person viewed subjectively and distorted. Garmendia discards the mask imposed by tradition and represents both universal and individual realities. This new hero is complex, independent

and without anchor. The events of his life defy tidy classifications. As Miguel Angel says in Los pies de barro,

> Las cosas que pasan en la vida de uno no tienen por qué tener un desenlace convincente como si tuviéramos que servirnos de ellas después para hacer un relato entretenido o sorprendente y dejar encantado a todo el mundo (p. 297).

Uslar Pietri, in a scene from his Estación de Máscaras, offers this important concept for the contemporary writer:

> Ya no somos el país rural de hacendados y peones, de guerrilleros y leguleyos que sigue apareciendo en nuestras novelas. Nos hemos convertido en otra cosa y hay que reflejar eso en los libros.[45]

Garmendia's response in portraying man without a mask is uncompromising and profound.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

[1]Juan Liscano, Panorama de la literatura venezolana actual (Caracas: Publicaciones Españolas, S. A., 1973, p. 132.

[2]P. Pla y Beltrán, "Los pequeños seres," Revista Nacional de Cultura, No. 136 (noviembre-diciembre, 1960), p. 144.

[3]David I. Grossvogel, Limits of the Novel (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 279.

[4]The Novel of the Future (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), p. 193.

[5]Emir Rodríguez Monegal, Narradores de esta América (Buenos Aires: Editorial Alfa Argentina, 1974), p. 33.

[6]Angel Rama, "Garmendia y la nueva literatura venezolana," Casa de las Américas, No. 54 (mayo-junio, 1969), p. 49.

[7]Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "The New Latin-American Novel," Books Abroad, XLIV, 1 (Winter, 1970), p. 46.

[8]La novela en Venezuela (Buenos Aires: Publicaciones de la Embajada de Venezuela, n.d.), p. 23.

[9]Uslar Pietri, pp. 37-38.

[10]Rodríguez Monegal, Narradores de esta América, p. 34.

[11]Juan Loveluck, "Notas sobre la novela hispanoamericana actual," Hispania, XLVIII, No. 2 (May, 1965), p. 221.

[12]"La antinovela en Hispanoamérica," Revista Hispánica Moderna, XXXIV, Nos. 3-4 (julio-octubre, 1968), p. 525.

[13]Rama, p. 50.

[14]"La nueva novela latinoamericana," México en la cultura (Suplemento de ¡Siempre!) No. 128 (29-7-1964), p. 15.

[15]Man's Changing Mask (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), p. 303.

[16]Aspects of the Novel (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1955), p. 47.

[17]William Barrett, Irrational Man (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1962), pp. 61-62.

[18]Ernesto Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 1964), p. 80.

[19]Nin, p. 193.

[20]Grossvogel, p. 280.

[21]"Cinco novelas de Salvador Garmendia: El impacto sobre los hábitos perceptivos," Hispania, Vol. 60, No. 4 (December, 1977), p. 884.

[22]The Spanish American Novel: A Twentieth Century Survey (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975), p. 244.

[23]Salvador Garmendia, Los pequeños seres (Montevideo: ARCA Editorial, 1967), p. 11. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[24]Juan Liscano, "En el umbral de una nueva narrativa," Papel Literario de El Nacional (10-9-1959), p. 8.

[25]C. Rebolledo, "Los pequeños seres," Papel Literario de El Nacional (27-8-1959), p. 3.

[26]Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda, "Salvador Garmendia," Nueva Narrativa Hispanoamericana, 4 (enero-septiembre), p. 292.

[27]Salvador Garmendia, Los habitantes (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C. A., 1968), p. 21. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[28]María Rosa Alonso, "Los habitantes," Humanidades, No. 9, Año III, Tomo III (1961), p. 347.

[29]Manuel Caballero, "Uslar Pietri, Garmendia: 'Two Nations,'" Cultura universitaria, XC (enero-marzo, 1966), p. 29.

[30]José Antonio Castro, "Día de ceniza," Recensiones, No. 1 (n.d.), p. 51.

[31]Salvador Garmendia, Día de ceniza (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C. A., 1968), p. 85. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[32]Brushwood, "Cinco novelas de Salvador Garmendia," p. 887.

[33]Angel Rama, Salvador Garmendia y la narrativa informalista (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1975), p. 64.

[34]Emir Rodríguez Monegal, El arte de narrar (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C. A., 1968), p. 163.

[35]El arte de narrar, p. 163.

[36]"Cinco novelas de Salvador Garmendia," p. 888.

[37]Salvador Garmendia, La mala vida (Montevideo: ARCA Editorial, 1968), p. 11. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[38]James C. Coleman, Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life, 2d ed. (Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1976), p. 232.

[39]Elisa Lerner, "Nuestra sociedad radial en Salvador Garmendia," Imagen, No. 44 (15-3-1969), pp. 6-7.

[40]Osvaldo Larrazábal Henríquez, Diez novelas venezolanas (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C. A., 1972), p. 43.

[41]Rama, Salvador Garmendia y la narrativa informalista, p. 74.

[42]Salvador Garmendia, Los pies de barro (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C. A., 1973), p. 229. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[43]Gabriel Jiménez Emán, "Los pies de barro," Revista Nacional de Cultura, No. 217-18 (noviembre-diciembre, 1974), p. 137.

[44]Brushwood, "Cinco novelas de Salvador Garmendia," p. 888.

[45](Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, S. A., 1964), p. 152.

CHAPTER IV

SALVADOR GARMENDIA AND THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Garmendia's elaboration of contemporary themes and the portrayal of a new hero are inextricably related to an essential change in the creative process or technique of the Venezuelan novel. A departure from the structure of the traditional Latin-American novel provides a more adequate setting for the new reality of Garmendia's generation. Themes centered on universal human crises acted out by anti-heroes both require and produce a fundamental deviation from the comparatively simplistic, nineteenth-century approach to the narrative. Early in his literary career, Garmendia speaks of the necessity of adopting appropriate methods in his determination to begin a new direction for an irresolute Venezuelan novel.

> En general, al empezar Los pequeños seres mi planteamiento más fuerte, es decir mi mayor angustia y temor frente a la novela era el desarrollo técnico; la construcción de la novela, era lo que más me interesaba y ante lo cual me sentía más desvalido.[1]

The Garmendian creative process is an original adaptation of European and American techniques which seeks to depict

the internalizing of contemporary reality. It achieves a success, as yet unsurpassed, in altering structure in the Venezuelan novel and the relationship between reader and narrator.

Prior to the advent of the new narrative, the Latin-American novel reflects an Aristotelian order. A rational view of reality prevails in which plot develops from beginning to end in a definable, external time-frame. Narration moves chronologically and demonstrates cause and effect, being carefully controlled by an omniscient and omnipresent creator. In Venezuela and also outside the continent, Rómulo Gallegos represents the highest level of literary achievement in Latin America during this era. Arturo Uslar Pietri summarizes his novelistic structure in the following terms:

> Se hace patente el estudiado equilibrio de la composición, una especie de pauta de simetría simplista, que lo lleva a disponer de los caracteres y las situaciones dentro de un elaborado sistema de contrastes y correspondencias y a ordenar la novela dentro de una estructura rígida.[2]

The definitive break with this tradition in the forties by Jorge Luis Borges, Miguel Angel Asturias, Alejo Carpentier and Agustín Yáñez, when seen in retrospect, is a period of transition.[3] More radical approaches to the structure of the novel occur in the works of Juan Carlos Onetti, Ernesto Sábato, Julio Cortázar and Juan Rulfo. Their contributions, according to Emir Rodríguez Monegal, bring to

more recent writers such as José Donoso, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Mario Vargas Llosa and Salvador Garmendia a heightened attention to the roles of language and structure.[4] This change in structural perspective from the traditional to the new narrative is based not merely on a younger generation's weariness with an older methodology but on precise assumptions in the modern writer's point of view.

If in characterization the modern writer does away with the masks of conventionality, in structure he eliminates the artifice of the primitive novel in a convincing portrayal of modern reality. Since the fundamental bases of good and evil are no longer clear-cut and persons' actions involve more than conscious, active experience, life does not move in a neatly organized pattern. In seeking to reveal the true character beneath the surface, the new narrative rejects a moralistic naïveté, turns inward to discover obscure mental and emotional states and, as a result, creates a new structural definition of plot which transforms the novel. While the earlier writer carefully structures an ordered universe, the contemporary writer sets out to formalize chaos. "Es decir, que la novela cambia de formas, pero no las pierde."[5]

These changes affect in a radical way the relationship between writer and reader.

> El escritor debe hacer vivir al lector en el mundo de ficción que ha creado, y que, no siendo el del orden

> tempo-espacial objetivo, normal, común, requiere nuevas técnicas. . . . El punto en que todos esos hilos, como sueltos, se entretejen, se anudan, al que todos esos caminos cruzados o medio laberínticos convergen y se centralizan--y allí adquieren su unidad y sentido, componiendo una vasta sinfonía instrumental de motivos--, es la conciencia del lector mismo, el autopersonaje ideal de la novela.[6]

The writer ceases to lead the reader from event to crisis and final resolution. He draws the reader into the chaotic world of the mind and forces him to experience a complex reality along with the writer. In Cortázar's Rayuela, Morelli pictures the reader of the new narrative as an accomplice, a fellow-traveler:

> El novelista romántico quiere ser comprendido por sí mismo o a través de sus héroes; el novelista clásico quiere enseñar, dejar una huella en el camino de la historia.
>
> Posibilidad tercera: la de hacer del lector un cómplice, un camarada de camino. . . . Así el lector podría llegar a ser copartícipe y copadeciente de la experiencia por la que pasa el novelista, en el mismo momento y en la misma forma.[7]

William Barrett describes at least three characteristics of the experience in which the modern writer and reader coparticipate: the flattening out of all planes, the flattening out of climaxes and the flattening of values.[8] In the first, time becomes relative and exists, as in Henri Bergson's distinction, as both l'heure durée and l'heure réelle. The writer compresses near and far and utilizes flashbacks, slow-ups and rapid time changes in an attempt to create simultaneity.

The flattening of climaxes is, for the writer of the

new narrative, the best portrayal of antiheroic characters and the apparent absurdity of human existence. For him, there are no lofty issues, no contrived dramas. There is, instead, an alternating "power and dullness, beauty and sordidness, comedy and pathos where movement is always horizontal . . ."[9] The disorder which results is a calculated and deliberate insistence upon an experience devoid of significant rising or descending action.

In the flattening of values, contemporary literature makes no distinction between the important and the unimportant. Just as the human mind accepts all stimuli, making no judgmental selection, so the new narrative admits attention to both the microscopic and the macroscopic.

> La novela de hoy se propone fundamentalmente una indagación del hombre, y para lograrlo el escritor debe recurrir a todos los instrumentos que se lo permitan, sin que le preocupen la coherencia y la unicidad, empleando a veces un microscopio y otras veces un aeroplano.[10]

Through the random thoughts of stream of consciousness and by means of the techniques of cinematographics, the reader participates in the creative act by effecting a synthesis.

In Venezuela, early experimentation with new approaches to the narrative is scarce and, because of isolation and years of political oppression, significant changes come very late when compared to developments in other Latin-American literatures. Juan Liscano describes the eventual and dramatic rupture which occurs through the cultural manifestoes of Sardio and novelists like Garmendia.

> Así se pensó hacer antiliteratura. Libertar el lenguaje de su sumisión a la cultura y al sistema. La escritura "noble" procedía, según este punto de vista, de la burguesía. Ahora se quería escribir como se hablaba. Y, con ese lenguaje sin adorno, penetrar en lo humano, sin limitaciones. Expresar los móviles secretos, las obsesiones sexuales, la gama compleja de las reacciones humanas. También aceptar el fracaso, la frustración, la mediocridad, la medianía. Con ello se decapitaba al héroe, producto de una literatura anterior exaltadora y encubridora. El absurdo, la falta de sentido de las acciones humanas, la irreverencia, el nihilismo, la quiebra de la racionalidad, la fealdad, el humor, entraban a formar parte de nuestra literatura, hasta ayer edificante o inspirada en la estética. Se trataba, fundamentalmente, de una reacción feroz contra la burguesía y el capitalismo, contra su ética y su ideología, sus normas, sus ideales (traicionados mil veces), su respetabilidad inmerecida. Con medio siglo de atraso nuestra literatura descubría la iconoclastia, la crisis del racionalismo y la antiliteratura.[11]

Since Garmendia prefers to express his ideas by implementing them in the novel and short story, his comments regarding literary criticism are restricted to conversations such as those published by Emir Rodríguez Monegal in his El arte de narrar.[12] In addressing the question of structure, he admits to the strengths of the traditional formula which dominates the first half-century in Venezuela, but expresses an incompatability between his purposes and the mold which Gallegos establishes so firmly in the previous generation. "Aun cuando pudieran ser ejemplos perfectos, a mí no me convenían para mi trabajo. De modo que fue ésa quizá mi mayor preocupación y mi mayor trabajo al empezar a escribir" (p. 150).

Sardio's goals for a Venezuelan literary renaissance include the assimilation of contemporary techniques as

represented by European, North-American and Latin-American leaders of the new narrative. Garmendia becomes for this generation one of the first, along with Adriano González León, and he is, undoubtedly, the most prolific of the group.[13] While he is compared to nouveau roman writers in his approximation to the physical world, he generally prefers to be evaluated in terms of his uniqueness.

> Con respecto a la técnica, tendría que decirte que para mí la técnica, el hallazgo de una forma para escribir, en un escritor es producto ante todo de su experiencia individual y por eso, hasta cierto punto, resulta intrasmisible en su totalidad (Rodríguez Monegal interview, p. 151).

His five novels develop from early experimentation to a relatively sophisticated level and demonstrate consistently Garmendia's determination for reform and the standard of excellence which he sets for it.

Los pequeños seres, Garmendia's first novel, is in many ways bold yet cautious. As his initiation into the new novel, it represents a first step not totally experimental. "Pudiera decirse que Garmendia, en cierto modo, oscila entre una modalidad lineal y otra experimental, sin asumir ninguna de ellas en forma definitiva y excluyente."[14] The work, while not divided into numbered and titled chapters, is set off in fourteen distinct units placed in relatively clear, chronological order.

Although it follows the psychological trauma of a man incapable of escaping "una yuxtaposición de contingencias

absurdas de las que nunca podré extraer un total convincente y esclarecedor," its extended series of monologues is fortified with certain clues to aid the reader.[15] He makes effective use of italics, ellipses, quotation marks and directions given either by speakers or narrator, such as "Había perdido el camino y se encontraba desorientado" (p. 44), or "De pronto se encontró en la acera" (p. 89).

Biographical fragments replace a coherent plot structure and, although the novel spans a day's time, a limited use of multiple time emphasizes a recounting of scattered events. Mateo's inability to gather them into a meaningful whole is thus more graphic to the reader. The skillful interplay of normality and absurdity also forcefully portrays the protagonist's trauma. Garmendia manipulates the characteristic of eventfulness, moving smoothly from one level of consciousness to another, "cortando y reemprendiendo constantemente el hilo o el nudo del relato. . . ."[16] The narrative balances between third-person narration, soliloquy and interior monologue.

It is clear, even from the first page of the novel, that structure is an integral part of the message which Garmendia intends to give. Mateo, a victim of the routine and boredom of modern city life, suffers from a deeply personal crisis made evident partially from his nearly neurotic self-questioning and doubt as communicated by incessant soliloquy and interior monologue. "Al momento

brotaron las palabras y retuvo la voz en su interior todo cuanto le fue posible" (p. 11). As his mind skips from one thought to another, structure reflects a corresponding shift in the text.

The third division, depicting the wake for Mateo's superior, is particularly representative in this respect. The scene begins with general comments in the third-person regarding the setting. Various comments from Mateo's colleagues then follow at random. Speakers are not identified by name, only as "someone," "a voice," "a face" or other anonymous tags. When he escapes to another room to avoid speaking to anyone, he finds himself in the middle of the multiple conversations of a group of older women. Making a concerted effort not to listen, he draws his attention to an interior reality. As his wife, Amelia, begins to speak, the type face changes into italics indicating the temporal and spatial switch. His thoughts turn to the first position he held in the Company. Italics again identify another day and time, returning immediately to the previous conversation with Amelia.

Suddenly, an associate's voice interrupts Mateo's concentration. "Mateo se volvió al momento, sacudido por la repentina aparición de la voz encima de su hombro" (p. 31). Garmendia records Mateo's more important thoughts instead of the obvious casual response to the intruder's greeting, utilizing parentheses and quotation marks to indicate

interior monologue: "¿Tendré yo esa misma expresión en mi cara?" (p. 31). As the conversation persists and Mateo's need to be alone grows more intense, another level of consciousness interrupts the speaker: "Quiero pensar. Debo comenzar ahora mismo. Este hombre me interrumpe" (p. 34). Finally free of the man, Mateo returns to the process in interiorization. Garmendia, in a sense, prepares the reader for Mateo's compulsive project, a state of mind which establishes a pattern for the balance of the work:

> Pero los hechos, las situaciones que lograba aislar en un momento, no se avenían a su propósito y, en cambio regresaban continuamente hacia ellos mismos como atraídos por una cuerda elástica (p. 34).

The section ends as the funeral party makes its way to the cemetery. An italicized conclusion pictures Amelia routinely busy at home, oblivious to her husband's desperate search.

Toward the end of the work, Garmendia demonstrates the degree to which Mateo's crisis has deteriorated: an entire division describes the city in a four-page paragraph. He portrays anonymous characters, pictures the sights typical of a vast metropolis and evokes memories of sounds and repugnant odors. Its tempo and tone reflect the depth of Mateo's alienation while avoiding the notion or artificiality of a literal climax. Though he seeks to reconstruct his past "de manera que todo el conjunto mostrara una ilación y un sentido como ocurre con las escenas de un libro" (p. 63), the novel ends in irresolution.

> Mateo comienza dibujándose con la primera palabra para concluir en la última como gran coordenada entregando los vértices de toda superficie que no tiene otra posibilidad sino la de volcar sobre lo ajeno interioridad global, total, arraigada a la vez a los mil bordes sobresalientes de la estructura novelística.[17]

Mateo's interior journey ends after he can no longer continue in his obsession for reiteration of past events. The attempt he makes to structure a unified whole seems to fall of its own accord, having been found to be without substance.

In his second novel, Garmendia turns from the inner workings of one man's mind to the sympathetic patterns of existence of an entire family. Los habitantes is a systematic, objective view of the father, Francisco, whose dismissal is the occasion for the novel, and the parallel lives of those who closely surround him. Though the principal subject for each of the twenty-four numbered chapters appears to be a random choice, the work is carefully structured to build an intensifying, yet horizontal, work.

In Los habitantes, Garmendia centralizes Francisco's unemployment and relates in varying degrees the individual family members' stories around that fact. Each portrayal receives similar treatment in a well-developed structural balance. While the anonymity of the title reflects a generalized viewpoint, suggesting the whole is the sum of its parts, each part casts the same closed and frustrated image as the whole. John S. Brushwood sees a deliberate movement of some of the characters toward the condition of others as

an effective unifying element. "Estas semejanzas contribuyen a la experiencia total de la novela--que todo siempre será igual."[18]

While Garmendia devotes entire chapters to a specific individual or setting, he develops Francisco's situation as a thread which surfaces from time to time throughout the work. He sets out early in the morning on a routine visit to the market only to be incriminated by a chance meeting with an old friend. It is Francisco who loses patience with his introverted daughter, Aurelia, and later chastizes Matilde and Luis. He also faces the humiliation of Engracia's attempt to borrow temporary financial relief from a family friend. In the closing lines of the last chapter, he is there as well, if only symbolically: "A intervalos, débilmente, se escuchaba un ronquido de Francisco."[19]

Theme and character are supported as well in the framing of the novel by the character of Aurelia. The text begins with a focus on her as she awakens and ends with her despondent call to Engracia after the family has gone to sleep. "Aurelia se levantó y dijo: -Hasta mañana, mamá" (p. 196). Her characterization as a quiet, retiring and unassertive person, slowly revealed in various chapters, creates a tonal structure for the entire work. Though one would expect the least from Aurelia, she is as dominant as Matilde and Luis in their frustrated aggressiveness.

Engracia's attendance at Mass in Chapter Nine also demonstrates the utilization of closed structure in an attempt to convey a notion of the family's hopeless existence. It begins as she and her two daughters are seated in the sanctuary and proceeds with a brief narration in the third-person. As Engracia's mind begins to wander in the confusion of becoming oriented to the Mass, the voice of her madrina, doña Hildegardis, momentarily penetrates her reality. Brought back to her senses by the pungent odor of incense, she repeats aloud a portion of the ritual. Quotation marks then indicate interior monologue and a return to her childhood in a third-person description of life with don Alfredo and his wife. A nine-page narration continues outlining background information on Engracia's family, the tragic death of her sister, Ludmila, their financial ruin after don Alfredo's death and her courtship with Francisco. Only the furious sounding of church bells brings her back to the ritual of the service where, with tear-filled eyes, she utters a pathetic prayer for Francisco as she stares into space. Garmendia achieves a slow pace with a contrasting inner tension because of his attention to structure.[20]

Changes in time and space are not limited, however, to obvious instances of day-dreaming as in Engracia's case. Garmendia accomplishes subtle movement in individual consciousness by means of corresponding shifts in verb

tenses. As Aurelia contemplates getting out of bed on a day of fiesta, her mind recalls an illness earlier in her life when she was confined to bed.

> Le parece que no va a levantarse en todo el día . . . ha estado enferma largo tiempo y la gente que rodea la cama la observa mostrando caras compungidas y lejanas . . . como hace muchos años: la enfermedad (p. 11).

In another instance Raúl's sister, Irene, relives a scene with her prostitute friend, María, while preparing to bathe and dress in the morning.

> Un cuerpo tropezaba en el respaldo cerca de su cabeza y en la oscuridad creyó sentir que él los recriminaba fuertemente. Por fin acabó de pintarse las uñas y sopló sobre la pintura húmeda (pp. 41-42).

When Francisco and Modesto Infante meet each other accidentally at the market, Francisco's memories of the past mingle interchangeably with the current conversation.

> En esos momentos bastaba rozar apenas el brazo de un hombre para verlo saltar y llamearle los ojos, como si una energía sofocante lo quemara por dentro. -¡Esta ronda es mía, Paulino! -¿Te acuerdas de Paulino, Modesto? (p. 58).

Raúl fantasizes a scene with Matilde as indicated in the change from conditional to imperfect tense. "Tendrían un cuarto para ellos solos, a sabiendas de todo el mundo y una cama, por supuesto. Raúl pensaba en esto y veía su propia cama, su cuarto. Los dos se desnudaban frente a frente" (p. 73).

Garmendia's attempts to allow his characters' thoughts to speak for themselves is typical of his objectivity in this work. Certain cinematographic effects help

maintain the impression of an objective, camera-like approach to reality. One example of this view is a description of a man's apparel at a distance, and later a restating of that description with more accurate detail as he comes nearer to the narrator.

> Vieron que tenía puesta una camisa roja abierta hasta la mitad del pecho y unos pantalones azules que serían de pana muy gruesa. . . . Sus pantalones eran, en efecto, de pana azul muy gruesa y la camisa roja de una tela espejeante y sedosa (pp. 106-107).

Attention to a photographic reality is obvious as Francisco takes a seat in a bar.

> Francisco observó su propia cara en el gran espejo embutido en mitad de las armaduras, entre dos columnas entorchadas. Allí estaba también la espalda y la nuca recién rasurada del dependiente (pp. 169-70).

In another instance, Luis wanders aimlessly through the neighborhood while Garmendia describes in precise detail, reflecting perhaps the nouveau roman influence in his narrative.

> Por alguna puerta asoman ángulos de butacas de colores vivos o sillones de paja raídos por los espaldares; algún paño bordado, un jarrón con forma de pescado, flores de cera y figuritas de vidrio en las repisas. En un zaguán aparece un cromo del Señor, rutilante, que muestra el corazón al aire, traspasado de aristas de plata y una mano alzada en posición de bendecir: "Dios bendiga este hogar" (p. 102).

Garmendia depicts a woman's gradual appearance on the sloping sidewalk as Francisco makes his way to the market.

> Una mujer va apareciendo en ese momento, con intermitencias, en el punto más alto de la curva: primero el busto que a la distancia se revela ancho y bulboso; en seguida, el tronco, el brazo tenso por el peso de la

> bolsa de mercado que es lo último en aparecer y que imprime un fatigoso balanceo a todo el cuerpo (p. 20).

Manuel Caballero describes Garmendia's objective approach as one which reproduces reality "fielmente--sin añadir el menor comentario, ni intentar el menor análisis que represente la presencia de una subjetividad aparte del mundo en que se desenvuelve la anécdota . . ."[21] Aurelia's collection of random family portraits is symbolic of the creative process which Garmendia adopts in Los habitantes. He gives the reader intimate, tedious and detailed glimpses of each member of the López family, each arising in the morning only to reencounter a hermetic existence. He attempts to present, within this concise period of time, an objective picture of life devoid of climaxes, planes and values. This structure, based on a slow yet unrelenting, meaningless panorama of activities, is the best characterization of the hopelessness and frustration of these trapped inhabitants.

A third novel, Día de ceniza, builds on the experiences of a central personality, Miguel Antúnez. It follows very closely the format established in Garmendia's first novel, Los pequeños seres. Miguel's search for himself and the discovery of his failure and mediocrity span a few days and twenty numbered chapters of lineal design. Though the writer stresses the forward movement and especially the element of clock time, he requires the reader to

adopt an attention to structural development to a significantly greater extent than in the two previous novels.

The emphasis in Día de ceniza is also on eventfulness and not on plot. The hero's actions correspond to the activity of Carnival yet only build on the unalterable fact of Miguel's failure to rise above his mediocre level of existence. To portray this in an effective way, Garmendia chooses to construct multiple-time situations upon an illusion of plot.

> Por medio de este recurso, la narración introduce al lector en hechos distintos del que expresa en ese momento para traerlo después al sitio de origen, tomar el hilo, y continuar con simple lógica la descripción del suceso principal.[22]

Recourse to mechanical indications of movement from one level of consciousness to another is less frequent. Although early in the novel quotation marks are used to indicate a conversation in a different time, italics do not appear in this work. The narrative provides implied directions throughout, and ellipses indicate both pauses and temporal changes. By reducing the use of such clues to structural development, however, Garmendia raises the level of sophistication and maturity in his third novel. The ease with which he narrates from one stimulus to another helps to retain reader interest as well as to lend a sense of cohesion to what otherwise would be a difficult, fragmented reiteration.

Perhaps a reason for this strength is a strong focus

on the protagonist. Although written from a third-person point of view, the work demonstrates Garmendia's tendency to identify strongly with his hero. At times, the narrator interrupts himself with the continuation of dialogue or narration, as if to assume a role for himself in the novel. "También podía pedir ahora una cerveza y aguardar allí, solo, hasta . . . Apenas las ocho."[23] This growing tendency leads to a significant change in subsequent novels.

Since a major portion of Día de ceniza consists of dialogue and third-person narrative, it is important to emphasize the complex technique which Garmendia utilizes in other parts of the work, notably in Chapter Six. Much of the character portrayal is based on the superficial, purposeless and frantic activity which Miguel displays in all interpersonal relationships. This chapter, however, portrays directly Miguel's personal struggle and thereby reveals the desperation, confusion and chaos which he experiences on a more profound level. For this reason, Garmendia chooses a comparatively unique approach to structure at this important point in the novel.

As the chapter begins, Miguel finds himself alone in the bathroom suffering both physical and emotional distress. While he is able to achieve some degree of relief from intestinal discomfort, he cannot escape the anguish which ensues during the next hour. Garmendia relates Miguel's trauma by means of rapid and numerous changes in space and

time. Heightened appeal to the senses and non sequitur allusions create a tense atmosphere and a tempo which ultimately correspond to Miguel's masturbation. His mind shifts from his naked body, to the provocative dress of a neighbor, to onion soup for lunch, to his initial arrival at home, to last night's restaurant dinner with Anzola, to the bathroom, to Carnival, to his body, to sex with Pastorita, and to orgasm. "De pronto la mano encalambrada cede, una cáscara frágil se resquebraja en su cerebro. ¡Ya basta!" (p. 64).

The pace slows at this point though his mind continues to move by association from one event to another. He relives a rendezvous with Pastorita then leaves the bathroom and takes up his conversation with Leticia. Upon mentioning the fact of meeting his lawyer-friend, Ramírez, earlier in the day, his thoughts return to the details of that accidental meeting. When he decides to rest in the bedroom, he remembers Ramírez's office, former friends in law school and their days at the Hotel Beyrut. A present-day description of Ramírez compares him to that of the past when Leticia worked as a secretary in his office. Miguel recalls his acquaintance with her at that time, their casual meetings for lunch, details of the Hotel Barcelona dining room and Dorothy Lamour and Mickey Rooney movies. An incident then follows in which Miguel forces himself on a reluctant Leticia after weeks of dating.

Suddenly he is with Ramírez, Sanabria and Sotillo during their law school days, wandering aimlessly through the streets of Caracas. Sotillo suggests a visit to La Duquesa's brothel, and they find their way to it through the darkness. It is La Duquesa's birthday, and the girls are celebrating wildly. Miguel's curiosity is aroused when he notices that Ramírez has left the room with one of them. Moments later, he finds Ramírez on the street and learns he has fled the bedroom after a disagreeable incident. They finish the evening at a bar, and Miguel awakens to his wife's shadowy image. "Se llevó el antebrazo a los ojos para volver a encontrarse en la oscuridad y regresar a sus pensamientos, pero allí sólo había quedado un murmullo confuso y dislocado" (p. 78). An argument concerning their marriage is shortlived when the telephone rings and Leticia goes to answer it.

Left alone in the darkness of the room, Miguel slips back into his semi-conscious state and finds himself as a boy at home in Barquisimeto. His family, the town with its sights, sounds and smells and his early poetry are all there. Then Leticia speaks again, and their argument continues as Miguel tries to console her and remove her doubts about their relationship. In the short period of time in Chapter Six, Miguel is troubled to the most intense level regarding his betrayal of a literary potential, "Me gusta escribir, leer" (p. 84), the conflict between marital convenience and

security and a sensual affair with a young woman, and the feeling of an irreparable loss of something essential from a distant childhood. Garmendia portrays these conflicts by utilizing an extremely complex structure reaching nearly twenty different levels of consciousness.

The creative process in Garmendia's works may be referred to as a bifocal technique. While he is able to depict a nearly photographic reality, he balances it with the nightmares and fears which plague modern man. On the one hand, he sees the minutest and least important detail, and, on the other, he portrays the extreme distress of disturbed and empty lives. Miguel's deliberately non-climactic suicide, which takes place between chapters, is a severe shock to his family and friends. Using another focus, however, one may admit it is, at least, a viable option for escape from the frustration, mediocrity and alienation of a life turned to ashes.

With the publication of La mala vida in 1968, the Garmendian narrative synthesizes the divergent creative techniques which are evident in his first three novels. This work gathers the strengths of structural approaches utilized in previous works and "trae un ámbito novedoso, testigo de los innegables avances del escritor."[24] While many characteristics of Garmendia's creative approach bear a resemblance to Los pequeños seres, Los habitantes and Día de ceniza, others demonstrate basic refinements in his narrative.

These changes bring with them important implications for structure and technique.

La mala vida, a novel considerably longer than the others, is divided into fourteen unnumbered sections. The transition between chapters may be smooth, as a continuation of the previous division, or abrupt with the narrative moving in another direction. Each section rests on its own merits and, since there is no plot, no manipulated cause and effect, each bears a striking independence from the whole. This is due, in part, to Garmendia's purpose in writing.

The most significant change in this work is that Garmendia seeks to make the reader a witness to or a participant in the composition of his writing. Composed in an intimate and casual fashion, the novel is a diary-like confessional in the first-person, and the reader is the confidant. The anonymous protagonist is the product of the congenial and fluid interrelationship of creator, narrator and hero. Virtually no distinction exists between the three.

By eliminating any differences in narrative point of view, Garmendia structures an interpretation of life which is intensely personal and subjective as well as focused in an original way. The plan of the novel reveals the protagonist's frame of mind as one which is totally open to the problem of communicating. "Más que un personaje es relator y, al actuar como tal, cumple su doble función, porque Garmendia ha sabido estructurarlo novedosamente."[25] The

incoherence and random order of things is both a reflection of the narrator's immediate experiencing, au ralenti, and the creator's unique statement about life.

The use of a first-person point of view is, likewise, a device which contributes to a more unified work. The complex structure builds around the creator-narrator-hero and achieves a stability in the egocentricity of the novel. Personalities, thoughts and events focus through one lens as he "husmea en ellas oponiéndolas y contrastándolas a lo que le sucede actualmente, sabiendo que nunca obtendrá nada, o acaso la misma, mala vida."[26] In this sense, the work is closed and circular.

Because of the subjectivity of this approach, the reader follows the writer at close proximity. Not only is he privy to the innermost thoughts and physical functions of the narrator, but he also may feel an acute dependency upon him since the next moment can mean a complete spatial and temporal change. To provide the reader with more insight into the narrative setting, the writer gives a type of theatrical aside in parentheses. These include reactions from others about which the reader has no knowledge, "risita aguda" (p. 7), his own inner thoughts, "¿Con qué dinero?" (p. 244), further conversational explanations given directly to the reader, "aunque de veras no he pensado de hilvanar un comentario vago y evasivo" (p. 251), stage directions, "Pausa" (p. 158), or simply background description, "tenía

un modo de hablar rápido y cortante, compuesto de frases breves que acababan en cerrados lotes de silencio" (p. 71).

Frequently, the writer pauses in his narration to speak directly to the reader concerning certain problems in the creation of a literary work. For example:

> Al llegar a este punto de lo que, usando de cierta benevolencia podría empezar a llamar mi historia, deseo poner en claro de una vez, si esto fuera del todo posible, algunos aspectos comprendidos, según creo, dentro del asunto general.[27]
>
> Viéndolo bien -esto es terreno aparte- he dejado acumular hasta ahora demasiadas cosas, sin atenerme a lo que podría ser un orden previsto y regular.
> No es nada fácil contar una historia y mucho menos la propia historia; porque uno llega y se pregunta a la mitad, ¿dónde está el asunto, verdaderamente?, y de seguro se queda sin respuesta (p. 92).
>
> . . . y llego hasta sentarme en la cama y verla descansar en una esquina de la mesa, junto a los libros que también fueron de Beltrán y dos ejemplares que aún conservo de aquella revista de la cual les hablaré alguna vez, si es que llega el momento (p. 102).
>
> Tengo, sí, a mi favor y a plena libertad, el recurso de abordar el relato a mi manera, con toda la insidia, deslealdad y molicie de que soy capaz (p. 191).
>
> Aurora se aproxima peligrosamente y ello me obliga a refrenar mis ímpetus. Por consideración a mí mismo (y a ustedes, quizás), debo mostrarme cauto y previsivo (p. 200).
>
> Regreso al hilo de la historia, para recordar que después del almuerzo, que no hice como de costumbre en la pensión sino en un pequeño restaurante del centro, vagué un poco por las calles vacías, y sin premeditarlo, volví al lugar de que hablábamos (p. 207).

In all these passages, there is coparticipation with the reader and a sense of camaraderie implied by the narrator's tone.

A further development unique to La mala vida is Garmendia's use of a type of structural montage. This technique, characterized by a continual flow of thought, leads smoothly from one distinct plane to another. While Garmendia achieves this only briefly or in restricted passages in his previous works, he builds the entire frame of La mala vida around the protagonist's memory flow. This creative process abolishes the notion of clock time, even while referring to it often, and slips easily from one level to another. Although the work as a whole assumes the reader's simultaneous participation, one particular passage is exemplary of his technique. In it, the narration moves from a scene in which the protagonist wanders through an area of the city known for its houses of prostitution, to a scene with a prostitute during his adolescence, to his hiding in a bathroom during his childhood after breaking a vase, to his impotence with the prostitute, to the transformation of his uncle's belt into an erection, to the funeral scene prepared for his dead mother, to his ultimate failure with the prostitute and, finally, to a street scene where he urinates, with his eyes closed, behind a pile of trash. "Al abrirlos, tras de saborear a mi gusto aquella oscuridad llena de hervores, mi malacrianza apuntaba gozosamente al cielo" (p. 242). Angel Rama describes such a technique as

> . . . una pasmosa capacidad para manejar libremente la materia narrativa fluyendo en el tiempo, en las situaciones, en los sentimientos y las imágenes acumuladas,

> con impecable rigor y a la vez con una desgarrada manera de ensamblar los más altos valores y las más inconfesables acciones hasta encontrar su punto de articulación.[28]

La mala vida reveals a new level of structural maturity in Garmendia's narrative. Although the work is highly structuralized, it moves with pleasing naturalness and a sensation of continuity without obvious technical manipulation. Both reader and writer come full-circle in their realization of the contemptibility of life, but both escape momentarily through an adventure in remembering, due to the acuity of human memory.

Los pies de barro, Garmendia's latest novel, represents the culmination of his efforts in the genre. It is the closest that Garmendia comes to the sentiment for antiliterature in the modern Venezuelan narrative. He appears to parallel closely the creative process which Edouard espouses to Sophroniska in André Gide's Les Faux-Monnayeurs.

> Pour moi, je voudrais ne pas couper du tout. Comprenez-moi: je voudrais tout y faire entrer, dans ce roman. Pas de coup de ciseaux pour arrêter, ici plutôt que là, sa substance. Depuis plus d'un an que j'y travaille, il ne m'arrive rien que je n'y verse, et que je n'y veuille faire entrer: ce que je vois, ce que je sais, tout ce que m'apprend la vie des autres et la mienne. . . .[29]

Los pies de barro is one of Venezuela's first examples of the juego of the new narrative. Like an abstract painting, it attempts to portray the chaos and disorientation associated with modern urban life. To accomplish this, Garmendia adopts extreme technical and structural devices.

If La mala vida is a montage, Los pies de barro is a structural pastiche. Held together very loosely by a recounting of the relationship between Miguel Angel and Graciela, the work presents the unconnected fragments and unrelated events of a multi-faceted existence. It mirrors María Teresa Babín's description of the new novel: "Lo trascendente del arte nuevo de hacer novelas consiste en la odisea del vivir confuso, en la maraña de las tumultuosas urbes modernas, devoradoras y despiadadas."[30]

Utilizing a creative process similar to that of La mala vida, Garmendia, Miguel Angel and the protagonist share one identity. The reader finds himself in the midst of the novel which Miguel Angel is composing. Written in the first-person, the work moves freely within the triangle of author, narrator and hero. Garmendia's purpose seems to be to establish a relationship between writer and reader as intimate as that maintained in the creative triangle. The emphasis is on a response to immediate stimuli resulting in the diminution of plot development. The reader no longer experiences an engaging cause and effect story but, instead, senses the overwhelming tendency to incoherence without apparent concern for the elimination of the peripheral or the extraneous.

The reality of this novel is a wide range of personalities, events and relationships. It is the accumulation of various environments and experiences. Among them are

incidents of urban guerrilla warfare, Miguel Angel's immediate circle of friends and their interaction with each other, instructions and specifications for an automatic rifle, details concerning Miguel Angel's work for an advertising agency, anonymous dialogues, the transcription of a radio boxing match, fragments from newspapers and magazines, the description of a visit to the laundromat and an excerpt from an eighteenth-century ecclesiastical document urging abstinence from certain dangerous drugs found in the New World.

Changes in time and space are abrupt and may offer some difficulty to the casual reader. Garmendia utilizes punctuation, italics, spacing and indentation to indicate some of these. He continues to converse directly with the reader, expressing again certain problems in constructing a novel, such as "me había propuesto hacer un capítulo entero sobre esa calle," "No voy a contar una palabra más de esto. Se acabó. Ya me ha cargado demasiado este asunto y encima me costó un trabajo bárbaro escribirlo," and "He escrito últimamente mucho más de lo que había creído en un principio y, sin embargo, lo admito, nada ha pasado todavía."[31]

Parenthetical monologues also provide another type of communication between writer and reader. Some enlarge on a statement just made, some are a resumé of a conversation not included in the narrative, others are descriptions of reactions from persons involved in dialogue, "aquí entorna

los ojos" (p. 9), his thoughts regarding a concurrent action, or memories which suddenly come to his mind. By using this technique, Garmendia allows for the natural impurity of free association and seeks to reflect such normal intrusions. They add, likewise; to the sensation of spontaneity and contribute to the psychological build-up of disjointed thoughts so essential to characterization.

The numerous characters who appear and disappear throughout the work are an important part of Garmendia's structural approach. Gabriel Jiménez Emán sees his use of dialogues and the constant procession of persons as factors which contribute to the unique flow of the novel. "Los diálogos van determinando la estructura de la obra a partir de una relación espontánea, libre, sin trabas de esquemas preconcebidos ni rígidos esqueletos teóricos."[32] While people and their speech provide a framework for the narrative, however, they also lend to the growing sense of alienation for, like the accumulation of objects around Miguel Angel, they inspire a degree of contemptibility as in his encounter with Cacique. "Hasta el tono de mi voz sonaba a falso y despreciable" (p. 256).

Los pies de barro, like Los habitantes and La mala vida, is closed and circular in its construction. Brushwood points out that the work has as its beginning and ending two scenes reminiscent of Jimmy's ultimate expression of contempt for life in La mala vida.

> Cierto que todavía no había pensado en largarme ni nada, aunque se me ocurrió, de pasada, que podía ir al baño porque imaginé una especie de alivio en poder bajarme los pantalones un momento (p. 12).
>
> . . . mi hermoso culo, digo, escrupulosamente limpio y jamás horadado, me ha amenazado hace algunos minutos con expulsar su hedionda carga sobre mis pantalones, de modo que me he visto en la necesidad de buscar el lugar adecuado para . . . (p. 308).

"Dentro de este marco," Brushwood adds, "él repasa muchos acontecimientos y relaciones que parecen identificar su vida, pero nunca logra arraigarse en ella."[33]

Los pies de barro, more than any other of Garmendia's novels, demonstrates an extremely complex creative process. It is both a reflection of the life which confronts his hero and a deliberate attempt to force the reader into a sometimes difficult coparticipation. While there are certain risks in totally frustrating the reader and a serious level of diminishing returns on such an approach, there is certain appreciation for the frustration and alienation of modern man in a structure in which nothing "está librado al azar: todo se coordina en una provocada incoherencia formal."[34]

An evaluation of Garmendia's creative process in the novel is incomplete without an understanding of the reaction to the traditional narrative which his work represents. By rejecting its logical patterns and artificial construction, he reflects in a type of antistructure a union of art and life more appropriate to the twentieth century. "Las

fronteras espacio-temporales se han dilatado para dar cabida al hombre abstracto y abstraído que se mueve como sonámbulo . . ."[35]

His works develop from the experimental to the complex in an original implementation of modern techniques "de los más audaces de la novelística hispanoamericana actual."[36] Whether in destroying conventional approaches to the narrative he also erects a barrier between writer and reader, whom he seeks to engage so vitally in the process, is a question yet to be resolved. No one should deny, however, his impact upon the Venezuelan narrative--a genre now fully in the mainstream of the contemporary creative process.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

[1]Emir Rodríguez Monegal, El arte de narrar (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C. A., 1968), p. 149.

[2]La novela en Venezuela (Buenos Aires: Publicaciones de la Embajada de Venezuela, n.d.), p. 42.

[3]Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "La nueva novela latinoamericana," Actas del Tercer Congreso Internacional de Hispanistas (México: Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas, 1970), p. 53.

[4]"La nueva novela latinoamericana," p. 56.

[5]Juan Loveluck, La novela hispanoamericana (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, S. A., 1969), p. 216.

[6]Alberto Zum Felde, La narrativa hispanoamericana (Madrid: Aguilar, 1964), p. 28.

[7]Julio Cortázar, Rayuela, 12th ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1970), p. 453.

[8]William Barrett, Irrational Man (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1962), pp. 50-59.

[9]Barrett, p. 51.

[10]Ernesto Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 1964), p. 23.

[11]Juan Liscano, Panorama de la literatura venezolana actual (Caracas: Publicaciones Españolas, S. A., 1973), p. 121.

[12]Pp. 147-63.

[13]Liscano, p. 127.

[14]Francisco Pérez Perdomo, "Prólogo," Los pequeños seres, by Salvador Garmendia (Montevideo: ARCA Editorial, 1967), p. 9.

[15]Salvador Garmendia, Los pequeños seres (Montevideo: ARCA Editorial, 1967), p. 82. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[16]P. Pla y Beltrán, "Los pequeños seres," Revista Nacional de Cultura, No. 136 (noviembre-diciembre, 1960), p. 144.

[17]Elizabeth Schon, "Reflexiones sobre Los Pequeños Seres," Papel Literario de El Nacional (14-1-1960), p. 6.

[18]"Cinco novelas de Salvador Garmendia: El impacto sobre los hábitos perceptivos," Hispania, Vol. 60, No. 4 (December, 1977), p. 886.

[19]Salvador Garmendia, Los habitantes (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C. A., 1968), p. 196. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[20]Manuel Caballero, "Uslar Pietri, Garmendia: 'Two Nations,'" Cultura universitaria, XC (enero-marzo, 1966), p. 32.

[21]"Uslar Pietri, Garmendia: 'Two Nations,'" p. 29.

[22]José Antonio Castro, "Día de ceniza," Recensiones, No. 1 (n.d.), p. 52.

[23]Salvador Garmendia, Día de ceniza (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C. A., 1968), p. 92. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[24]Osvaldo Larrazábal Henríquez, Diez novelas venezolanas (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C. A., 1972), p. 41.

[25]Larrazábal Henríquez, p. 43.

[26]Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda, "Salvador Garmendia," Nueva Narrativa Hispanoamericana, 4 (enero-septiembre, 1974), p. 296.

[27]Salvador Garmendia, La mala vida (Montevideo: ARCA Editorial, 1968), p. 31. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[28]"Garmendia y la nueva literatura venezolana," Casa de las Américas, No. 54 (mayo-junio, 1969), p. 56.

[29](Paris: Gallimard, 1925), p. 238.

[30]"La antinovela en Hispanoamérica," Revista Hispánica Moderna, XXXIV, Nos. 3-4 (julio-octubre, 1968), p. 527.

[31]Salvador Garmendia, Los pies de barro (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C. A., 1973), pp. 74, 216 and 111. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[32]"Los pies de barro," Revista Nacional de Cultura, Nos. 217-18 (noviembre-diciembre, 1974), p. 137.

[33]"Cinco novelas de Salvador Garmendia: El impacto sobre los hábitos perceptivos," p. 888.

[34]Eduardo Gudiño Kieffer, "Un sólido oficio," Visión (9-2-1974), p. 44.

[35]Babín, p. 526.

[36]Rama, p. 56.

CHAPTER V

LANGUAGE AND THE VISION OF GARMENDIA

The Sardio movement and the influence it has on the remaking of Venezuelan literary expression is, like many reforms, a reaction to what immediately precedes it. After the international fame and creative plateau which Rómulo Gallegos reaches during the first half of the twentieth century, the Venezuelan narrative enters a static and uncertain period. Although the similar socio-political climates of other Latin American countries and the concomitant intellectual isolation of the period generate a degree of unity in the narrative, the genre maintains a status quo which produces little significant elaboration and certainly no improvement over the Gallegos formula. The new generation, however, chooses to reject such formidable models as Gallegos' Doña Bárbara, José Eustacio Rivera's La Vorágine and Ricardo Güiraldes' Don Segundo Sombra, and adopts a vision of the world, expressed in a significantly altered language, which contrasts sharply with the primitive or

traditional pattern.

While the latter finds value in decorum, balance, eloquence and care for stylistic elements, the new novel begins to erode this long-standing approach by lessening its emphases and admitting characteristics which eventually define a totally recreated narrative. In it, moderation and sobriety become license and not infrequent excess; moments of picturesque reality become a fascination for the consistently repulsive; attention to language becomes an irreverent abuse of the language. Instead of the careful manipulation of stylistic elements, a denial of the very notion of style is the hallmark of the modern writer. In Julio Cortázar's Rayuela, Morelli echoes this sentiment when he says, "Todo ardid estético es inútil para lograrlo: sólo vale la materia en gestación, la inmediatez vivencial (transmitida por la palabra, es cierto, pero una palabra lo menos estético posible . . .)."[1]

Garmendia and his Venezuelan contemporaries are the product of revolution and change. During their youth, they experience the violent growth of Caracas and the rapid changes which come over the nation during this time. A phenomenal population explosion and incredible economic successes interrupt Venezuelan life and have an influence on social and psychological crises in the new society. These factors help to explain, in part, the pronounced generation gap which yields, on the one hand, political demonstrations

and insurgency among students and, on the other, "un propósito de ruptura con el estilo estético, con la escritura bella, en aras de imitar el habla corriente, chata, anodina."[2] It is not surprising, then, that Garmendia's language and vision of reality is very much that of contemporary Venezuela. "Lo que el lenguaje hace luego es ceñirse a su visión como las sútiles mallas de las bailarinas a los músculos de sus cuerpos."[3]

Garmendia's use of language and his vision of the world, while not reaching the more recent extremes of some of his younger contemporaries, reflect the new generation's notion of the importance of a bold approach to the physical world. His narrators and protagonists, devoid of a spiritual dimension, perceive reality through a strong dependence on the senses. He emphasizes the world of things and objects, some unmentionable and unsettling. His vocabulary is often that of the street, "salpicado de los naturales dialectalismos o vulgarismos lingüísticos en los que no falta la voz soez, ingrediente necesario a toda creación novelística actual."[4] In his works, human beings become depersonalized in the use of grotesque imagery while the inanimate takes on unexpected human characteristics.

His prose is "tensa, magnética, sin distorsiones extremas del lenguaje . . ."[5] Never flowery or inflated, it follows well the model set by José Rafael Pocaterra in a similar reaction against refined and pretentious writing.

He creates with "un léxico logófobo de toda palabra noble, prosa descarnada, dura, audaz en sus descripciones, horra de todo miedo expresivo, feroz para el fiero vivir de la ciudad marginal, aledaña, underground."[6] Garmendia's style is "escritura directa, parca en adjetivaciones y efectos verbales."[7] For him, language is the artist's tool. In his later novels, he approaches more closely an attitude of disrespect for the standards of language by breaking down the paragraph, the sentence and individual words.

In Los pequeños seres, Garmendia uses the repetition of a particular image to reinforce his theme. The direction which his protagonist takes toward ultimate ruin, as a little person unable to cope with the realities of modern society, parallels the words declive and variations of inclinado. They first appear in the opening paragraph and continue throughout the novel.

> Habría salido por la puerta entreabierta, cuya hoja en declive veía reflejada en la claridad del espejo, y él se hallaba solo en el cuarto, luchando todavía por acabar el nudo de la corbata. Sin embargo, no volvió la mirada para asegurarse de ello ya que temía encontrarla a su lado, fuera del marco de imágenes inclinadas y en aquel momento se sentía dominado por la necesidad de pensar y, sobre todo, de poder hacerlo solo, en voz alta, con toda libertad.[8]

Other examples are:

> En el desmoronamiento silencioso que ocurría en su interior, formas y palabras rodaban y desaparecían por un inesperado declive (p. 14).

> En el gran espejo brotaban inclinadas las sillas vacías (p. 57).

> Andar. Seguir el declive de la acera (p. 73).
>
> Era ya muy tarde y caminaba por una calle estrecha e inclinada (p. 74).
>
> Pronto comenzaré a deslizarme sobre un plano inclinado . . . (p. 78).
>
> Todo se inclina (p. 83).
>
> La calle descendía en un fuerte declive que lo empujaba por la espalda (p. 103).
>
> Figuras móviles proyectadas en declive sobre los espejos, las filas de sombreros y chaquetas (p. 122).

Garmendia makes extensive use of the simile in his descriptions, creating vivid images in the reader's mind. Mateo's superior has fingers that are thick and round "como un embutido" (p. 12), whose rough and imperfect stature makes him like "un juguete de goma aporreado por todas partes" (p. 12). In his father's barbershop, the fumigators are like onions and the manicurist is "gorda como un tonel" (p. 21). A Havana cigar is large "como un tallo" (p. 26), and murmurs at the funeral scene are like "una oleada oscura" (p. 28). The deserted plaza is "una extraña ruina intacta, en vela, como un cirio recién apagado" (p. 55), and the raindrops which begin to fall are like "frutillas aventadas desde lejos" (p. 61). Thoughts which persist in the back of his mind are "como hongos secos adheridos a las paredes interiores" (p. 78). The walls of the circus tent tremble like a giant beast.

At times, his use of the simile seems to have a particularly pointed meaning for the novel's theme and

characterization. Amelia's shoulder is "como un muro frío donde la breve llama se ha consumido" (p. 21). One of Mateo's colleagues is like "una astilla entre dos hombros" (p. 25). Tío Andrés' head reminds Mateo of "un gorro deshilachado" (p. 45), and his posture is like "un muro a punto de caer" (p. 46). The detestable personnel manager is like "un gran muñeco desmontable, construido torpemente" (p. 60). As he wanders aimlessly, Mateo sees the lighted city spread out before him "como un crecimiento de espinas luminosas" (p. 106).

Persons are compared often to animals:

> "Mira, este eras tú" y emite una risita de ardilla que le hace temblar la garganta cómo si bajo la piel se moviera un pequeño animal (p. 20).
>
> . . . detrás, bajo el peso de grandes capas endurecidas por macizos arabescos, se movía el sacerdote, casi tambaleante, como un gran galápago sostenido sobre sus patas traseras (p. 33).
>
> A mi derecha, la señorita Méndez, tiesa como un atado de ballenas, frunce su cara rosada de alfiletero mientras lanza rápidos picotazos a la máquina de escribir (p. 35).
>
> . . . las cornisas doradas del ataúd que se movía como un animal lento sobre la superficie sinuosa de los cráneos (p. 36).
>
> Otras veces aparecía en el comedor, a mitad del almuerzo, gritaba y manoteaba como un gallo rabioso (p. 120).

Conversely, objects and things which surround Mateo take on human traits as portrayed by the use of simile, metaphor and personification. The trees bordering the avenue are a picture of weariness and destitution, the

intense rays of the sun wound the surfaces with their heat, wicker furniture is like the cold and shiny bodies of mannequins, the countryside is sad during one of his walks as a child, the city is alone and prostrate, the fronts of buildings are sad and aged, and in Mateo's delirium, the objects around him become animated, taking on a power to communicate and a tireless locuacity like people at a crowded party. The colorful electronic billboards are dead during the day but come alive at night, old homes wear faded masks without breath or eyes, the furniture in Mateo's office is heavy and sad, a prostitute's room is located in the bowels of an old apartment building, trucks laden with fruit are resting "en un sueño agobiante" (p. 107), an armless wall clock has a "péndulo decapitado" (p. 110), ruin bites the walls of decrepit buildings which grow old without nobility, bedrooms are deaf to the bustle of city noise, the wheels of machinery grow weaker to the point of fainting and the air is impregnated with city sounds.

Appeal to the senses is an important stylistic element in the novels of Garmendia. "Los sentidos constituyen un factor básico en la experiencia de la novela--todos los sentidos, incluyendo el olfativo, que se emplea . . . con una inusitada frecuencia."[9] The sense of smell relates to the people, the food and the places in metropolitan Caracas. Some examples from his first novel include:

> En el grupo que se había formado junto a la entrada del comedor, voces y respiraciones tropezaban en medio de un olor ácido de cuerpos (p. 24).
>
> Olía a esperma y a agua de lavanda y el aire comenzaba a teñirse de la tonalidad verdosa que emitían los vidrios de un cancel (p. 27).
>
> Eras un cuerpo joven que palpitaba y respiraba en el aire pobre del cuarto, impregnado de un olor agrio de paredes húmedas (p. 31).
>
> El interior del automóvil negro, tenía adherido al lustre de los cueros un olor viejo e indolente de sala de espera (p. 39).
>
> Lo irritaban sus continuas miradas de soslayo, su total vejez ruinosa y polillenta de criatura de hospicio, su olor de cama de enfermo que percibía con repulsión cuando accidentalmente se le acercaba demasiado (p. 52).
>
> El techo era muy bajo y olía fuerte a abonos y a raíces (p. 65).
>
> El aire era denso y tibio con olor de piel húmeda (p. 68).
>
> La atmósfera guardada allí se ha enrarecido: olores y alientos se condensan en un aire consistente, casi palpable y es como si gruesos pétalos obstruyeran los conductos nasales (p. 79).
>
> Era un lugar barato untado de un vapor tibio y denso de frituras y restos de café con leche (p. 104).

The sense of sight is important in Los pequeños seres. Mateo feels the effects of the sun as he wanders in his neurotic state. Also significant is the prevalence of whites, grays and pastel shades instead of the bright primary colors. This factor seems to contribute to the protagonist's psychic state. Some evidences of Garmendia's use of sight include the following:

> Frescos de colores pálidos, habitados por criaturas imaginarias, hablaban de un tiempo liquidado: . . . (p. 26).

> Está hecho de pasta fina, una cáscara frágil tostada al horno, sonrosada (p. 32).
>
> Se aprende con la concentración mental. . . . -y se apretó el cráneo con todos los dedos: aquella caja ósea, vacía, sembrada de manchas grises donde aún se agarraban residuos de una pelambre seca y descolorida- (p. 53).
>
> Ruinas pálidas (p. 64).
>
> . . . y otras paredes grises, fatigadas, de una fealdad indolente. . . . Nudos de metal o de piedra toscos, ennegrecidos . . . (p. 64).
>
> Miró las puntas del rastrillo con grumos de lodo reseco, la hoja carcomida de la pala, una línea de luz entre el muro de madera y el suelo: afuera el sol calentaría la grama, haría brillar los árboles (p. 66).
>
> . . . y allí sólo tenía lugar el juego de los pies bajo las mesas, fragmentos numerosos, dispersos bajo todas las mesas y el cruce de las piernas estiradas, encogidas, entrelazadas, dispuestas al azar en equis, en eles invertidas, en ves (p. 68).
>
> Lo asaltaron imágenes estrábicas, perfiles duplicados por reflejos numerosos, líneas de luz proyectadas desde el vértice de los bombillos que iba a perderse en la profundidad de los espejos y, al fin, descubrió las puertas de salida donde menos lo hubiera imaginado (p. 70).
>
> El brillo impecable del sol sobre la palidez de las paredes, la gente, el movimiento, toda aquella estridente proximidad le traía una sensación de aturdimiento (p. 103).

Sound is important to Mateo's experiences during his time of crisis. Perhaps the effects of alcohol on his system tend to increase instead of decrease their intensity:

> Voces roncas, poderosas--la más alta es la de mi padre--disputan bajo los almendrones del corral (p. 23).
>
> Se hablaba a grito contenido y los timbres se mezclaban en una aguda afinación de falsete (p. 24).

> La palabra golpeó a Mateo en el oído. Sonó con fuerza repentina y desapareció en seguida semejante a la cuerda de un piano que se rompe (p. 25).
>
> Luego el murmullo se fue haciendo menos perceptible, se repartió en grupos aislados y acabó de borrarse por completo en una atmósfera de silencio forzado (p. 36).
>
> Pero mientras el cuerpo se abandona al reposo y baja el peso de las carnes y casi se oye correr la sangre bajo la piel, la mente a su vez se ensordece, parece que todo fuera a olvidarse en un momento (p. 38).
>
> Allá lejos, Amelia hablaría continuamente con una abeja incrustada en las telas de la laringe . . . (p. 71).
>
> Como algo inexplicable y remoto, como el susurro de una vida perdida que no podría alcanzarlo, se escuchaba el rumor uniforme de la ciudad (p. 86).

Garmendia attempts to relay the continuous flow of sound when he writes "yo-siem-pre-lo-he-ad-mi-ra-do-a-us-ted-mar-tán" (p. 51), and he imitates the halting speech of a man reading the newspaper aloud: "los...es...pect...adores con...conster...na...dos vieron como la be...lla tra...pecista de . . ." (p. 104). He uses assonance to depict the monotonous chanting of a priest in the sentence ". . . trató de imaginar el círculo de figuras borrosas, sin formas en los rostros, la salmodia del sacerdote prolongada en oes ondulantes, . . ." (p. 44--underlining added).

Sentence structure in Los pequeños seres tends to be simple and uncomplicated. As Mateo's delirium progresses, however, sentences become more complex.

> Ahora no podía apurar un trago más. La excitación que reinaba en la sala, el aire caliente, cierta aparente deformidad de los rostros que emergían en instantes llenos de lucidez, para desaparecer en seguida, sin ilación alguna, merced a un continuo y desacordado

> movimiento de imágenes y también un exceso de precisión, una casi descarnada realidad de los rasgos más próximos, lo envolvían en una confusión de aturdimiento (p. 70).

At other times, thoughts may come in extremely short phrases and sentences, such as "Estaba cansado" (p. 17), "Yo era algo" (p. 19), "Largo y lleno de espejos" (p. 21), "Era un alivio" (p. 62), "Se incorporó de pronto" (p. 99) and "Andar" (p. 127).

Garmendia uses effectively the accumulation of negative vocabulary to suggest to the reader the growing sense of alienation within Mateo. As he wanders out of the cemetery at dusk, he begins his aimless walk through the streets of the city. Here, the writer provides a deliberately prejudiced view of the surroundings with words such as "las sillas vacías . . . un duro silencio . . . desnudas y solas . . . el silencio petrificado . . . espacios desiertos" and "Formas disecadas . . . objetos disonantes carentes de proximidad y parentesco: . . . pasamanos agotados . . . clima estéril, nunca renovado . . . el inmóvil decorado . . . máscaras envejecidas" (p. 57).

When Garmendia enters the world of the adolescent and the prostitute, he undertakes to reflect the language of that reality. In Los habitantes, Garmendia portrays for the first time the coarse and often base world of the modern metropolis. Colloquialisms and obscenities are a part of Luis' characterization as a listless youth and, to an extent, of Irene's life of sexual degradation. Likewise, Francisco's

friendships, as depicted in local bars, provide the setting for the current vernacular. Some examples are:

> -¡Aquiétate, vale! Es temprano.
> -No puedo.
> -¡Ah, carajo! ¡De aquí no se va nadie!
> -Ahí vienen las otras; ¿qué pasa, pues?[10]
>
> -¡Ay, coño! -gritaba Emilio, torcido por las carcajadas.
> -Tú estás bien cuete, chango. Echate otro.
> -Poco a poco, vale.
> -¡No jodas! (p. 116).

Appeal to the senses is an important factor in Garmendia's vision of the city in Los habitantes. He utilizes "un lenguaje preciso, afirmado en la constante captación de lo sensorial."[11] He places a strong emphasis on the senses of smell, sight and sound as they relate to the ever-present city. While this appeal is sharply lessened in the context of the home and the family, it becomes essential as contact with the city heightens, whether directly or by memory. Some examples of appeal to the sense of smell include the following:

> Olía a monte y a humedad nocturna, y a veces también a excrementos secos, pero eso mismo era también agradable y distinto (p. 38).
>
> A Francisco le pareció que un sabor metálico de brandy se le metía debajo de la lengua, junto al olor grueso de aceite quemado y humo de mechurrios (p. 55).
>
> Olía a tierra abonada y agua corriente al pasar cerca de los cajones de lechugas y los pretiles de zanahorias y repollos y después parecía que abrieran de golpe una alacena y brotara el tufo recargado de los quesos y los embutidos y en seguida se pasaba a otro aire, contaminado por las frutas corrompidas y el olor a mortuorio de las flores, y otro, agrio y fuerte, como el que

> expelen las jaulas del zoológico y el de los huesos amontonados y sangrantes y la carne fibrosa, recién cortada (p. 57).

The sense of sight is much more important in Los habitantes than in Garmendia's first novel. This may be due to his determination to depict characters as men and women who are confined to their immediate surroundings. A dependence on sight corresponds to a tendency to enumeration and cataloguing and the resulting predominance of nouns in many passages. Appeal to the sense of sight is evident in these examples:

> . . . si abre los ojos verá el techo con su color blanco mate, rayado por vetas arenosas y unos dibujos pardos e informes que crecen hacia las paredes: son manchas de humedad que el tiempo ha resecado y que llegan a simular, por momentos, panoramas de montañas coronadas por cabezas monstruosas de gigantes y pájaros (p. 9).

> Cuando salió a la puerta del cuarto, el resplandor la dejó aturdida. El patio y el pequeño corredor quedaron calcinados y sólo muy lentamente las cosas fueron recuperando sus contornos. Engracia comenzó a aparecer en la entrada del comedor; no tenía rostro todavía, salvo una mancha amoratada y movediza (p. 29).

> Contra el cielo, el paterio de las antenas de televisión, lanzando reflejos platinados (p. 30).

> La fachada en triángulo, pintada de un amarillo viejo, se alzaba contra el cielo sin nubes. Una bandada de palomas caseras voló en triángulo perfecto sobre las planchas de asbesto color salmón y al cambiar sorpresivamente de rumbo, se oyó un breve aleteo y los cuerpos centellearon en el aire (p. 74).

> El sol demarcaba con precisión las líneas rectas, los pequeños cuadros horadados de los ranchos más lejanos, que parecían colocados en desorden, sin sujeción alguna, en la superficie del cerro. Las láminas de cinc refulgían por todas partes como trozos de espejo (p. 106).

> Giraban las caras, las botellas, las bambalinas del techo, los charcos de las mesas, los faroles y las ristras de guirnaldas amarillas y rojas, y por sobre la carne gruesa del hombro, pasaba y pasaba el letrero negro del rincón: urinario, urinario, urinario; las letras, anchas y aplastadas, sobre la estrecha puertecita, repitiéndose a cada vuelta (p. 62).

The sounds of Caracas surround the characters of the López family. They include the entire spectrum of experiences, from the intimate family sounds, "El sonido de la ducha, al interrumpirse de golpe dejó oír unos pies descalzos chapoteando en la humedad" (p. 16), to the diverse noises of a metropolis:

> Comenzaba a crecer por sí solo un murmullo denso y movedizo del que escapaban, como chispas, un grito, una llamada, el tañido repetido de una corneta o un motor que acelara (p. 23).

> La música de un radio grita una frase conocida que pasa y se desmorona en algún punto lejano y vuelve todo el silencio del barrio, la gran calma del día de fiesta (p. 25).

> Alguien está cantando afuera desde hace rato. Esa voz, lamentosa y quebrada, fallece o se levanta prolongada en un grito inseguro (p. 62).

> Por un altoparlante, la voz gangosa y ceceante del cura español entonaba la estrofa y todo el coro iba a rastras, alargando las vocales: Perdona a tu pueblo, Señor . . . (p. 67).

Garmendia also attempts to imitate certain sounds either by orthographic changes or by repetition. Matilde shouts "pintaaados" (p. 10), Francisco sings in the shower "Corazones partiiidos, / yo no los quieeerooo. / po po po po po po po . . ." (p. 14) and the Mexican sight "¡Aaaaaa!" (p. 111). He depicts an old man's stammering speech through an

effective use of repetition and shortened phrases:

> Los cuadros, mire usted: esto, los cuadros, los floreros, los muebles. Todo cuesta dinero. Aquí hay un capital, sí, señor. Y ahora es distinto, muy distinto. Cambiaron los tiempos y los hombres. La vida tiene muchas exigencias y uno tiene que condescender. Cuando uno contaba las morocotas en los dedos; cuando se hacían negocios de verdad . . . ¡Ah! . . . Bueno, también era asunto de saber jugarse la vida. La vida es lo que vale, ¿sabe? La vida es todo. Anque uno está aquí, por fin, y tiene algo. Tiene lo que ha trabajado y se ha ganado y eso es lo que queda. Uno se va, se va. Uno no es nada. Esto queda (p. 123).

Simile, metaphor and personification, though they appear less frequently in this novel, produce vivid images for the reader. Aurelia's early morning dreams are like a gelatinous surface, Francisco's hoarse singing in the shower is like some unknown wind instrument, a man's beard is like prickly thorns, the glimmer of Raúl's urine is like fine splinters of glass, María's breasts tremble "como un racimo" (p. 40), "Lo mejor de María es el culo, que se extiende formando dos anchos paréntesis; es redondo y lleno como un gran queso" (p. 41), the clothing on Irene's father drapes his body like dead skin, Modesto Infante's stomach is like the curve of a large earthen jar, rain is like sand in Engracia's face and Plinio's jacket, inflated in the wind, is like the shell of a tortoise.

A ringing of the church bells covers the barrio, a wall of trucks hides the street, tight baseball pants outline "las varas de las piernas" (p. 69), the powerful sounds of the organ harass the murmurs and the coughing in

the sanctuary, a deformed and yellow moon floats in the patio, a wall of shoulders gives off the odor of tobacco and cologne, a placid silence overtakes Aurelia's room, Francisco's sandals lick the floor, a bus vibrates impatiently, Luis' vomit is devoured by the dust, and drops of rain fall with "golpecitas alegres" in the puddles of water (p. 143).

An element which has similar effect on the reader is synesthesia, the coupling of two distinct senses. This has the force of emphasis and usually reflects the writer's emotional involvement in the description. Some examples are "el aire blanco" (p. 7), "La penumbra gris, pesada . . ." (p. 14), "el silencio amarillento" (p. 18), "un azul duro" (p. 19) and "un murmullo denso" (p. 23).

The doubling of adjectives is common in Garmendia's narrative. This establishes a balance by providing two possibly complimentary modifications in a minimum of words, an example of the writer's terseness and concision. Examples from Los habitantes include: "un aire agrio y picante" (p. 103), "Su pelo, negrísimo y cerdoso, . . ." (p. 107), "un ronroneo bajo y cansado" (p. 126), "una pausa larga y pensativa" (p. 146), "la piel . . . blanca y arrugada" (p. 150) and "manos prodigiosamente largas y amarillas y cabellos también de un amarillo fino y luminoso" (p. 157).

While there are similarities between Garmendia's third novel, Día de ceniza, and Los pequeños seres in terms

of tone, character development and structure, there is an equally consistent approach to the physical realities which press in upon the protagonist. Garmendia's use of language and his vision of the world demonstrate the same sordid and often distasteful focus on an alien environment. By repeating previous emphases and, in some cases, heightening others, he achieves a strong portrayal of Miguel Antúnez's desperate search for an authentic existence.

Although the Garmendian narrative may be characterized by a maximizing of certain physical senses, and especially that of smell, Día de ceniza seems to depend to a great extent on the sense of hearing. The sounds described in the work reflect those of the central city and, together with the gaiety of Carnival, mock Antúnez's tired struggle to survive. His last words are "Estoy cansado. Vámonos."[12] Some of the passages demonstrating the importance of sound include: "el zumbido del tránsito" (p. 9), the "ruido continuo de los zapatos" (p. 10), "una carcajada metálica" (p. 10), "un arrastrar de tacones" (p. 16), "el golpeteo suave de las sandalias" (p. 17), "El grito áspero del vendedor de lotería" (p. 17), "ruidos humanos o el choque de muebles y utensilios" (p. 22), "todos hablaban a gritos en medio del ronco zumbido del tránsito" (p. 32), "Gritaban, pero en medio del vocerío de las cornetas no era posible oírlos" (p. 33) and "resonaban voces guturales que parecían salir del fondo de un tonel vacío" (p. 38).

Antúnez is filled with the sounds of compressors, the crackling of cellophane, "el ritmo atropellante de la calle" (p. 39), the noises of the computer, the distant rumble of the city, the music of a radio, "el tableteo de las máquinas de calcular" (p. 48), "el zumbido del automóvil que pasa, alguna voz perdida, un grito o un canto de mujer" (p. 142) and, finally, a terrifying inner sound which symbolizes his ultimate inability to stabilize his life: ". . . y oye como si lo llamaran desde un lugar remoto: Miguel, Miguel, Miguel, Miguel, como un latido del fondo de los cerros" (p. 165). Even the insignificant sounds of everyday experiences become unbearable to him. "Todo aquello le pareció chocante y opresivo: el ruido del vapor que se ahoga en la taza de café con leche lanzando gruñidos y trompetillas, . . ." (p. 91). Garmendia imitates exaggerated sounds, as in "Duqueesaaaa" (p. 75), "empezó a gritar como una loca: jiiiii, jiiiii" (p. 55), "La a final le había quedado grandísima y deforme" (p. 72) and the footsteps of Olga and her husband "ti-toc, ti-toc, ti-toc . . . toc-shhh, toc-shhh, toc-shhh" (p. 192).

Appeal to the sense of touch, nearly unnoticeable in previous novels, is significant in this work. The importance of tactile sensation lies in its relationship to Antúnez's psychic dilemma, certain fixations and their meaning in terms of an alienated human being. Some examples are:

> Antúnez oyó un zumbido en su cabeza, tuvo un eructo con resto de whiskey y zumo de limón y le pareció sentir la tibieza de la sábana en el cuerpo desnudo, cubierto por una piel seca y caliente (p. 14).
>
> Tenía en la oreja el silbido caliente de Franquetti, y sin dirigirle la mirada, le puso una mano en el hombro. Algo duro. Era como apoyarse en un pretil de ladrillos (p. 18).
>
> Finalmente consiguió levantarse, abrió la llave del lavamanos y dejó correr el agua sobre las yemas de los dedos; así, la presión aflojó poco a poco (p. 65).
>
> Muy raras veces llegó a tocar sus manos, de manera breve y casual, al coincidir en agarrar un libro o la botella de cerveza, y, sin embargo, aún hoy puede revivir la impresión de una piel seca, árida, caliente (p. 69).
>
> Ese afán de acercarse a las superficies hasta diluirlas en el ojo y sentir el roce en las pestañas; o de roer con las uñas las partes blandas o porosas, como ahora esa tela delgada que el polvo de café ha formado en toda la base de la máquina, o mejor aún la cubierta grumosa de leche coagulada en el tubo que expele el vapor (p. 92).

The sense of smell relates mainly to the dominance of the city in Antúnez's life. There are the odors associated with bars, such as food and alcohol, the body odors of people who pass him on the street or in the office, the aroma of fruitstands, "el olor que sube de sus muslos" (p. 60), the smell of old wallpaper and decaying books, Leticia's breath, Pastorita's powder, "el olor íntimo de sus trajes colgados; su olor arraigado, incrustado en las fibras, como si la piel se hubiera transmitido a ellas" (p. 124), the piquant aromas inside the church of San Francisco and the smell of El Princesa during his years as a law student.

An emphasis on sight and the frequent mention of the

sun and mirrors or shiny surfaces are characteristic of Día de ceniza. The mentioning of the sun usually occurs in a negative and debilitating sense, corresponding to Antúnez's emotional state, and the presence of mirrors may be both a fascination and a painful symbol of the protagonist's need to come to terms with himself. The night lights, the beach during the daylight hours and the setting of the sun over the city, from the perspective of Anzola's apartment window, are particularly strong passages. Other passages include the mirrors in the bar, the reflective windowpanes of skyscrapers, the mirror-like flashes of the sun on passing automobiles, his own bathroom mirror and the magnificent mirrors in Sr. Belandia's home. Antúnez feels his eyeballs "llenos de sol, acuosos y calientes, como si los hubiera tenido un buen rato en agua hirviente" (p. 11), his pupils are burned by the sun at the beach, he experiences the "violencia del sol" (p. 133) and outside in the streets the sun is "crudo, aturdidor" (p. 175).

As in Los pequeños seres, there is a tendency toward the depersonalizing of human beings and the animation of inanimate objects. Some uses of personification for this effect include: "una carcajada metálica lo siguió hasta la puerta" (p. 10), "su mente trabajaba . . . como si durmiera y despertara en breves intervalos" (p. 16), "lucía un strapless rojo que mordía la blanda masa del busto" (p. 23), "las cornetas gritaban" (p. 30), "un fresco vapor de lluvia

rozó los escritorios, cosquilleó los cabellos y entró en los pulmones" (p. 41), "se repetía el panorama de tejados negros y patios angostos y profundos lamidos por el sol" (p. 70), "las calles se extendían solitarias y tristes" (p. 74), "el monte acaba por tragarse las calles" (p. 83), "el gusto ácido de la cerveza burbujeaba en sus tripas pidiendo alivio" (p. 90), "el viento frío venía a golpearlos en las caras" (p. 98), "esqueletos de anuncios que aún deben estar encendidos" (p. 110), "una calle de aspecto ruinoso, cuyas edificaciones, mucho tiempo atrás, habían sido víctimas de algún abominable asalto" (p. 120), "lenguas de espuma" (p. 131), "el sol tostaba a su gusto la pintura amarilla de varios sillones de mimbre" (p. 134), "una penumbra tranquila y suavizante ocupaba el cuarto" (p. 151) and "las paredes en pie como rígidos bloques de tasajo, insensibles al desgarramiento que acaban de sufrir" (p. 188).

Human beings often take on the characteristics of animals, usually expressed by simile. Prostitutes' vertabrae move "como gusanos" (p. 22), a woman responds without moving "como una res gorda" (p. 23), there are "miles y miles y millones de seres idénticos, diminutos y sucios correteando alocadamente como hormigas" (p. 31), Pastorita's thighs become enlarged "como ancas de rana" (p. 63), an old man flutters around the room "como un gallo ciego" (p. 82), Fabricio slips between the tables like a fish, barking his orders, Herrera compares his misery to

that of an animal's, el Gordo Russo paces back and forth in his room as an animal does in a cage at the zoo, doña Cleotilde takes on "un aire esponjado y contento de gallina que arropa a sus crías" (p. 151) and Omar is "cabizbajo como un buey manso" after Antúnez's death (p. 206).

Other uses of the simile offer the reader equally strong "imágenes grotescas, desquiciantes, que complementan y animan lo descrito."[13] For example, the wrinkles on a lady's neck are like cracks in a jar and her fleshy knees are like "grandes trozos de tocino" (p. 9), a man's hair adheres to his head like a cap made of scorched wire, a woman chews her food casually "como un reflejo tardío" as Garmendia alliterates, "sus mandíbulas se mueven muellemente" (p. 10), an angered man's eyes are like "nudos de carne viva que estuvieran a punto de sangrar" (p. 14), men blink and move like wooden dummies, Pastorita's fingers are like "trocitos de madera de un color pálido" (p. 54), the sky is like "un caldo insípido" (p. 109), the coffee machine growls like a satisfied cat, Antúnez's pistol is like "un animal hembra con todas sus crías dentro, emponzoñadas" (p. 125), Leopoldo's women are "criaturas ajadas y frías retiradas de la circulación y el uso, como las sillas rotas o los trajes demasiado gastados" (p. 147) and the morning quiet is like a transparent liquid in complete repose.

Metaphors appear more frequently in Garmendia's third novel than in the previous ones. They include: "dos

varas secas y venosas" for arms (p. 9), "aquel foso largo y angosto que era su cuarto" (p. 68), the organ at San Francisco plays "un mugido de res" (p. 138), Günther is a sickly shrub transplanted to "una tierra hostil" (p. 144), a man's lips are "pedazos de barro reseco" (p. 158) and, after collapsing at the realization of Antúnez's suicide, Leticia is "apenas un pliegue" under the white sheet (p. 206).

Doubling of adjectives continues as do short sentences and phrases such as "Los amigos" (p. 82), "Viajar" (p. 84) and "Eso era" (p. 186). Colloquialisms are not common in this white-collar setting of Caracas, although one particular image is repeated later to a significant degree in Garmendia's last two novels: "tíos de mierda" (p. 13) and "¡Soy una mierda!" (p. 64). Garmendia also utilizes synesthesia for ironic and descriptive effect. Some examples are: "un olor dulce" (p. 48), "una voz seca" (p. 58), "paredes . . . silenciosas" (p. 65), "la penumbra olorosa" (p. 72), "un seco olor" (p. 73), and "la caliente oscuridad" (p. 133). Use of the oxymoron is similar to this effect, such as "un silencio opresivo" (p. 80), "un bramido sordo" (p. 97), "un martilleo sordo" (p. 108), "aquel sol frío" (p. 188) and "un grito silencioso" (p. 202).

In La mala vida, Garmendia intensifies theme and character by means of an alternating of foci between a vision of austere reality and a contrasting vision of sensuous exaggeration. While both depend upon the writer's

obsessive attention to minute detail, each contributes to a fine balance of the two planes of human experience: the mystery of man's existence and his intimate penetration into the physical world which surrounds him. "El detallismo en Garmendia es como un hilo conductor que el escritor tiende hacia el lector para que se empape de las cosas que lee y pueda llegar a su interior anímico."[14]

Garmendia's ability to describe his protagonist's world, "su describir minucioso, su don por el detalle," produces in this novel an extraordinary appeal to the sense of sound.[15] These sounds include the wide range found in the barrio of La Candelaria, from the soft whisper of a wind to the deafening roar of city traffic. They affect the deepest ranges of the writer-protagonist's being:

> Creía oír a lo lejos, en un remoto y blanco sedimento de formas y sonidos que debía brotar de más allá de todo lo visible, el gran ruido del mundo, el rumor informe de una multitud que era un rumor larvario, subterráneo, apenas discernible, en cuyo fondo bullía el impulso de crecer y derramarse hasta un límite ensordecedor, fuera de toda escala imaginable.[16]

Other examples of appeal to the sense of sound in La mala vida include Clarisa's "resbaladizo siseo de suelas empolvadas" (p. 8), "un ruido de motores y música de radios, entre el murmullo de la multitud" (p. 36), cousin Juan's speech "con pitidos, con gorgojeos, con un hilo de aire sostenido, trémulo, incesante como si tuviera un silbato atragantado" (p. 48), Nicolasa's "melodía simple y monótona que iba inventando, y que se componía de una sola eme

sinuosa y melancólica" (p. 58) and a recorder emitting "una voz agonizante, un aullido; una monodia incomprensible que mezcla sílabas de un dialecto ahogado e informe" (p. 90). Sounds seem to acquire a physical presence:

> Aquellos sonidos eran simples hálitos aligerados de materia que cruzaban techos y paredes, delatándose solo por momentos en cortas y tremantes apariciones, capaces de borrar del aire toda otra presencia sonora y correr vibrando hasta extinguirse por los bordes de la madera o apenas vagando de un oído a otro y disipándose, antes de reunir el contexto necesario para determinar con claridad su procedencia o su significado (p. 163).

The importance of sound extends to the writer's attempt to represent them as well by means of language. Stela imitates the sound of people rushing in and out of the office: "brrr" (p. 7), Gómez makes an effort to enunciate clearly from across the room in "a-sam-ble-a" (p. 18), Stela's laughter is written "jiii" (p. 20), a man in the bar exclaims "¡Uuuuuuuu . . ." (p. 40), Obdulia's walking through the crowd is a "chás, chás" (p. 49), cousin Juan falls off to sleep mumbling "Sobadita, ita . . . ita . . . ita . . . soba . . . sobadita . . . soba . . . ita . . . ita" (p. 55) and upon meeting the protagonist, Montero exclaims "¡ajáááá!" (p. 98). Montero has the habit, as a telegrapher, of translating his conversations with the "ti ca ri ca rian" of each word (p. 107), the protagonist imagines the fictitious Parker walking along with the rhythmic tapping of his baton: "Tan . . . toc toc . . . tan . . . toc toc" (p. 128), don Pepe exaggerates "con-fi-den-

cial-men-te" (p. 180), a drunken man sings part of a song: "Para no volver jaaaaaa-maaaas" (p. 207) and tía Jacinta grumbles "ug, ug, ug" (p. 229).

As in all Garmendian narrative, appeal to the sense of smell is constant. "Son las suyas novelas táctiles, novelas que sudan, novelas que dejan entre las manos un persistente olor."[17] They are the repulsive and decaying smells of the city, rarely pleasing odors. For example, "El olor acre de lluvia se me fue a la cabeza" (p. 15), "me sale de los poros un olor de ácido fénico" (p. 17), "un olor de encierro, trapos de baúl o fondo de orinal vacío" (p. 47), "un olor goteante de abono fresco" (p. 52), "expele un olor agrio de orines y cacas de perro" (p. 67), "sobreviven paredes y portales corroídos que arrojan en la sombra olor a ruinas y viejos excrementos" (p. 120), "un zaguán angosto que olía a meados de gato" (p. 125), "seguía escapándose a la calle el aliento de una humanidad disminuida que debía moverse sin ánimo en las habitaciones" (p. 136), "Un edificio en construcción corta secamente la liviandad del aire . . . e introduce, como la respiración de una herida, un penetrante olor a cal y tierra húmeda" (p. 203), "aquella galería con su vaho de orines y linimento Sloan" (p. 227) and "Olía a excrementos secos y a vieja albañilería" (p. 249). Even when more pleasant odors occur, it is with a sense of derrogation: "Una emanación parte de ella como un reflejo y se repite en mi interior. Es un olor de insecticida, de

cosméticos, de falsa limpieza" (p. 236).

The sense of touch is another indication of the protagonist's revulsion and alienation as well as his need to experience the real world. The tactile sensation is also important in a sensual context: "me recorre el brazo el roce almidonado del fuerte embalaje que protege sus senos" (p. 30), "su codo me estruja las costillas como una cabeza de clavo o el aire seco de sus narices me golpea en el cuello" (p. 37), "la vibración que trasmiten sus dedos se pierde como una advertencia intraducible en ese único sentido que ya se abre dentro de mí a modo de una tronera sin fondo" (p. 124), "El contacto del forro de seda me adormecía" (p. 133), "Advertí la presión en mi brazo" (p. 136), "Sentí la presión de todo su cuerpo duro y tenso" (p. 137), "Sentí los huesos vivos de su mano" (p. 156), "Sus cabellos me rozaban la mejilla llenándome de dulzura y de fiebre" (p. 211) and "El mate de aquellas carnes apagadas me bañaba por dentro y me parecía sentir un hueco debajo del vientre" (p. 238).

Metaphors further portray the writer-protagonist's unique vision of his world. A man's eyeball is "una pasta débil de excremento de pájaro" (p. 40). The protagonist's barrio is "un cuerpo viejo, a medias desmembrado que se retrae en su agujero, oculta sus muñones y sus desprendimientos y hace su única mueca demasiado conocida" (p. 61). He says of La China, a prostitute, "Sus pezones son higos

secos, arrugados, tan grandes como gorritos cosidos a las carnes" (p. 67). A singer's wife is "una masa de carne sólida y se diría que su esqueleto había acabado por desintegrarse allá adentro" (p. 100). M. Pierre "era un barrilito grasiento lleno de risa" (p. 118). The dining room at the Pensilvania is a ship full of passengers "que en horas de silencio parecía flotar a la deriva en una calma de aguas muertas" (p. 120). Beltrán's wife is "un dibujo desvaído, una viñeta sin color" (p. 158) and the clock striking 10:00 is "una enorme gota que cae y expande largas espirales sobre un líquido espeso" (p. 222).

Garmendia's extensive use of the simile is reserved mainly for his descriptions of human beings depicted as having animal traits. "Las comparaciones con gestos y actitudes animales llegan a entrabar un poco el libre juego del juicio objetivo, y se llega al momento en que algunos personajes son trasladados a su imagen animal."[18] For example, Stela, "como si presintiera el alboroto, se muestra terriblemente excitada, grita y corretea entre los escritorios como una gallina, una fina gallina despiojada de la mejor raza" (p. 9), Gómez enters the room "como un ratón" (p. 16) and later Gómez runs "de un lado a otro como una cucaracha" (p. 25). The protagonist squeals "como un chancho" when cousin Juan plays with him (p. 49) as does M. Pierre at the hands of Beltrán and La China's thigh is like "un lomo de pez gordo que sale a flote" (p. 89).

In other instances of attributing animal-like characteristics to human beings, women fly through the house squealing as they prepare to make candy, "Nicolasa exhala un alarido agrio de gallinácea" (p. 59), Eulalia has the look of a "gran pescado seco" (p. 87), Stela's shrieks sound like "la impresión de haber dado un pisotón a un conejo" (p. 21), Gómez continues to appear like a cockroach "mas ahora, con la camisa fuera del pantalón, la corbata rodada y el pelo en desorden, era como si hubiese recibido un pisotón y corriera sin tino arrastrando las tripas" (p. 25), a man in the bar has the face of a white rat, Italians at the beach are red like lobsters' legs, tía Jacinta's fingers are quick like the antennae of an insect and, when Luis "eructaba, bramando en el cuarto, parecía que vomitara leones" (p. 239).

Garmendia's use of personification adds both picturesque speech and, more importantly, serves to further depersonalize human beings. Some examples are Stela's eyes which "enferman, se degradan y mueren de muerte propia sin abandonar sus agujeros" (p. 7), a rainy day which causes the lights to languish and the cold air to cling to clothes and bones creating a confused laziness and Level's wart "se interpuso, y desde su primera aparición cobró vida y afirmó su lugar sin reservas" (p. 14). He describes a modest villa as being "asfixiada de muebles" (p. 27), "las hojas pardas del anteportón raídas y rayadas como el dedo de un albañil,

que lloraban al abrirse tristemente" (p. 52), "La puerta . . . deja salir, desde lo oscuro, un silabeo informe, apagado, menudo, de timbres femeninos" (p. 67), "los vestíbulos, también, de ciertos hoteles enfermizos, grandes y vacíos que parecen eructar zumos ácidos en su lividez de convaleciente" (p. 111), "La Chandler hace sonar sus muelas masticando lentamente, metódica, uniforme, sin parar" (p. 141) and "La revista sucumbió, pues, anegada en sangre" (p. 182).

At other times, Garmendia makes use of effective word pictures to convey a variety of images, each tending to distort reality. Some of these include:

> . . . unos cabos de lápices maltratados y romos tienen el aspecto de un bocado devuelto a medio masticar (p. 12).
>
> Su cara amarillo limón, de limón que ha empezado a podrirse, y los dedos descarnados sobando el maletín . . . (p. 24).
>
> Jimmy lo conduce de una manera peculiar, agarrándose fuertemente al volante, los brazos rígidos, echado hacia atrás, la mirada lanzada al horizonte como si llevara las riendas de una pareja de caballos (p. 38).
>
> . . . una monja altísima, cilíndrica, de una sola pieza, el hábito morado nazareno que parecía fijado a la dura armazón del cuerpo por infinitos alfileres, . . . (p. 80).
>
> La cara de Eulalia, se ha tornado tan rígida que me parece verla caer en pedazos como un viejo revoque (p. 88).
>
> Su sonrisa chispeaba un momento, jugueteaba por dentro y su mano se abría y cerraba en firmes masajes sobre la frente como si de allí comenzara a exprimir las palabras que usaría de inmediato en pequeños bloques compactos de tamaños y formas diferentes, que luego iba a acomodar con cautela, unos sobre otros, bajo una mirada atenta y concentrada, fija en el mármol de la mesa (p. 127).

> . . . él escribía sin parar como si lo supiera todo de memoria, y yo en cambio veía que todos los nombres posibles estaban amontonados en algún depósito cerrado de mi mente que no conseguía abrir (pp. 152-53).
>
> Hablaban, eso sí, continuamente y sin esfuerzo, como si antes de llegar al papel hubieran sido rellenados hasta el tope de cierta cantidad de palabras que se hilvanaban con todo y sus signos de puntuación y su correcta ortografía (p. 225).
>
> En medio de un estrépito de fichas y arrastrar de silla, las voces exaltadas se mezclan formando una pasta de gritos (pp. 253-54).

Synesthesia is common in La mala vida. For example, "un aire mustio de sorda vigilia" (p. 13), "un aire que entra por los oídos con un débil y oscuro zumbido" (p. 46), "una sorda gama de verdes, marrones y azules" (p. 60), "un soplo de oscuridad" (p. 128), "un silencio . . . excitante" (p. 198), "un latido gordo" (p. 223), and "un ruido . . . oscuro" (p. 258).

Colloquialisms and vulgarisms appear frequently in this work. While in Los habitantes and in Día de ceniza they are isolated interjections which contribute to character portrayal or setting, in La mala vida, they are also an integral part of the language in some instances. Among these are:

> La idea de la revista nació de un tal Iturriza, español, medio mierda, un tipo hablador y soberbio . . . (p. 144).
>
> -Para ti que quieres iniciarte en la cosa, ésta es una oportunidad del carajo. Palabra. . . . El de la idea es un español, Iturriza, ¿sabes? Un poco jodido, pesado como todos, pero sabe su cosa, claro (p. 149).
>
> "Salte para la calle, viejo marico, ladrón. Salte si es hombre, gallego del carajo" (p. 181).

> Debía andar por ahí, el viejo cabrón de mierda, confundido entre las figuras sin rostro que manchaban la media luz antigua (p. 189).
>
> . . . Ciro me daba la espalda y echaba a caminar adelante sin ocuparse de mí que no era más que un pobre infeliz marico de mierda (p. 242).
>
> La China decía al principio que yo tenía un tipo de comemierda pero que le caía simpático (p. 244).

In La mala vida, Garmendia initiates a unique approach to the dialogue which he expands in his next novel. At times, he abolishes the normal dialogue format and replaces it with conversations within the framework of a narrative passage. Examples of this approach to the dialogue include the following:

> Los ojos brotados. ¡Nicolasa! Carajos, mierdas, ésta es una casa de putas, de putas, de putas, de putas, y seguía golpeando la misma palabra y corriendo a lo largo del comedor . . . (p. 57).
>
> Lo espiaba de soslayo, sin importarme que él se diera cuenta y hasta respondiera a mi impaciencia . . . : todavía no, no esperes nada aún, no hay nada todavía . . . (p. 120).
>
> Hablábamos a gritos y las palmadas llovían en las espaldas de don Pepe, carajo, qué gran hombre; yo propongo un tiro a dos colores para la sección deportiva, ¿dónde va la página poética? Salimos a comprar cigarillos y ya el negro del botiquín estaba cerrando. Qué te parece, qué grande es la vida, hermano (p. 152).
>
> . . . un mínimo deslizamiento de la voz al decir mucho gusto, cómo está usted, gracias, ahora no; . . . (p. 155).
>
> La axila depilada pidió otras cervezas y en seguida procedió a despedirse usando una voz lastimera, aporreada: no, no podía acompañarnos más tiempo, lo sentía tanto, tenía ocupaciones (p. 158).

Italics indicate not a structural change but either

emphasis or a mimicking of someone's speech. For example, ". . . me ha venido llamando señor desde hace cinco años . . ." (p. 7), ". . . debía ir con frecuencia a la imprenta durante la tirada, a corregir pruebas o a lo que Parrita llamaba vigilar la edición, . . ." (p. 138), "Don Pepe era un humilde amante del saber y la cultura, título que él mismo se atribuía, . . ." (p. 148), "Hacia el fondo, en un parte formado por tabiques de coleta pintada, tenía Iturriza su privado como él lo llamaba" (p. 161) and "Mi amistad de varios años con el sastre anatómico de la línea impecable, Benigno Zamorano, . . ." (p. 191).

Sentences are shortened frequently to phrases or even to a single word. Often these consist of a verb or a verb and modifier. This contributes to the conversational flow of the work and lends a sense of clarity and a contrasting simplicity. Some examples include: "Aplaudíamos" (p. 23), "Vuelvo a casa" (p. 39), "Llovía furiosamente" (p. 75), "Despierto" (p. 89), "Me detengo" (p. 96), "No invento nada" (p. 131), "Temblaba" (p. 178), "Es allí" (p. 207), "Le temblábamos" (p. 239) and "Ganas de llorar" (p. 241).

Los pies de barro, Garmendia's most recent novel, is similar to La mala vida not only in theme, characterization and structure, but also in the treatment of language and the writer's vision of reality. In general terms, the work continues the balance of sensuous exaggeration and a sharply

altered prose. Los pies de barro reveals a consistent tendency toward language stripped of extraneous expressions, a sparse prose intent on a more direct writing. This style of writing contributes significantly to characterization and theme in the accumulation of what seem to be mere words, not communication, and the colorless recounting of the commonplace. Brushwood refers to this, although from a different perspective, as the "contraste entre el lenguaje empleado para comunicar el cosmos mediocre y el lenguaje chocante que se emplea en los pasajes eróticos o escatológicos."[19] Appeal to the senses and vivid simile, metaphor, personification and word pictures continue their unique role in this work.

The sense of sound, as in La mala vida, is predominant in the language of Los pies de barro. These sounds include not only the recurring noises of the city, but also the intimate and interior annoyances which reveal the protagonist's anxiety. Some examples of Garmendia's attention to sound are:

> . . . sale un murmullo confuso de voces, un grito de mujer que es la misma que sale cubriéndose la cara y chilla, ríen adentro, . . .[20]
>
> Se escuchaban de lejos: un pregón recio y amellado que parecía rejarle la garganta, unas oes largas de tostonero, voz de ciego llena de polvo, seca como un cuero de iguana (p. 70).
>
> Todo era extraño en aquel lugar, especialmente el ruido que recargaba el aire como una materia pesada con aristas metálicas: ruido de cien voces fundidas, que se encajona en los largos pasillos y salones de clase

> donde huele a yeso o a pinturas y detrás el sonido redondo y sostenido de grandes portazos (p. 77).
>
> . . . acercándome su voz calmuda que se demora insalivando y deglutiendo algunos finales de palabras, como si retuviera un caramelo en la boca . . . (p. 96).
>
> . . . el librazo de la Historia del Cielo de Flanmarión que se resquebraja al abrirse, sonando como las maderas de una casa en ruinas, . . . (p. 107).
>
> También he oído ruidos, voces desconocidos y he sentido correr mi sangre (p. 114).
>
> Al mirarnos con sus ojos nublados, la enferma abrió una boca blanca y emitió dos sonidos extraños, dos aes estranguladas que se repitieron a intervalos iguales (p. 140).
>
> Una mierda espaciada, larga, con una enorme erre en el medio (p. 180).
>
> En medio del bullicio oigo las campanadas lentas, redondas cuya sonoridad se expande en un solo círculo, como si un peso de bronce golpeara en un charco de aceite (p. 305).

Garmendia seems extraordinarily interested in a literal portrayal of sounds as he frequently demonstrates exaggeration and detail. He imitates the flow of Pancho's words in "próximoacoronarsucarrerademedicina" (p. 39) and "secretariodeculturadelcentrodeestudiantesdelLiceo y esperabaobtenerun espaciogratuitoenla Emisoraparala-transmisiónde un programaestrictamenteculturalsin finalidad-espolíticasdeningunaespecie" (p. 41). Other imitations include "trompetatatatararatatatararatata" (p. 91), "ratatatatatatatatatata" (p. 120), "se caaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaae" (p. 126), "bellíiiisima . . . mieeeerda" (p. 136), "Brrrrrrrrrrr" (p. 145), "esperaaaar" (p. 184), "yujúúúú"

(p. 195), "¡Miguel Angeeeeel!" (p. 220), "Guadaluuuuuuuupe" (p. 270) and "tra la la tra la la lalalalalalala" (p. 294). He uses assonance in "oír el ruido en u de las burbujas que suben en el frasco" (p. 193--underlining added).

Appeal to the sense of smell, while not as intense in this work, is significant as an element of the Garmendian style. The restaurant is filled with the odor of tartar sauce, a bedroom smells of night cream and women's stockings, Miguel Angel remembers the aroma of "los fritos, de la carne espumando en las brazas, . . . las verduras y las especias, la melaza y los quesos y los embutidos, . . ." at an old market (p. 38), a car's interior smells like new shoes, a bordello exudes "un golpe de cerveza rancia" (p. 82), he notices the stench of rotting fish at the beach and the acid smells of a darkroom. Miguel Angel's room as a child "olía a cucarachas" (p. 196), he mentions Inda's home in an older part of the city where the patio smelled of vegetation, insects and dampness, and he describes the repulsive odors of a beggar, "su pestilencia sólida y moldeable" (p. 260).

Appeal to the sense of sight is low in Los pies de barro as is appeal to the sense of touch, although the latter achieves some importance due to the role of sex. Some examples of the tactile sense include: "pongo a andar las yemas de los dedos al ras de la lanilla delicada de la alfombra" (p. 20), "Siente el cosquilleo de los mosquitos en las nalgas y el frío de la noche" (p. 46), "los pechos

blandos de la mujer le han tropezado el brazo y la sensación del roce persiste debajo de la manga donde él se frota con los dedos" (p. 59), "el roce de los cubitos le duerme los labios" (p. 60), "Guardaba todavía la sensación pastosa y cruda de la cama" (p. 94), "todo mi cuerpo estrecho y tubular metido en el calor de la sábana y la presión oscura en la vejiga, que conduce mis pensamientos al cuarto de baño" (p. 95), "la presión uniforme de tu mano en mi brazo" (p. 103), "el roce fresco de su falda" (p. 208) and "siento la rasgadura de sus uñas en mi cuello" (p. 209).

Simile, as in previous novels, contributes to the process of depersonalization by a consistent comparison of human beings to animals or to objects, lending a negative or derrogatory influence. Miguel Angel imagines himself as a tiger attacking an unnamed person with whom he carries on a conversation in the opening lines of the novel, Julio moves his head like a wooden dummy, a woman is "fría y desangrada como una sonámbula" (p. 12), a head of hair is curled like "un enorme hormiguero color ceniza" (p. 21), a man's face is covered with spots that look like nail heads, Graciela compares Miguel Angel to a meek little dog, an old man looks like "un bastón nudoso, por lo amarillo y seco y lo estreñido que era" (p. 39), Cacique breathes like a broken bellows, Julio is like "un cuerpo soñoliento" (p. 66) and Miguel Angel thinks of himself "pelado como un plátano" (p. 66). A human hand is like a sharp thorn,

swollen veins envelop a woman's legs like parasites, a woman's shape is like a barrel, a man's eyes jump like birds, an elderly Lebanese is like "una camella de trapo a causa de su puntiaguda joroba y un olor abundante que despedía a su peso y que a no ser propiamente de camello, menos aún se aproximaba a la familia humana" (p. 158), Pavel is like "un pájaro en tierra, dando salticos y aleteos" (p. 185), a fat woman's head is like "un globo de helio" (p. 202), a young man jumps "como un gusano" (p. 214) and a priest is like a bony phantom.

Some use is made of the metaphor:

> a woman: el doble adecuado de una fotografía en color de Paris Match, pero de un número atrasado que se hojea en cualquier parte donde uno tiene que esperar sin ganas (p. 7);
>
> a woman's breasts: dos peloticas trémulas (p. 8);
>
> Julio's automobile: una pequeña fiera iracunda que parece haber escapado milagrosamente con vida de un duelo de colmillos y revolcones (p. 13);
>
> Julio: una violenta y exasperada máquina de huesos (p. 15);
>
> time: una gota de aceite en la mano (p. 16);
>
> a man's legs: dos largos cilindros de caqui desteñido (p. 40);
>
> the tales of Miguel Angel's father: caras de maniquíes endurecidas en un mismo molde, que se miraban las unas a las otras (p. 80);
>
> the barrio: una abultada raíz que se expandía sin tregua (p. 81); una hendedura pululante que palpitaba bajo el vientre harto de la otra ciudad de torres blancas y vidrieras iluminadas (pp. 81-82);

> a crippled, elderly lady: una figura de paja y papel arrugado, que una chispa hubiera hecho desaparecer en una sola y repentina llamarada (p. 141).

Another element of style which is effective in describing Miguel Angel's reality is personification. Some of the few examples include hands that sleep, the roof of the Mercado Central that swells its roof to the sun, walls that are licked by oil, eyes soothed by beer, a naked wall, anguished hands, a wrecked Packard "todo desnarizado, tuerto de un faro, la jeta torcida en una mueca melancólica" (p. 77), "La locura, el alcohol, la putería invadían todos los pasadizos del laberinto" (p. 81), tired colors, El Tuerto's eye that "se retrae en su órbita, como si la proximidad de unos débiles mellizos de raza inferior lo cubriera de hastío o desaliento" (p. 103), "Bar las tres letras de neón, la ere enferma abrazada por una titilación fosforescente" (p. 113), "la ciudad dormida" (p. 154), "el golpe del sol en plena calle me despierta con un cogotazo" (p. 186) and walls that are "castigadas por infinidad de rayaduras y palotes" (p. 271).

Garmendia's vision produces outstanding word pictures, memorable twists to reality. Juan Liscano suggests that the writer's strength "consiste en sugerir mediante el detalle, en . . . un gran poder de visualización y de captación de ambientes."[21] The following examples are some of the more picturesque from Los pies de barro:

> . . . Aquelarres (por supuesto que tuvo dificultades con la palabra: pareció retenerla en silencio unos instantes entre las yemas de los dedos como si sostuviera un huevito de paloma, . . . (p. 10).
>
> . . . Julio no podía moverse, estaba rígido y desfigurado como si mi boca abierta lo clavara contra la pared (p. 15).
>
> En un momento dado, ella podía prescindir del conjunto de sus facciones y valerse únicamente de los labios para comunicarse, ejecutando movimientos mecánicos que cortaban las palabras a cuchillo, lo cual le imprimía una severidad chocante (p. 51).
>
> Escucharlas resultaba tan poco entretenido para mí, como hojear una colección de estampas donde un solo personaje reapareciera en cada hoja, adoptando poses y actitudes diferentes y ostentando algún ligero cambio en el vestuario (p. 80).
>
> . . . tu cara redonda y aplanada, como si alguien se le acabara de sentar encima y al levantarse le hubiera reventado un cuesco que te dejó de herencia la nariz arrugada y la boca fruncida para siempre (p. 102).
>
> . . . los ojos prensados y fijos, como de cien años de vigilia (p. 139).
>
> Las manos estaban tan llenas de hormigas, que parecía que llevara guantes (p. 145).
>
> Un día abrí los ojos y sentí que él se había ido como si fuera un mal olor (p. 219).

An element related to this is the use of synesthesia. These unexpected linkings of dissimilar senses offer vivid images. They include "semejante oscuridad tan suave" (p. 19), "la oscuridad de lana fría y un lejano olor animal" (p. 20), "siente un frío amarillo en la cara" (p. 47), "esa fría oscuridad" (p. 83), "un verde tibio y soñoliento" (p. 88), "un sonido ácido" (p. 100), "un zumbido tenso y aceitado" (p. 115) and "el ruido grueso de la calle" (p. 253).

Vocabulary in Los pies de barro reflects as well the two levels of reality portrayed by Garmendia. On one hand, the work is replete with colloquialisms and vulgarisms. They reflect the guerrilla warfare ambient and the intimate and violent relationship between Miguel Angel, Graciela and their interaction with mutual friends. Conversely, the novel demonstrates a thematic, structural and stylistic maturity and sophistication which surpasses Garmendia's earlier works. He utilizes vocabulary of other languages such as "pommes frites" (p. 16), "western" (p. 31), "piu dolce" (p. 248). The narrator and other characters, in many cases artists and intellectuals, speak with a cosmopolitan savoir-faire about movie personalities like Edward G. Robinson, Peter Lorre, Rock Hudson, Jimmy Durante and Shirley Temple. They identify with the comic-strip character Archie, take Alka Seltzer, employ "disck jokis" (p. 202) and listen to Beethoven and "Tshaikowsky" (p. 251).

An increased complexity in sentence and paragraph structure seems to parallel other stylistic elements. Sentences may be extremely lengthy and grammatically involved. One example fills two pages and includes fifty-three verbs, forty-two prepositional phrases, six subordinate clauses and fifteen present participles (pp. 16-17). The conjunction y links six independent clauses into a long passage (p. 117). A sentence may be interrupted, without punctuation, to allow for an element of dialogue, as in the

following example:

> Sólo que todavía íbamos a contratiempo
> -¿Qué tal, loco? -lo dijo de una manera insoportablemente franca, convidándome con un fruncido de nariz
> y yo era todavía una mano izquierda desentrenada, que daba tumbos en un acompañamiento disparejo (p. 25).

Another sentence ends with the relative "que" (p. 29), after which there is an italicized interjection of several pages, and it apparently is never completed.

Garmendia also uses what may be called a sentence-collage, as in the following example:

> Cruzamos un metro de jardín y Julio llama a la puerta empleando la señal convenida: dos toques rápidos que se repiten por tres veces a intervalos iguales, sin saber si alguien que llegara a pasar en ese momento se da cuenta y piensa quiénes serán estos que tocan de una manera tan extraña y va donde el policía de la esquina y le dice ahí hay unos tipos sospechosos que tocan la puerta así y asá y cuando estemos todos en el sótano bien desprevenidos tran se presenta el policía manos arriba todos y yo le salto: a mí me trajeron engañado, lo juro, yo no tengo nada que ver con esto, no me interesa nada, si quieren les digo todo lo que sé y me sueltan y entonces me voy para la casa silbandito y del interior nos llega el rumor de un drama radiofónico: . . . (p. 117).

Another variation of this alternative to the dialogue appears in the simultaneous transcription of a conversation and narrative, as in these passages:

> Ana Rosa volvió ayer por la tarde, hola flaco, tuvo que subir doscientos metros de escalones, le palpita la nariz y tiene la boca entreabierta, sacudió la cabeza, se suelta el cabello, la gente te manda saludos flaco, se tendió boca abajo en la cama y se pone a hojear el manual de Mariguela, lo mataron coño, se da vuelta, abre los brazos, dobla una rodilla, siéntate flaco, todavía me duele la pierna, camino con dificultad, . . . (p. 69).

> Fue producto de un encuentro casual en la calle; nos tropezamos, yo tenía ganas de salir corriendo pero ella comenzó con qué tal, cómo estás, qué cuentas y cuándo nos vemos y por fin me comprometió a visitarla esa noche, a las ocho, sin falta, ¿sí?, no sea malo, lo espero, ¿eh? Bueno. Bueno (p. 233).

Garmendia's stylistic approach, while remaining consistent with the writer himself--since style is the man--, varies from earlier original manipulations of language to later attacks upon accepted bases of form. He makes effective use of simile, metaphor, personification, word pictures, synesthesia, vocabulary, sentence structure, dialogue and its variations, colloquialisms and concision. Appeal to the senses is a fundamental characteristic of his experiencing of reality, and it nearly always focuses on sordid or repulsive qualities.

Ernesto Sábato makes the important point that "la literatura de hoy no se propone la belleza como fin (que además la logre, es otra cosa). Mas bien es un intento de ahondar en el sentido general de la existencia, una dolorosa tentativa de llegar hasta el fondo del misterio."[22] Garmendia's emphasis on the scatological metaphor in his last two novels reveals the inherent dichotomy of this mystery. He pictures the ironic truth in a passage from Los pies de barro:

> Uno queda partido en dos. La mitad de abajo, todo un gran pedazo inferior aplanado y duro, es una bola de carne pelada que expele vientos y materia: una masa animal y estúpida que hace lo que debe; mientras hacia arriba crece una máquina cargada de energía, una vieja máquina con sus piezas calientes y aceitadas que sigue

> funcionando a la perfección. No tardo en abandonar el lápiz y cierro los ojos para llenarme por completo de esta sensación agradable de ser dos cosas vivas a la vez, cada una tan completa y tan grande como la otra: . . . (pp. 34-35).

María Teresa Babín strongly criticizes the antinovel in contemporary literature and seems to condemn it as a failure. She says,

> Al afanarse por crear una obra novelesca distinta a la de los novelistas que les precedieron en América, acumulan desmedidamente los pormenores más triviales, y colocan en un espacio de miles de palabras una colección de cuadros pornográficos, de reminiscencias cubistas, surrealistas y expresionistas abstractas, haciendo colores, olores, sonidos y formas que causan vértigo . . .[23]

The creator of a sustained, original and authentic interpretation of a Venezuelan citizen of the world, however, seeks to answer the need for a voice fluent in the parlance of a new generation. As distorted and difficult to face as that may be, such is the language and vision of Garmendia.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

[1]12th ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1970), pp. 453-54.

[2]Juan Liscano, Panorama de la literatura venezolana actual (Caracas: Publicaciones Españolas, S. A., 1973), p. 121.

[3]Ernesto Sábato, El escritor y sus fantasmas (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 1964), p. 210.

[4]María Rosa Alonso, "Los habitantes," Humanidades, No. 9, Año III, Tomo III (1961), p. 347.

[5]Francisco Pérez Perdomo, "Prólogo," Los pequeños seres by Salvador Garmendia (Montevideo: ARCA Editorial, 1967), pp. 9-10.

[6]Lubio Cardozo, "Memorias de Altagracia, un cambio en la narrativa de Salvador Garmendia," Cuadernos hispanoamericanos, 289-90 (julio-agosto, 1974), p. 444.

[7]Liscano, p. 131.

[8]Salvador Garmendia, Los pequeños seres (Montevideo: ARCA Editorial, 1967), p. 11. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[9]John S. Brushwood, "Cinco novelas de Salvador Garmendia: El impacto sobre los hábitos perceptivos," Hispania, Vol. 60, No. 4 (December, 1977), p. 885.

[10]Salvador Garmendia, Los habitantes (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C. A., 1968), p. 172. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[11]"Los habitantes," Revista Cultura Universitaria, No. 82 (enero-marzo, 1963), p. 127.

[12]Salvador Garmendia, Día de ceniza (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C. A., 1968), p. 200. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[13]José Antonio Castro, "Día de ceniza," Recensiones, No. 1 (n.d.), p. 51.

[14]Osvaldo Larrazábal Henríquez, Diez novelas venezolanas (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C. A., 1972), p. 47.

[15]J. R. Lovera de Sola, "Notas sobre Salvador Garmendia como escritor," Zona Franca, Año I, Segunda Etapa, No. 4 (noviembre-diciembre, 1970), p. 82.

[16]Salvador Garmendia, La mala vida (Montevideo: ARCA Editorial, 1968), pp. 222-23. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[17]Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "Salvador Garmendia, la visión y el lenguaje de un novelista," Imagen, 31 (15-8-1968), p. 4.

[18]Larrazábal Henríquez, p. 46.

[19]p. 887.

[20]Salvador Garmendia, Los pies de barro (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C. A., 1973), p. 59. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

[21]"En el umbral de una nueva narrativa," Papel Literario de El Nacional (10-9-1959), p. 8.

[22]p. 210.

[23]"La antinovela en Hispanoamérica," Revista Hispánica Moderna, XXXIV, Nos. 3-4 (julio-octubre, 1968), pp. 528-29.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

A generation ago, the Venezuelan novelist Rómulo Gallegos said, ". . . escribí mis libros con el oído puesto sobre las palpitaciones de la angustia venezolana."[1] Although a new Venezuela has grown up around the picturesque settings of don Rómulo's monumental works, the same dramatic claim applies to the novels of Salvador Garmendia; only the definition of "la angustia venezolana" has changed. It is significant that no writer since Gallegos has been able to maintain such a coherent and uniform body of literature. "En nuestro país, muchos narradores han escrito una o dos novelas excelentes, pero no fueron capaces de crear un universo novelesco a lo largo de varios libros, a la manera por ejemplo, de Rómulo Gallegos."[2]

Garmendia's relationship to the novel is not superficial, reaching back even to his youth.

> La novela me atrajo poderosamente desde mis comienzos en la literatura. Podría decir que ella incubó en mi adolescencia y creció junto conmigo, hasta formar parte de mis sentidos e intervenía directamente en mis hábitos intelectuales. La gran narrativa (fui un devorador

> ardiente del Siglo XIX, cuyos monumentos novelísticos admiré y venero todavía como a hermosos gigantes) significó para mí una técnica y una maestría, cuyos secretos residían en el mundo que me rodeaba.[3]

His contribution to the rejuvenation of the Venezuelan narrative is the result of his personal commitment to the genre and his intellectual concern for its future in a changing country. Earlier, cautious judgments by literary critics have multiplied into widespread recognition of his work as that of the leading example of the new narrative in Venezuela.[4]

Alberto Fillippi, commenting on the impact which Garmendia has had on the development of the Venezuelan novel, notes the problematic lack of a true narrative tradition of consistently authentic creativity. He compares the impact of Garmendia's work to that which Gallegos provided in his generation. "Raramente nuestra novelística ha respondido, a excepción quizás de Gallegos, con tónica digna y consciente a los movimientos narrativos contemporáneos."[5] In retrospect, this evaluation is certainly an understatement. Garmendia's themes, his characters, structural techniques and style are a fortunate meeting of a significant talent and a momentous cultural turning point.

Juan Loveluck itemizes the characteristics of the new novel in Latin America. These statements also summarize, in varying degrees, Garmendia's approach to the narrative. They include:

1) a disintegrating attack on the novel form and the preeminence of a narrator;
2) a disrespect for language;
3) the diminution of the traditional hero and his position vis-à-vis a chaotic world;
4) an experimentation with the element of time, including the importance of memory;
5) the use of cinematographic techniques;
6) a change in point of view emphasizing the camera-eye;
7) the reader as co-author and accomplice; and
8) the difficulty with logical, causal relationships.[6]

This is important evidence of Garmendia's success in effecting a renovation of the novel in Venezuela "frente al ruralismo o la mímica europeizante lo mismo que la exploración del lenguaje, la ruptura formal, una visión ecléctica y desprejuiciada."[7]

Garmendia's themes are the alienation of modern man in a meaningless and frustrating world and his inability to lift himself above the demeaning levels of mediocrity which surround him. He speaks to universal concerns "donde la angustia es ya humana, sin límites nacionales ni continentales."[8] His novels express the anguish of urban living which he views with keen insight, not as a casual passer-by, but with a vision that is "la pegajosa, caracoleante, cuesta arriba, del peatón, del pasajero de autobús, para quien cada detalle, cada letrero, cada piedra de la calle, es un espacio donde . . . el tiempo se arrastra perezosamente."[9]

The Garmendian hero stands without the masks of convention, a stranger to other human beings: "cada uno habita su escaño solitario sin permitir que otro se acerque demasiado."[10] His characterization is "más indirecta, más

evidenciadora que explicativa," without judgment or explanation.[11] Garmendia constantly seeks to reveal his protagonists' cowardice and weaknesses and to penetrate relentlessly into their innermost beings. He portrays ironic heroes in solely physical terms of the most intimate and repulsive nature. "Sobre ella no sopla en ningún momento el espíritu."[12]

Structurally, Garmendia's novels reflect international influences such as the destruction of chronological time, the importance of cinematics and the elimination of artificial form including conflict, climax and denouement. All five of his works are structurally closed; three end in death and two leave the protagonists in mute disillusionment and self-contempt. The novel becomes a reflection of the protagonist's fragmented reality through interior monologue, psychic flux and a severely objective stance.[13]

In terms of writing style, Garmendia expresses himself in a language devoid of pretention and modification. He depends heavily on the physical world through appeal to the senses, grotesque imagery and a fascination for detail. Internationally, he has been acclaimed for "la novità del linguaggio secco e tagliente, perfettamente aderente ai fatti descritti."[14] His works are dominated by "la pasión de las descripciones que sin cesar paralizan la acción y levantan dentro de la ilación narrativa grandes paneles estáticos, como cuadros o fotos fijas que el autor se

complace en traducir a palabras."[15]

Garmendia achieves in his novels the goals set by Sardio for bringing Venezuela into the mainstream of contemporary literature. His perspectives are universal, offering not only a succession of events and "una serie de personajes, sino que exprese una visión (real y alucinatoria a la vez) del mundo."[16] While not breaking from recent Venezuelan trends, he represents the timely culmination and amalgamation of themes, character portrayal, structural devices and dynamic style which have earned for him the reputation of foremost exponent of a new Venezuelan narrative.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

[1]Cited by Jesús López Pacheco in the Prologue to Obras Completas de Rómulo Gallegos (Madrid: Aguilar, 1958), p. xxii.

[2]Juan Liscano, Panorama de la literatura venezolana actual (Caracas: Publicaciones Españolas, S.A., 1973), pp. 134-35.

[3]Salvador Garmendia, personal letter (1-2-1980).

[4]Pedro Díaz Seijas, La antigua y la moderna literatura venezolana (Caracas: Ediciones Armitano, 1966), p. 715.

[5]"Garmendia y la novela venezolana," Papel Literario de El Nacional (26-11-1959), p. 6.

[6]Juan Loveluck, La novela hispanoamericana (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, S.A., 1969), pp. 27-28.

[7]Garmendia, personal letter (1-2-1980).

[8]Roberto E. Ríos, La novela y el hombre hispanoamericano (Buenos Aires: Editorial y Librería La Aurora, 1969), p. 39.

[9]Manuel Caballero, "Uslar Pietri, Garmendia: 'Two Nations,'" Cultura Universitaria, XC (enero-marzo, 1966), p. 33.

[10]Salvador Garmendia, Los pequeños seres (Montevideo: ARCA Editorial, 1967), p. 36.

[11]Eduardo Camacho Guizado, "Notas sobre la nueva novela hispanoamericana," Nueva narrativa hispanoamericana, I (1971), p. 134.

[12]Liscano, p. 132.

[13]Ivan A. Schulman, "La novela hispanoamericana y la nueva técnica," Universidad de Antioquia, 171 (1968), p. 86.

[14]Pantaleo Palmieri, "Scheda per Salvador Garmendia," Lettore di Provincia, 34-35 (1978), p. 121.

[15]Angel Rama, Salvador Garmendia y la narrativa informalista (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1975), p. 125.

[16]Loveluck, p. 115.

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