

Fall 2003

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Recommended Citation

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FLARR PAGES #30 (F, 03)

The Journal of the Foreign Language
Association of the Red River

File Under:

- The Process of Writing Literature
- Ecuadorian Novel
- Stream of Consciousness
- Drug Traffic, Spying

"Writing the Novel, An Interview with Vicente Cabrera"

Thomas C. Turner

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Professor Vicente Cabrera, who now teaches at the University of Minnesota, Morris has just published a new novel, *La sombra del espía*, which has received wide acclaim in Ecuador. This work is a cross-cultural tale of spies, drug-traffickers and typewriters. Two other novels, published previously are: *La Noche del Té*, which has mental illness as its theme, and *El Gabán*, which describes a student and a serious political uprising. A fourth novel is in the works: *El Hortelano de Ulba*, which treats a mixed-race Hispano and American theme.

Following is an interview that Prof. Cabrera created to demonstrate the magical process of writing:

Journalist: Sir. You have often said that your novels don't result from inspiration, that everything comes from your writing.

Writer: Yes, that is right. Writing is the force that leads the direction of the story. Writing is the steering wheel and motor of the story. Writing develops its own path.

Journalist: What do you mean by direction?

The Plot of *La Sombra del Espía*

In *La Sombra del Espía*, Mauricio de la Renta, an Ecuadorian journalist, goes to Mexico to spy on the wife of his friend Chapelli, a successful psychiatrist of Quito, and on Pilar Mercedes, Mauricio's ill sister. Chapelli is desperate to find out why his wife is leaving him to be again in Mexico City, this time with her Colombian friend, Diana.

In México, Mauricio spies on them and falls in love with Diana, who after a few encounters abandons him and does not want to know any more about him.

Mauricio, alone and still spying, becomes a friend of two Americans from Hinsdale, Illinois. With their connections in the American embassy, he manages to get a tourist visa. But to get that visa to Paradise, the Consul wants him to spy on drug dealers in Mexico and Ecuador. They believe that as a journalist he must have access to precious sources.

For his job the embassy also offers to bring his sister to the USA to be treated in the best mental hospital in the land.

The story follows more sinuous and dangerous paths in the U.S., later in Puerto Rico, Mexico, Ecuador, and back again in the United States where Mauricio will find his reward or punishment.

Writer: The direction is the step that the character takes to follow a particular path; often the character does not know what path or road he or she is going to follow. The path is given to the character by the flow of the sentence, or the phrase, or by the impetus of the word, of the specific word at the instant of writing.

Journalist: Interesting. I have heard in your presentations that the characters come out of the writing and not from reality.

Writer: Yes, reality only exists because writing makes it exist. Reality does not exist outside of writing.

Journalist: Do you as a writer exist because of your writing?

Writer: Just like you as an interviewer exist because of the interview which you are going to transcribe and arrange in "interview text" for reader to read. You will exist in the reading of the interview.

Journalist: So, the character doesn't know the road he or she will be following?

Writer: No. He or she doesn't know what path to follow. It will come by surprise or by chance. Often his or her plan does comply with what will actually happen.

Journalist: Again, sir. How do you start a novel?

Writer: The thread of the story comes to me by the sound of a word, from the sound of a sentence or a phrase that I found or heard in the street, that I heard from my cousin, or aunt, or from a colleague. The "instant" of that word gave me the story. Not even an event that one thinks is good for a novel is going to be an actual candidate for fiction. The more one tries to novelize it, the more elusive it becomes.

Journalist: And the names of the characters? How do they come to you?

Writer: The word, the rhythm or natural flow of the phrase is going to lead me to the name of a character. I don't invent them; they invent themselves.

Journalist: Interesting.

Writer: Yes. The name had its own story to unfold.

Journalist: Could you tell us what your next project is going to be? Or what you have this moment in your typewriter or in your keyboard? Because you have mentioned "keyboards" in your fiction.

Writer: Yes, the keyboard gives the rhythm to my writing. Something that is still in the loom and that is not completed yet, one should not talk about. I am superstitious.

Journalist: When do you know a work is finished?

Writer: When the story tells me that it is done, then it is finished.

Journalist: Listen, you are a bit vague.

Writer: Yes, and you are a bit unwilling to understand.

From *Varios* 8A (March 8, 2002)

"Con un estilo fluido y composición novelística compacta y de intriga interconectada, Vicente Cabrera permite que los personajes tomen su iniciativa y su vida en sus propias manos. Lo que les permite enredarse en sus vericuetos de esperanza, logro, y desilusión. Resultados que quedan a la lectura y modo de percibir del lector. Una gran novela. Un gran evento la obra y su aparición."

Autobiographical Note:

Vicente Cabrera was born in Guano, Ecuador, the son of the owner of a shoe factory. He gained his Doctorate at the University of Massachusetts and has published widely as a journalist and as a professor of Spanish. Dr. Cabrera is the author of numerous critical books about literature on both sides of the Atlantic, and he has recently won the prestigious "distinguished research" award at the University of Minnesota, Morris. He has given numerous readings of his new novel, both in Ecuador and in the United States.