

What's Past is Prologue: Imagining the Socialist Nation in Cuba and in Hungary

Patricia D. Fox  
*University of Indiana Bloomington*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), and the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, **Purdue University Press** selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: [<clcweb@purdue.edu>](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)

---

### Recommended Citation

Fox, Patricia D. "What's Past is Prologue: Imagining the Socialist Nation in Cuba and in Hungary." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 1.1 (1999): <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1002>>

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <[clcweb@purdue.edu](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)>

---

**Volume 1 Issue 1 (March 1999) Article 3**

**Patricia D. Fox,**

**"What's Past is Prologue: Imagining the Socialist Nation in Cuba and in Hungary"**

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss1/3>>

---

Contents of ***CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 1.1 (1999)**  
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss1/>>

---

**Abstract:** Patricia D. Fox's article, "What's Past is Prologue: Imagining the Socialist Nation in Cuba and in Hungary," examines the symbolic mooring of Cuban and Hungarian identity, recuperated Caliban from William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and an ever conflicted Faustus/Adam from Imre Madách's *Az ember tragédiája*, respectively. Despite serial cosmological fragmentations and political upheaval, the present analysis holds that production and reproduction of these founding figures in the process of imagining the socialist nation represent an ongoing litigation of meaning. This process then conserves a marked thematic continuity through temporal conceptions, totality of exegesis, the mix of rational and mythical, and the recoding of past symbols to serve the present reality and to indirectly realign the past and prophesy the future. Beyond the formative and transformative points of similarity between the two cases, the essay discusses culturally specific divergences and the impact of differing experience and mentalities on literary and filmic expression. In conclusion, the study first offers a tentative model of socialist nation, positing a framework within which to understand and complicate Cuban and Hungarian sui generis patterns and then describes in the more universal context of narrating the nation those practices and characteristics common to that genre.

**Patricia D. FOX**

### **What's Past is Prologue: Imagining the Socialist Nation in Cuba and in Hungary**

Franz Boas proposes "that mythological worlds have been built up only to be shattered again, and that new worlds have been built from the fragments" (qtd. in Levi-Strauss 206; Teit 18). In a more popular examination, Joseph Campbell observes that "with every new advance ... man's knowledge and control of the powers of earth and nature alter, old cosmologies lose their hold and new come into being" (144). In my present study i assume that, even while "new" worlds are built and "new" cosmologies come into being, the fragments of former mythologies never completely lose their hold. Consequently, i suggest that, whatever its circumstance -- technological advance, social, or political revolution -- every transformation may alter, but seemingly does not erase, the reigning cultural conception of the universe. Recalling Roland Barthes' conception of mythical speech as an example of discourse -- a system of signification, a cosmology -- i contend that every group, community, society creates meaning, needs to create a system of signification proper to their own reality, while always relying on the constancy and the continuity of that created meaning. In other words, the interplay between national and socialist fictions suggests that History does not begin -- or end -- with a revolution.

Similar to José Antonio Maravall's study of shattered Renaissance cosmologies, the present project begins "to describe the complex interplay between mentality, institutions, aggregate interests and the exercise of power" (vii) by ultimately focusing "on the specific ways in which the emergence of this entity -- for Maravall, the process of State-craft; here, the process of imagining the socialist nation] has radically changed the mentalities of the people who have lived the change (Godzich and Spadaccini vii; see also e.g., Campbell, *Myth*, 138-41). In other words, on the models of Benedict Anderson, Graeme Turner, Peter Zwick, and Homi K. Bhabha, my interests lie "not only in what discourse is, but also in what discourse does" (Turner 1-2): how each instance of shattering or fragmentation necessarily impacts the collective consciousness of a culture and the images with which that community represents itself. And certainly, the histories of Cuba and Hungary provide ample evidence of cosmology-shattering transformations and the fragmented mythological worlds left in their wake.

When Columbus touched shore in Cuba on 27 October 1492, he wrote in the ship's log, "Where there is such marvelous scenery, there must be much from which profit can be made" (qtd. in McManus 17). And, just as "the separate streams of knowledge in the ancient world converged on Greece, where all knowledge was sifted, evaluated and turned into more profitable channels" (Alavi 18), so too would history and myth combine to "profitably" define Cuba, her peoples, and her cultures. Among the profiteers: Spain, whose 400-year colonial tenure ends unceremoniously in 1898, a defeat reflected in the artistic production of Spain's Generation of 1898; Britain, whose one year reign in 1762 gains them the Florida Peninsula; the United States, whose neo-colonial patronage follows on the heels of Spanish domination; the Cuban landed elite, whose enrichment in partnership with foreign multi-nationals foments corruption in government and opportunistic speculation in unstable markets. Various attempts to forcefully rewrite the reigning cosmology -- the system of meaning that was in place -- meet with defeat: The Ten Year War of Independence (1868-1878); the Second War of Independence (1895); the National Strike in August 1933 which succeeds in ousting the dictator Machado only to see him replaced 100 days later by army sergeant Fulgencio Batista, the man who would govern Cuba -- in fact -- until the last days of December 1958.

In Hungary -- "a nation of lost wars" (Nagy 11) -- there follows a similar progression of profiteers: the Turks occupy the country for nearly 150 years after the defeat of the Magyar army at Mohács in 1526; the Habsburg Empire rules in feudal, semi-colonial splendor for another two centuries (1686-1867); the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1867-1918), while allowing a certain measure of economic, social, and political development, ultimately denies to Hungary the practice of statecraft. After the dissolution of the Monarchy following World War I, the country is ruled, in turn, by a conservative elite (1920-1948) and then a Socialist-Communist coalition (1948-1953) headed by the dogmatically Stalinist Mátyás Rákosi. In this case, too, various attempts to challenge the existing cosmologies meet with failure: the Revolution for Independence from the Habsburgs in 1848, the Compromise of 1867

with Austria; the short-lived (133 days) Hungarian Soviet in 1919; a brief, unsuccessful spell of parliamentary democracy (1945-1947); and a series of disastrous alliances, e.g., with Germany (vis-a-vis the Monarchy) in World War I which reduced Hungary's territory by two-thirds (Treaty of Trianon, 1920), and again during World War II based on Hitler's promise to restore those lands (see, e.g., Hankiss; Brogan).

More than stylistic convention prompts me to prefer a present tense recapitulation of historical events in Cuba and in Hungary. The "presence" of these events is felt as a directly encountered, daily reality in which "past is prologue" and seemingly much more tangible than statues to past glories or commemorative street signs. Indeed, in an interview in September 1993, Cuban poet Nancy Morejón suggested to me that the Cuban Revolution which ousted Batista began with the 1868 War of Independence. Similarly, the dedication to Lisandro Otero's *En ciudad semejante* reads, "a los que han muerto por Cuba en cien años de combates revolucionarios." In that light, the 1959 Cuban Revolution represents a revolt against not only the dictatorship of Batista or of the landed elite and sugar hungry multi-nationals, but represents itself as the shattering of both the mythological world set in motion by Spanish colonial heritage and the only slightly fragmented cosmology of the neo-colonizing designs of the United States. Similarly, the 1956 explosion in Hungary also signaled a specific challenge to the heritage of Stalin's totalitarian brand of communism; however, more centrally, it represents an attempt to dislodge the ghosts of her own dominated, compromised and feudal past. In that vein, Marx declared that, "men make their own history ... not under circumstance chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted, from the past" (Part I, para. 2). Certainly, on a discursive level, it proves difficult to distinguish between empire building explorers and conquerors, on the one hand, who in their own time shattered old world cosmologies, inventing new worlds from the fragments for the greater glory of g-d and king, and the ensuing profiteers, on the other, newer versions of a former cosmology's deities and aristocrats, who continued the process.

Such periods of transformation will produce some of the most well known, and often most stunning, works of these literatures. One thinks of the creative output of the Del Monte circle in turn of the century Cuba (e.g., Manzano; Romero Suarez) or of literary production during the period between the two World Wars in Hungary (e.g., Kosztolányi, the Nyugat School, etc.). In addition, national figures forged by these transformations, such as Hungarian Sándor Petöfi (1823-1849) and José Martí (1853-1895), will frame and excite the collective consciousness of future cosmologies. Indeed, these revolutionary warriors and poets take on the mythical proportions of the visionary hero, "who has gone on the adventure and brought back the message, and who is the founder of institutions -- and the giver of life and vitality to his community" (Campbell *Open*, 3). Therefore, in the complex interplay of shifting cosmologies, the juxtaposition of domination and failed challenges -- the meeting of cosmologies -- becomes fundamental in shaping the mentalities of those in Cuba and in Hungary "who have lived the change." While this negotiation ultimately ties and yet distinguishes past, present and future, the key factor at work in this process lies in the search for continuity, for the indestructible soul: a stable nation-image.

The banquet scene in the film *La última cena* (1977, *The Last Supper*) directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea provides a funny and often ironic glimpse of one such meeting of cosmologies (see, e.g., *Viewer's*; Fernet). In this case, the confrontation is between traditional African belief systems and orthodox Catholicism, a syncretism replayed in contemporary Cuban culture (i.e., Santería). In fine Hegelian fashion, the Master has "invited" twelve hand-picked slaves to share dinner with him on Good Thursday, recreating in his mind, Christ's final meal with his apostles. Along with the lavish feast, the slave owner intends to impart religious dogma to the unwashed. Of course, the slaves, whose tattered and dirty clothing provides stark contrast to the elegant attire of the slave owner, view the event with some apprehension, but soon begin to exchange stories -- their own founding myths and master narratives -- with the inebriated Criollo. Alea cleverly exposes a tangled web of cosmological incest and he takes on the weighty task of deciphering the relations between, on the one hand Catholic mythology employed as a justification of the racist discourse of slavery and the cosmology of colonial Cuba which is, in turn, reminiscent of a *La vida es sueño* (*Life is a Dream*) mentality of seventeenth-century feudal Spain, captured to perfection by Pedro Calderon de la Barca. By extension, the film implicitly challenges the remnants of this cosmology in modern day racist attitudes which depreciate the African component of Cuban national identity. Symptomatically, one

could suggest a further relationship to socialism's project to decipher, and to then challenge, the interrelatedness between religious dogma and colonialism's practices.

The meeting of cosmologies is also the theme of "Hajónapló" ("Logbook"), a short story set in Denmark and written by the Hungarian writer Géza Ottlik. On the one hand, he presents the ruminations of two "hajó nélkül maradt tengerészek" (41) ("shipless sailors" 31), Captain Kirketerp and Vice-Admiral Ivo Maandygaard, the "Danish" rendering of Iván Mándy, an Ottlik contemporary, parts of whose short story, "Magukra maradtak" ("Left Behind") make up the text of "Hajónapló." The narrative then adroitly counterbalances their musings with the cultural system of the Maori, the seafaring New Zealand tribesmen who now rule the landlocked country. More centrally, the uneven juxtaposition of domination and failed challenges here serves to represent the radically changed mentalities of "those who have lived the change." In consequence, the following fictive historical recapitulation is pointedly reminiscent of Hungarian historical reality: "Dániának nem maradt kikötője, tengerpartja se, amióta előbb a svédek, áruló szövetségeseik, kiverték a vizigótokat és az angolokat, s megszállták az országot, aztán az oroszok kiverték a svédek, őket pedig a Marquesas-harcosok győzték le, és újabb dán területeket csatoltak szomszédaikhoz. ... A megszállók is egyre rosszabbak lettek, Kirketerp szerint. Az angol protektorátus jobb volt a svédnél, s míg a cár alatt, görögkeleti hitre áttérve bár, de a kereszténységüket megtarthatták, és a dán királyi monarchiát is -- (más néven ugyan és korlátlan teljhatalommal felruházva) -- most a Marquesas-uralom betiltott minden vallást, és eltörölte a királyságot is. Altörzsfőnökség lett, és más nevet kapott az ország" ("Hajónapló" 7-8) / "Denmark has no ports left, no seaboard, ever since the Swedes, those treacherous allies, having chased out the Visigoths and the English, proceeded to take over the country only to be expelled by the Russians who were in turn ousted by the Marquesan warriors who gave away even more Danish territory to the neighbors. ... And the conquerors had been progressively worse, accord to Kirketerp. The English protectorate had been preferable to the Swedes, while under the Czars, although converted to Greek Orthodoxy, they kept their Christianity as well as the Danish monarchy (albeit under another name and transformed into an absolute autocracy) -- whereas the current Marquesan dominion outlawed all religions and abolished the monarchy. The country became a tribal subchieftainship and received a new name" ("Logbook" 9-10).

It is as a result of these serial dominations that the Captain remains a parenthetical "hazafiatlan és egyben sovíniszta ember" (8) ("a non-patriot who is at the same time a nationalist"), an interesting and telling distinction between national and political spheres. The short story, which Ferenc Takács Ferenc describes as "a Borgesian exercise in transfictionalizing certain obsessive paradoxes of national identity, authorship, writing and language" (168) also proffers lessons to be learned from the meeting of cosmologies: the limits of rationality and the irony of victory. In the first instance, the Vice-Admiral affirms that "'Az értelem önmagában nem képes a valóság dolgait megragadni," [mert őszinte,] "A világ --(egyébként lehetetlen!) -- megértésével a természet akartunk úrrá lenni, tevékenységgel, szerszámokkal, találmányokkal, felfedezésekkel, végül akár pusztítás, gyilkolás árán is" (36) / "Reason alone is unable to grasp all of reality," [because as he suggests,] "By understanding our world (an impossible undertaking!) we wanted to master nature, through endless activity, tools, inventions, discoveries and finally even at the cost of murderous destruction" (27).

The observations is more than a little reminiscent of Columbus. Consequently, Kirketerp later concludes, "Nem győzni kell, hanem kibírni" (22) ("It is not winning that counts, but enduring" 19). For him, something else attests to this endurance: "A lelket mégsem lehet teljesen elpusztítani, mert teremt magának egy ráadás Spielraumot, könyökteret, egy új dimenziót, ahol létezni tud, és szabad lesz örökre" (23) (the indestructibility of the soul, and its ability to create for itself additional room for play, elbow room, a new dimension where it may exist free forever" 19). Consequently, the transitoriness of political rationalities appears superfluous in comparison to the permanence of the national soul which continues to endure and prosper. In the second instance -- the meaning of victory -- Captain Kirketerp muses that "A vereség arra jó, hogy sok ráér idt nyer vele az ember. Hát hogy állunk győzelemnél?" (45) ("A defeat was good for giving a person lots of leisure time for thinking it over. But how about a victory?" 33). Watching the televised Olympic victory of compatriot, runner Astrid A. Anderson, he wonders if "mert kipróbálja, hogy a jó ismerős, vereséggel nyert sok ráérő időből a győzelem mennyit hagy meg, a fontos, ősi semmit nem csinálásra" (55-56) ("she is probing how much of the well-known, plentiful leisure time of defeat is left after the victory, for that all-

important, primeval doing-nothing" 40).

Both will conclude -- he, from an armchair in the Admiral's living room, she, grasping flowers and gold medal in the vast emptied Paris stadium -- that "a gyzelem éppolyan értékű véletlen, mint a vereség" (57) ("a victory is an accident with the same value as a defeat" 41). It is not important that the reader agree or disagree with this observation. This fictive recreation becomes significant if the reader can discern, in the complex interplay of shifting cosmologies, evidence of how the Hungarian national consciousness has been shaped under circumstances -- domination and defeat -- directly encountered, given and transmitted, from the past. This temporal confusion -- past, present, future -- and the attendant significative consolidation, across historical, literary and cinematographic lines, would seem to belie the Quixotic search for meaning in a world of changing values. Such, however, is not the case.

Despite -- or because of -- the fragmentation of antecedent mythologies, Cuban and Hungarian stories evince a seemingly inherent thematic continuity: the stability of nation-identity. In two representative works, a kind of turned-in-upon-itself circularity follows from the deliberate construction of a spatial unity: the city, metaphor of the nation. Simultaneously tracing historical events in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Cuba, *En ciudad semejante* (1970) (*In a City Such as This*) by Lisandro Otero (and translated into Hungarian) attempts to break with the cycle of past defeats and disillusionments with the triumph of the revolution -- which is not an end in itself, but a point of departure. In *A városalapító* (1970) (*The City Builder*) by György Konrád, this marked circularity produces an overwhelming hopelessness and the sense of an always, already condemnation. Here again, the architect traces the history of the city, including that of its builders, from the Middle Ages on through the present, tacitly comparing the shifting cosmologies at each stage. In both narratives, the nation-city is presented as a cohesive and hermetic model despite the fact that in distinct historical periods it appears the result of divine whim, a fluke of nature, or teleological intention. Here again, as in *La última cena* and "Hajónapló," these stages do not represent distinct entities, but instead insinuate varying mythological perspectives which invite the reader to juxtapose the similarities -- those points of continuity -- between each succeeding cosmology.

For his part, Jean-François Lyotard affirms that contact between cosmologies "is thus a litigation over the names of times, places, and persons, over the senses and referents attached to those names" (157). This observation echoes Levi-Strauss' conception of the purpose of myth -- within each succeeding cosmology -- as that of "provid[ing] a logical mode capable of overcoming a contradiction (an impossible achievement)," he admits parenthetically, "if, as it happens, the contradiction is real" (229). Likewise Ticio Escobar asserts, "Para conjurar el caos, acechante siempre, cada sociedad necesita de explicaciones totales, y lo que no puede explicar con razones lo explica con mitos" (121) ("in order to hold the ever threatening chaos at bay, each society needs full explanations, and that which cannot be explained by reason, is explained by myth). Accordingly, the signaled litigation of contradictory and chaotic discontinuities would seem to support the Vice-Admiral's conclusion that "reason alone is unable to grasp all of reality." Therefore, in Cuban and Hungarian historical, literary, and filmic stories, the continuing litigation of meanings describes the complex interplay between former cosmologies and the enigmatic integrity within the socialist cosmology.

In both the Cuban and Hungarian cases, one example of the search for continuity -- the continuing litigation of normalized or naturalized meanings -- can be seen in the adoption of certain favored archetypal figures: Caliban in Cuba and Faustus in Hungary. Campbell posits that "such images -- which, in a magical way, immediately touch and waken centers within us of life--are to be retained, washed clean of 'meanings,' to be reexperienced (and not reinterpreted) as art" (*Myth* 159). Indeed, as with the "presence" of the historical past, the "presence" of these archetypal figures lends a circular dimension to the overall paradigm of on-going discontinuity and offsetting continuity. Hence, reader and viewer begin to discern a continually reexperienced identifying motif in the stories of these countries. The figure of Caliban -- born from sailor's yarns, documented by Montaigne, dramatized by Shakespeare -- is a case in point. Evidenced most concretely in Roberto Fernandez Retamar's 1971 essay, "Calibán: apuntes sobre la cultura en nuestra América," present-day Cuban identity attempts to confront those fifteenth- into sixteenth-century dialectics on civilization and barbarism. Retamar's seminal tract likewise attempts to dislodge the legacy of a nineteenth into twentieth century "updated" polemic contained in works such as José Enrique Rodó's *Ariel* (1900) Domingo Faustino

Sarmiento's *Facundo: civilización y barbarie* (1845), José Vasconcelas' *La raza cósmica* (1925), and even such "abolitionist" novels as Suarez Romero's *Francisco, el ingenio, o, las delicias del campo* (1838). Those works essentially divided the world into two opposing poles: for Rodó, Calibán and Ariel; for Sarmiento, "cuidad y campo" (town and country); for Vasconcelas, "carne y alma" (body and soul); and for Romero Suarez, black slave and the "European" Criollo. Their writers decried base physical appetites, untamed and untutored nature -- the jungle, the Indian, and Black savages -- and the chaotic past (and present) of the "New" World. Evoking Greek and French models, these gentlemen favored a rational plan: the promotion of man's spiritual attributes, the domestication of man and nature, and a cosmopolitanism which could promise a logically ordered future.

José Martí's "Nuestra América mestiza," (1886) ("Our America, a Melting Pot") written in the latter part of the nineteenth century, represented an earlier attempt to wash clean and to litigate these polemics in the context of Cuban and Latin American identity within the new cosmology -- world-view -- of post-colonial independence. Following Martí's lead, Retamar will later declare, in the context of post-neo-colonial independence: "Nuestro símbolo no es pues Ariel, como pensó Rodó, sino Calibán. Esto es algo que vemos con particular nitidez los mestizos que habitamos estas mismas islas donde vivió Calibán: Próspero invadió las islas, mató a nuestros antepasados, esclavizó a Calibán y le enseñó su idioma para poder entenderse con él, ¿qué otra cosa puede hacer Calibán sino utilizar ese mismo idioma -- hoy no tiene otro -- para maldecirlo, para desear que caiga sobre él la 'roja plaga'? ... ¿Qué es nuestra historia, qué es nuestra cultura, sino la historia, sino la cultura de Calibán?" (32-33) / "Our symbol then is not Ariel, as Rodó thought, but Caliban. This is something that we -- the mixed races that inhabit these same islands where Caliban lived -- see with particular clarity: Prospero invaded the islands, killed our ancestors, enslaved Caliban and taught him his language so that he could communicate with him. What else could Caliban do but use this same language -- today there is no other -- to curse him, to wish on him the black plague? ... What is our history, what is our culture, if not the history, the culture of Caliban?" (32-33; my translation).

Both sides of the Caliban polemic -- the uneasy relations between interloper and native; and, the civilizing mind-set which asserts that culture (symbolic life) is brought, not born (raw nature) -- inform not only the narrative strategies, but more centrally continue to impact the lives of those who have lived the change. Consequently, there is a deliberate effort to shift meaning from Caliban, the colonized and victimized monster or fluke of nature to a recuperated Caliban: "rebelde," creator, craftsman of culture as the preferred Cuban post-revolutionary identity.

As with the adoption of Calibán, the figure of Doctor Faustus becomes a site of significant litigation and the link between fiction and culture in Hungarian literature and film. And similar to Calibán, regardless of temporal or spatial realities, the good doctor's reappearances in world literatures and histories are many and diverse: a figure of early "Volksbuch" (Folklore) legend, a sixteenth-century alchemist in the works of Christopher Marlowe and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, an ambitious but spineless actor in twentieth-century Nazi Germany in Klaus Mann's book (1936) and Szabó Istvan's Oscar winning film (1980), a romantic and tragic figure who reflects something essentially human. In both these last works, titled *Mephisto* after the devil's counterpart who escorts Faustus on his nefarious travels, it is the personality traits of greed and limitless desire and not folkloric precision which remain central to the characterization. Yet another recipient of this rich genealogy, the play "Az ember tragédiája" (1859) ("The Tragedy of Man") would immortalize Hungarian Imre Madách (see, e.g., Németh; Koltai). As Dieter P. Lotze suggests, echoing the sentiment expressed by Retamar regarding symbols of national identity, this last work: "holds a special place in Hungarian culture. Magyars generally see it as the most outstanding combination of philosophy and literature ever produced in their language. Its deliberate universality -- already indicated in its title -- sets it apart from most Hungarian literary works and makes it more easily accessible to foreigners. On the surface, only its language seems to separate it from the writings of other European poets. Yet for many generations Hungarians have considered it very much as part of their cultural heritage and expressive of their national experience" (8). "Having fallen from the garden, Adam demands from Lucifer the promised prize: knowledge. As with the legend of Doctor Faustus, which its remaining eleven scenes of negatively colored dream visions of various historical periods so closely parallel, this narrative pessimistically focuses man's struggle between good and evil, the often absurd Kafkaesque tightrope walk between transcendent entity and unwitting representative. Prospero

may abandon the island, but for the doctor: "Hell hath no limit, nor is circumscribed / In one self place, for where we are is hell / And where hell is there must we ever be; / And, to conclude, when all the world dissolves / And every creature shall be purified, / All places shall be hell that is not heaven" (Madách V 135-40).

Even Caliban, whose deformed body would more readily intimate an earthly hell, can await the triumphant departure of Prospero, the external force which compromised his freedom. Faustus, on the other hand, is condemned to forever carry within him his private hell, the imperfection of his bartered soul. In the transformation from the religious/transcendent (other-worldly) model of the middle ages to the ethical political/immanent (this-worldly) construct of the modern period, it is not a distant spiritual power, but man himself who creates his own inferno. Here again, there is a deliberate effort to shift meaning, this time, from Faustus's pretensions to transcendency through the acquisition of knowledge to a focus which underscores his essential humanity and impotence.

Even a quick examination reveals parallels between the two mythical bases. In each, four groups and their interrelatedness become apparent: 1) the knowledge-seeking magician/master who struggles to return to a former status and who controls the present reality; 2) a spirit-form sidekick who shares the characteristics of the master and whose desires he fulfills; 3) fools who are condemned by "nature," whose deformity, excesses, or gullibility are outward signs of an inherent moral unfitness; and, 4) the gentry who suffer or benefit from the art of the knowledge seeker. Forgiveness and recuperation drive the one thematic, while loss and the impossibility of repentance describe the other. I suggest that on one level these universal elements provide a meeting grounds for both Cuban and Hungarian national myths and histories, while at the same time, engendering culturally specific fictions and histories which, in turn, condition national identities. In other terms, "what's past is prologue."

The concordance between these classic creations and revolutionary images is striking. And each reexperience of the richness of these archetypes, while contributing a background of high emotional drama, ultimately frames the nation identities of Hungary and Cuba. The Hungarian "Faustus," betrayed by fickle fate, ensnared by an uncertain and incomprehensible destiny, embodies the uncertainty of (personal and national) fate, and the certainty that the simple election of one's destiny in a world constantly transforming itself is a complicated matter. Each choice most often involves a costly and painful compromise, so evident in the cases of the engineer wedged between the uncertain winds of political change and the desire for a simple life in *A kutya története* (*A Dog's Life*, literally, the history of a dog) (1956) by Tibor Déry; or, the worker caught between the daily grind for survival and an unspecified and unspoken anger in *Rozsdatemető* (*Cemetery of Rust*) (1965) by Endre Fejes; or, the architect whose love of the city he has built is offset by the incomprehensibility of The Plan which dictates its forms in *A városalapító* by György Konrád. This paradigm also surfaces in the filmic triologies of István Szabó, in his *Mephisto* (1980), *Colonel Redl* (1984), *Hanussen* (1989) and Márta Mészáros's *Napló gyermekeimnek* (1982) (*A Diary for My Children*), *Napló szerelmeimnek* (1987) (*A Diary for My Loves*), *Napló apámnak, anyámnak* (1990) (*A Diary for My Father and My Mother*). Each protagonist, and by extension those who surround him or her, is locked in a struggle between the current transcendent entity and the consequences -- the most often unpromising prospects -- of personal choice; the rocky demands of political allegiances and the harshness of individual realities.

In Cuba, the "recuperated" Caliban must face the new responsibilities and unforeseen sacrifices now required of personal and national choice. This Cuban archetype recreates himself and the community to which he belongs, whether intellectual turned insurgent in *Bertillón 66* (1959) by Manuel Soler Puig; or, university student turned intellectual revolutionary in *En ciudad semejante* (1970) by Lisandro Otero; or, revolutionary turned lawyer turned director of the agrarian plan in *La última mujer y el próximo combate* (*The Last Woman and the Next Battle*) (1975) by Manuel Cofiño Lopez. Here, the protagonists struggle against "el siempre acechante caos" and the ever-present memory of a vanquished past. The reiterated thematic crops up in celluloid as well: *Retrato de Teresa* (1979) (*Portrait of Teresa*), and Gutiérrez Alea's film (1968), based on Edmond Desnoes' book (1965), *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (*Inconsolable Memories*, literally, *Memories of Underdevelopment*). In all, the move from passivity to action also entails the separation from family, the loss of loved ones and the forfeiture of the illusive comforts of a former cosmology. Washed clean of negative connotations which have dogged him throughout history, the newly politicized Calibán



confronts his revolutionary destiny amid the ghosts of former -- and actual -- cosmologies.

The signaled osmotic fusion of images retained and meanings reexperienced in artistic production and historical narrative suggests that "literature itself becomes the writing of the history of a people, the creation of a tradition and a people's contemporary definition of itself" (Drake 1-2). Arguing that "Hungarian life and literature developed in perfect sympathy with one another," Frederick Riedel explains that "simultaneously with the growth of the national spirit, and lending it strong support, arose the nation's literature" (3). So that, as history forms myth-based expressions, the mythical actively partakes in shaping history. For his part, Richard Waswo asserts that, because each is born within the realm of interpretation, both history and myth are fictions. This conception sees fictionality as "a narrative that forms the objects of its own interpretation" (541) which configures an at once cognitive, collective and historically contingent process. Consequently, within a particular social, historical and cultural paradigm, a society collectively shares in the recreation of historicized myths and mythical histories. Certain meanings attach to the signifiers and the fiction progressively feeds upon itself, engendering a slippery trail of signifiers. This universalizing cognitive model then accommodates itself to the demands of any particular temporal context. Or, as Waswo goes on to postulate, in order to "determine what happens, [each collective] will regress to myth": "We see what we look for, our stories tell us what to look for; we find it (whether it's there or not) and then we can act out the stories" (559-60). Indeed, in the preceding "stories," the general structural elements vary depending on the (historical) perception. Cuba, seeing itself as having broken the cycle of colonization and defeat with the triumph of the revolution, evinces an overwhelming optimism. Although its stories are no less circular in their construction than their Hungarian counterparts, the overall structure seems to favor an Aristotelian (and Marxist) teleological movement towards ascendancy. Wlad Godzich and Nicholas Spadaccini posit an incestuous relationship between history and narrative -- history as narrative -- which accounts for the thematic unity between cosmologies, the culturally predetermined working out of plots: "History developed as a discipline in the shadow of a system of signification that placed special value upon teleological explanations couched in emplotted forms [i.e., Christian Salvational, Judaic Messianic, Communist utopian discourses].... In any case [events in the world] are part of a discourse of actions, as Aristotle calls it, or plot. And plot becomes significant if the actions it reports can achieve closure, for only with such a closure does their end become clear" (viii).

Hungary, still occupied by Soviet forces and, therefore, more subject to a foreign hegemony, employs instead circularity to favor motifs such as transitoriness and arbitrariness in order to pessimistically reflect the historical irony of its realities of loss and defeat. Nonetheless, despite the particularities of teleological ascendancy or closed-in-upon-itself logic, both structures proffer an openness which defies narrative closure. "Whereof past is prologue," both appear to coincide in creating, seeing, and then finding what is looked for: a confirmation of the always already extant self image, whether it be that of the "recuperated" Caliban or that of the long suffering Faustus. The current -- and questionably -- post-Marxian period of transformation arguably represents "just another" cosmology-shattering upheaval known as democratization and the transition to free market economies, based on a uniquely North American homegrown mythologies of Yankee individualism (e.g., Rambo/Rocky, Horacio Alger). Only time will tell which fragmented mythologies survive from "the good old days." After all, history does not begin -- or end -- with a revolution.

Neither Caliban nor Faustus possesses a static personality as they travel over time from monarchical order to positivism's model, from West to east or to the tropics. Even within the relatively short span of time given to imagining the socialist nation, distinct aspects of those unifying personalities provide evidence of an animated evolution of character-defining attributes and liabilities. Those traits suggest the enigmatic integrity of identities continually in the process of being formed in-between spaces, here identities constructed between national and socialist fictions over time. Concurrent with their transhistorical, transnational characteristics, these stories undoubtedly remain sensitive of and responsive to particular historical actualities, cultural specificities, political ideologies and the like. While the reaction to the "socialist" component varies, each text insinuates first a blending of narratives: historical and cultural, national and socialist. In general, while Hungarians seem to include socialism on the mythical (transcendent) side, Cubans tend to place this ideology on the side of rationality (assessable to human design). The divergent historical experiences of Cuba and Hungary provide a possible explanation. For centuries, Cuba had been othered as "mythical" and

associated with traditional sources of myth: local legend, superstition, Santería. While recognizing these influences, new Cuban fictions actively engage the transcendent dimension and pursue the promises of rationality. The recuperation of Caliban-the-politicized is one manifestation, a more didactic style, another. For their part, the Hungarians, steeped in the carcasses of failed or arbitrarily interpreted rationalities -- a kingdom without a king, Nazism, Stalinism -- have apparently lost faith in the pretensions of such like logics. The result tends to be the favoring of a more satiric style and something akin to an urge to re-invent the transcendent (mythical), i believe, with the end of discovering a manner in which to re-experience commitment and belief.

The response to the "national" component betrays a more subtle divergence. Nonetheless, in both the Cuban and the Hungarian instances, the primacy of the nation remains fundamental. Seemingly, having survived endless transformations and discontinuous upheavals, the resulting search for a constant, stable and secure nation-identity stands as a major preoccupation of the historical and artistic production of these countries. One manner of shaping this national personality as witnessed in the texts lies in researching those unique elements which contribute to their (compromised) uniqueness: the "island" culture of both countries, the construction of a unique ethnicity (*Afro-Cubanidad*) in Cuba and the linguistic singularity of Hungary.

The approaches to national identity do, however, differ. In Cuba, a teleological confidence animates its artistic production and stimulates the search for "Cubanidad." This attitude suggests that the time has come for a share in winning (fate), that its antecedents which were snatched from her are recoverable (orphanhood); that freedom implies a willing sacrifice for the good of the community (choice). In consequence, the search for national identity has a somewhat more aggressive aspect and displays oppositional characteristics: the representation of a country continually under siege from its neighbor to the north, the polemic between exiles or counter-revolutionaries and "those who have lived the change." In Hungary, it is a preoccupation with loss -- and truncated mourning -- which characterizes the artistic and historical vision. Bolstered by long experience with arbitrariness, this perspective evinces a nagging suspicion that providence is not a kind mistress (fate); that abrupt separations and precipitous transformations provoke irremediable psychic harm (orphanhood); that freedom is a sticky wicket of painful compromise (choice). In her book on the films of Márta Mészáros, Catherine Portuges suggests that the resulting *Angst* (my term) can perhaps be seen as the result of an incomplete or stolen mourning. Consequently, the reaching back for roots in this Central European context, takes on a more ontological aspect. As Ticio Escobar asserts in his discussion of myth and identity, this unifying characteristic "es elaborado internamente por el grupo a través de representaciones que constituyen el correlato simbólico de su serie de posiciones objetivas ... que uniformizan su historia y sus proyectos y se resuelven en un estilo cultural único" (122) ("is internally elaborated by the group through representations which constitute the symbolic correlate of a series of objective positions ... which homogenize their history and projects and are resolved in a culturally specific manner" (my translation).

In general terms, the imagined national socialist community is represented as a collective of diverse members, each member, a representative of the collective, an organic whole as it were. In the stuff of dreams that describes that entity, diverse perspectives coalesce to form an inclusive and cohesive population (e.g., Hobsbawm). Instinctively, the core group has recognized the communal aspects which unites its members: in general, their histories of serial dominations and failed challenges, in Cuba, a common colonized past and the memory of cultural and economic victimization; in Hungary, a shared angst often drawn with self-deprecating humor. Those communal visions mark the dominant conceptualization of the nation in the works of the first two in-process periods, transition to and consolidation of the image of the socialist nation. In the later phase of institutionalization, the diverse and conflicting facets which sprang from the juxtaposition of several individual personalities are now contained within one single person. These dynamics are not opposed to one another, insinuating instead a subtle shift from an "every man" organic whole to an "Everyman" whole organism. There is of course the danger that the "collective" depicted in these stories and that alluded to earlier by Waswo -- whatever its specific political, temporal, or social characteristics -- while representing itself as universal, indeed only responds or corresponds to a dominant or hegemonic interest. This is precisely what Roland Barthes has signaled in the case of "ex-nomination," the essential universalizing "naturalness" associated with any transcendent discourse. Indeed, the

"naturalized" characterizations of certain groups and themes -- the role of the intelligentsia, the gender variable and the issues of race and ethnicity and their positioning within, or without, the traditional nation and their station, actual and imagined, in the incoming cosmology -- already suggest where the questioning of the projected, imagined socialist nation might start.

The sweeping collections of folk-literature gathered by anthropologist Stith Thompson and the compilation of myths assembled by Eduardo Galeano in his three volume compendium demonstrate that there exists a commonality, a universality among the stories which humans tell about themselves. Beyond signaled coherency of themes and players, the common strain between such like master narratives, or more precisely in this instance, national stories, involves their capacity to at once define and to motivate a cohesive national identity. With each re-telling, these stories function to re-establish and to clarify the uniqueness of the community, its identity and its continued existence. The durability of the nation-image in narrative reasserts the durability of myth. Those novels which deal with the nation -- socialist or otherwise -- then reveal a series of like characteristics. They are first historical, in the broad sense of the term. That is to say, such prose works directly base themselves on real events which have served to shape and, in some instances, transform the nation. More importantly, personal histories and private memories which take place outside of the public spotlight shed light on the no less compelling construction of the individual and collective identity. Accordingly, revolution, political upheaval, loss of territory or other momentous happenings make sense only insofar as the reader empathizes with "those who have lived the change" or is able to enter into the mentality, not of the reigning or dominant political discourse, but the needs, desires and aspirations of the fictive personality. In the strongest cases, this blend of personal and collective, private and public however refuses to slavishly repeat "official history" or to simply provide an interestedly slanted revision. Nevertheless, the re-examination of historical events under the literary lens indeed constitutes a re-writing of the national story, an attempt to decipher the present by "encouraging" the past -- and in no small way, the future as well -- towards narrative coherency.

As a result, another telling characteristic of the novel of nation resides in the commingling of the rational and the mythical. On the one hand, the sense of public history provides a teleological, event-driven narrative, moving towards progress, modernity and the creation of the nation and the attendant, national amalgam. On the other hand, human consciousness, not always ready to make sense of events in the moment, will nevertheless litigate contradiction and discontinuity through culturally-specific exegesis. Myth then fills in the story through the reliance on the meaningful constructions of juxtaposition and repetition to overtly or tacitly suggest a cosmological relationship between one or the other historical event, one or another generation. Consequently, the novels of nation are at the same time ahistorical, in the sense that a reiterated feature resides in the deliberate confusion of past, present and future.

The last characteristic which I wish to signal here suggests the importance of the familiarity of the references. On a first level, the historical events -- and their contexts -- are known. This common knowledge does not however preclude a curiosity in the fictive process of filling in and making sense of the narrative. For example, everyone knows that the Titanic will sink, but the moviegoer remains intrigued with the young couple's developing love story. Further, embedded within such familiar cautionary tales -- here, *The Tempest*, in the one case and the Faustus legend and *Az ember tragédiája* in the other -- each character masks an archetypal figure of discreetly mythical proportions. These central players -- recall Caliban in Cuba and Faustus/Adam in Hungary -- possess an every man (person) quality whose flaws, foibles and random acts of courage embody the ever ephemeral national character -- here, *cubanidad* or *magyarság* (*Hungarianness*). That the recognition be constructed, imagined or wish fulfilled does not matter. The process of imagining the nation shapes the identities of its subjects. Simultaneously, as a result of their specific cultural and social realities, these same subjects shape the function of the nation. Perhaps ironically, therein lies their universality: "Whatever our ignorance of the language and the culture of the people where it originated, a myth is still felt as a myth by a reader anywhere in the world. Its substance does not lie in its style, its original music, or its syntax, but in the *story* it tells" (Levi-Strauss 210).

#### Works Cited

Alavi, Ziauddin. *Geography of the Middle Ages*. Delhi: Sterling P, 1966.

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 1983. London: Verso, 1990.
- Barthes, Roland. "Myth Today." *A Barthes Reader*. Ed. Susan Sontag. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982. 93-149.
- Bhabha, Homi K., ed. *Nation and Narrating*. London: Routledge, 1980.
- Boas, Franz. "Introduction to James Teit, *Traditions of the Thompson River Indians of British Columbia*." *Memoirs of the American Folklore Society* 6 (1898).
- Brogan, Patrick. *Eastern Europe 1939-89: The Fifty Years War*. London: Bloomsbury, 1990.
- Campbell, Joseph. *Myth, Dreams, and Religion*. Dallas: Spring, 1970.
- Campbell, Joseph. *An Open Life*. New York: Larson, 1988.
- Drake, Sandra. *The Uses of History in the Caribbean Novel*. PhD Diss. Stanford: Stanford U, 1970.
- Escobar, Ticio. "Identidad, mito, hoy." *Revista Casa de las Américas* 186 (1992): 120-26.
- Fornet, Ambrosio, ed. *Alea: una retrospectiva crítica*. La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1987.
- Galeano, Eduardo. *Memoria del fuego: I. Los nacimientos*. México: Siglo Veintiuno, 1982.
- Galeano, Eduardo. *Memoria del fuego: II. Las caras y las máscaras*. México: Siglo Veintiuno, 1984.
- Galeano, Eduardo. *Memoria del fuego: III. El siglo del viento*. México: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1986.
- Godzich, Wlad, and Nicholas Spadaccini. "The Changing Face of History." *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure*. Trans. Terry Cocharan. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986. vii-xxiv.
- Gutiérrez Alea, Tomás. *The Viewer's Dialectic*. Ed. Iraida Sánchez. Trans. Julia Lesage. La Habana: Editorial José Martí, 1988.
- Hankiss, Elemér. *East European Alternatives / Kelet-európai alternatívák*. New York: Oxford UP, 1990.
- Koltai, Tamás. *Az ember tragédiája a színpadon*. Budapest: Magvető, 1987.
- Konrád, György. *A városalapító*. Budapest: Pesti, 1977.
- Konrád, György. *The City Builder*. Trans. Ivan Sanders. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987.
- Korosy, Maria, ed. *A Hungarian Quartet: Four Contemporary Short Novels*. Budapest: Corvina, 1991.
- Levi-Strauss, Claude. *Structural Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books, 1963.
- Lotze, Dieter P. *Imre Madách*. Boston: Twayne, 1981.
- Lytard, Jean-François. *The Diferend: Phrases in Dispute*. Trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988.
- Mándy, Iván. "Left Behind." Trans. John Batki. *A Hungarian Quartet: Four Contemporary Short Novels*. Ed. Maria Korosy. Budapest: Corvina, 1991. 43-88.
- Maravall, José Antonio. *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure*. Trans. Terry Cocharan. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986.
- Martí, José. *Política de nuestra América*. México: Siglo Veintiuno, 1977.
- Marx, Karl. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. 1852. Trans. Daniel de Leon. New York: Random House, 1963.
- McManus, Jane. *Getting to Know Cuba*. New York: St. Martin's, 1989.
- Nagy, Moses M., ed. *A Journey into History: Essays on Hungarian Literature*. New York: Peter Lang, 1990.
- Németh, Antal. *Az ember tragédiája a színpadon*. Budapest: Székesfőváros, 1933.
- Otero, Lisandro. *En ciudad semejante*. La Habana: Instituto del Libro, 1970.
- Otero, Lisandro. *Babilon, eljött a te itéleted! / En ciudad semejante*. Trans. Vera Székács. Budapest: Kossuth, 1978.
- Ottlik, Géza. "Hajónapló." *A Valencia-rejtély*. By Géza Ottlik. Budapest: Magvető, 1989. 7-58.
- Ottlik, Géza. "Logbook." Trans. John Batki. *A Hungarian Quartet: Four Contemporary Short Novels*. Ed. Maria Korosy. Budapest: Corvina, 1991. 7-42.
- Portuges, Catherine. *Screen Memories: The Hungarian Cinema of Márta Mészáros*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993.
- Retamar, Roberto Fernandez. *Calibán y otros ensayos: Nuestra América y el mundo*. La Habana: Arte y Literatura, 1979.
- Riedel, Frederick. *A History of Hungarian Literature*. 1906. Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1968.
- Takács, Ferenc. "Notes on Contributors." *A Hungarian Quartet: Four Contemporary Short Novels*. Ed. Maria Korosy. Budapest: Corvina, 1991. 167-73.
- Tezla, Albert. *Hungarian Authors: A Bibliographical Handbook*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1970.
- Thompson, Stith. *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1932-36.
- Turner, Graeme. *National Fictions: Literature, Film, and the Construction of Australian Narrative*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986.
- Waswo, Richard. "The Fiction That Literature Makes." *New Literary History* 8 (1988): 541-64.
- Zwicz, Peter. *National Communism*. Boulder: Westview, 1983.

Author's profile: Patricia D. Fox works in Afro-Hispanic literature, literary theory, and on the intersection of art and politics in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Indiana University, Bloomington. Her publications include: "Meta-Borges: A Magyar Meditation on Masters, Maori and Meaning," *Variaciones Borges* (1997) and "Of Blackness and Brazil: A Dialogue No Longer Deferred," a book chapter in the forthcoming volume, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: Past, Present and Future*, edited by Point of View, Center for Afroamerican and African Studies, University of Michigan. One of her new studies, "Writing Across the Caribbean: Afro-Hispanic Musings on Race and Negritude," is forthcoming in *The Journal of Caribbean Literatures*.