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**FICTIONAL AND HISTORICAL NARRATIVE
STRATEGIES IN THE WRITINGS OF
R.M. KOSTER**

**by
Jon Wesley Rozhon ©**

**A thesis presented to the
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Canada

Name: Jon Wesley Rozhon

University: Lakehead University

Degree for which thesis was presented: Master of Arts in English

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Supervisor: Kim Fedderson, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation concerns R.M. Koster's first three novels, *The Tinieblas Trilogy*, a fourth novel entitled *Carmichael's Dog*, and his non-fictional account of Panamanian history, *In The Time of The Tyrants*. The purpose of this paper is twofold: first, to acquaint readers with Koster's writing, to describe how plots unfold and characters develop; second, to examine the various narrative strategies at work in the texts, the ways Koster constructs through language his "fictional" Latin American Republic of Tinieblas and his "non-fictional" history of Panama. The dissertation demonstrates how Koster's narrative strategies in these writings serve to undermine stable, singular textual interpretation.

Four novels, a history of Panama, and a handful of magazine articles comprise the main share of R.M. Koster's published works. The first of his books, a novel entitled *The Prince*, was published in 1971, and his most recent work, *Carmichael's Dog* was released in 1992, so Koster has been on the literary scene for a considerable time. Despite this, there has been little critical attention directed towards his work; the Modern Languages Association bibliography lists only one scholarly article, a 1983 paper by G.B. Crump, that directly addresses Koster's fiction. However, Koster has made a substantial contribution to American literature, and his writing merits more critical attention than it has to this time received.

Concerning his first three novels, known as "The Tinieblas Trilogy", Koster writes that "the temporal focus is mainly the seventh decade of our utterly unreal century" (Preface to *The Prince*) and also states that the setting is "(mainly) the imaginary Central American Republic of Tinieblas" (Preface to *Mandragon*). These two comments localize the narratives in time (the 1960's) and geography (Central America). Yet every time Koster gives explicit remarks about historical eras and places, he tempers the specificity of those words with adjectives like "unreal" and "imaginary". These prefatory comments indicate a tactic manifest in all of Koster's narratives: that is, there is a mixture of historical fact with imaginative fiction, a clouding of distinction between the two areas.

The purpose of this paper then is twofold: first, to acquaint readers with Koster's writing, to describe how plots unfold and characters develop; second, to examine the various narrative strategies at work in the texts, the ways Koster constructs through

language his “fictional” Latin American Republic of Tinieblas and his “non-fictional” history of Panama.

Keeping this dual purpose in mind, I have divided this paper into four main chapters; each chapter deals specifically with one of Koster’s works. Prefacing the first chapter, however, is a section on recent Panamanian history. This history is the referent that Koster treats as fiction in his first three novels and as both fact and fiction in a work published after the fall of Panama’s military government. Chapter one concerns *The Prince*, Koster’s first novel in what he calls “the first volume of a trilogy, but to my mind, more like the left panel of a triptych” (Preface to *The Prince*); this is the work in which Koster creates his fictional country of Tinieblas. Chapter two deals with the second panel of the triptych, *The Dissertation*, a novel that more expansively portrays the Tinieblan realm. The third chapter looks closely at *Mandragon*, the book which contains Tinieblas’ apocalyptic conclusion. Koster’s collaborative effort with Guillermo Sánchez, a history of Panama entitled *In The Time of The Tyrants*, is evaluated in the final chapter; this work exists in contrast to the novels, for the Tinieblas books are fictions that are contingent upon history, and *In The Time of The Tyrants* is a history contingent upon fiction. These four texts are discussed chronologically, with Koster’s first published book examined near the outset and the recently published *In The Time of The Tyrants* analyzed at the end.

Koster’s fifth major publication, a novel entitled *Carmichael’s Dog*, does not occupy a prominent position in this dissertation. It is Koster’s most recent work of fiction, but the narrative is not directly related to Tinieblas or Latin America. Within the pages of this book, however, there is considerable commentary on creative method, not to mention

a character, an author who invents and destroys a fictional world, that bears a striking resemblance to Koster himself. *Carmichael's Dog*, then, is useful as literary criticism on Tinieblas and commentary on the writing process. I use it in this paper as an occasional guide to concepts and issues addressed in the trilogy and *In The Time of The Tyrants*.

The three chapters concerning the novels are divided into two sections. The first section deals mainly with plot outline and introduces major characters and themes. It investigates and answers the basic questions of what happens in the books, what are the causes behind these events, and who exactly is involved. The second section of each chapter is more concerned with the previously mentioned narrative strategies, looking specifically at what one of Koster's characters describes as the "book-building" process (*Carmichael's Dog* 18).

Also within the second part of each chapter, I devote a certain space to discussion of the critical terms used in this paper. Much of this terminology means different things to different critics, so the discussion is meant to stabilize the terms, at least temporarily, for the purposes of my analysis. In the chapter on *The Prince*, for example, I examine the constituent parts of classic realist narratives, as defined by Catherine Belsey. Then, I apply Belsey's critical lexicon, the terms she uses, to Koster's text. I do the same with magic realist critical terms and some postmodern critical terms. In the third chapter, I discuss general aspects of apocalyptic narratives, making extensive use of the critical apparatus delineated by Lois Parkinson Zamora.

The relationship between history and fiction has been and continues to be a prominent scholarly and literary concern. One critic, Dennis Walder, contends that such concern is inevitable whenever theorists or writers seek “to understand past works in the present” (333). Until recently, positivist conceptions of history held that the past is knowable and that there are few fictional qualities to scholarly, historical research. Winning out over positivism have been twentieth century structuralist theories that find historical narratives to be problematical: “... history cannot give us direct access to objective facts, since the ideology and the verbal strategies of the historian will determine what he chooses to notice and how he describes it ...” (Lerner 334). Thus, there are structuralists who claim that deconstructed historical texts are nothing more than fictions containing “familiar narrative and hence fictive patterns, such as ‘plot’” (333).

In his statement on the present state of history and fiction, aptly entitled “History and Fiction”, Laurence Lerner argues that the structuralist perspective has been taken to an extreme relativism by scholars including Francis Barker, Terence Hawkes, and Roland Barthes. Lerner grants their theory that historical knowledge is not completely objective, but asserts that it is not necessarily completely subjective either. He believes instead in a “more complex possibility that [knowledge] results from an interaction between the external world and our method of perceiving” (335). In other words, historical knowledge is always partly subjective or fictional.

Despite holding to this proposition of inevitably subjective history, at a point further along in his discussion, Lerner writes, “It is necessary to state the obvious. Fiction differs from history in not making a claim to truth” (336). What he means by this is that

the historian sets out to find truth, but in reality that truth is unattainable: "...the historian, who undertakes to tell the truth, may be careless, or ignorant, or a liar, and the novelist, who does not undertake it, may be scrupulous" (336). Therefore, there is always the paradoxical possibility that truth-seeking historians can "be refuted by evidence", whereas novelists and poets, literature's fabricators and fabulists, can be the better historians. Lerner is quick to note that any such conclusions can only be reached by "historical and not by aesthetic criteria. The novelists would then be carrying out a contract they had not subscribed to" (336).

Koster himself explicitly states that he subscribes to the novelist's contract, and not the historian's, when he writes in the author's note to *The Dissertation*, "This book is fiction. I made it up." He further asserts his fictional intentions in the author's note to *Mandragon*: "This book is the third in a series of three ... depicting imaginary people and imaginary events in the imaginary Republic of Tinieblas. How fine my frenzy was, how well I've turned these unknown things to shapes, the reader may judge for himself ... but I dreamed them up." Nowhere have the Tinieblas novels been described as a definitive historical record, and Koster does not wish them to be interpreted as such, but the novels are contingent; they rely upon history for meaning. In fact, a great part of the reader's aesthetic appreciation and political understanding of these three novels depends on recognizing their contingency.

As mentioned earlier, the historical referent underlying Koster's three novels is Panama/Central America. This referent is disguised as Tinieblas, and Koster distances the reader from it using a variety of problematizing fictional strategies. At no time do the

novels operate as autonomous fiction, sealed off from history; rather they continually feed off history, are sustained by it. It was not till the novels had been finished, however, that Koster wrote specifically of Panama in *In The Time of The Tyrants*, his account of military rule in the Central American republic.

There were some specific reasons behind the decision to write *In The Time of The Tyrants*. After completing the Tinieblas trilogy in the late seventies, Koster did not publish any major works for over a decade. Then, in 1987, while on a hiking trip in Maine with his son, he “realized he could write about Panama” (*I.T.T.* 353). Rather than use Panama as a model for another work of fiction, Koster decided that his next works would deal more explicitly with the country and its history. He admits in *In The Time of The Tyrants* that “he’d treated themes from Panama’s story in fiction” in the past, but “he’d published nothing factual; he was afraid to” (353). This time, however, he decided to enlist the aid of a friend and fellow writer, Guillermo Sánchez, a Panamanian living in exile in Miami. Initially writing under Sánchez’ name only¹, Koster felt he could continue to reside in Panama while criticizing unrestrainedly that country’s military tyranny. The result was two articles published in *Harper’s* magazine, and a decision to collaborate on a more comprehensive history (353-54). The book was almost finished when Manuel Noriega’s régime fell in late 1989. In 1990, feeling much more secure as Panama moved in a democratic direction, Koster added his name to the manuscript and *In The Time of The Tyrants* was published.

It is difficult to say with certainty how much of *In The Time of The Tyrants* is Sánchez’ writing, for the narrative has the unmistakable mark of Koster upon it: there are

the Kosterian stylistic giveaways; Koster's highly ironic sense of humour permeates the narrative and, along with it, there is the creative use of metaphor also found in the Tinieblas books; the stories told in *In The Time of The Tyrants* are captivatingly written and thematically similar to many of the stories in the novels. More than anything else, the one aspect of *In The Time of The Tyrants* that most demonstrates Koster's strong authorial presence is the frequent repetition of key language from the trilogy: Koster re-uses Camilo Fuertes' phrase "uniformed gorillocrats" (*Diss.* 3; *I.T.T.* 57) to describe military rulers; the sentence "It is a long-standing peculiarity of Panama that everyone not only wants to be president but considers himself the best person for the job" (*I.T.T.* 62) reiterates a theory that is raised in all three Tinieblas novels; even a sexual hypothesis from *In The Time of The Tyrants* that "machismo extols the penetrator" (21), is identical to Camilo Fuertes' assertion that "in this country (and the rest of Latin America, for that matter) a *macho* is a *macho* so long as he penetrates" (79). All of these and other similarities to the trilogy indicate that *In The Time of The Tyrants* is very much a Koster creation and that Sánchez is, for all intents and purposes, a mostly silent partner.²

In The Time of The Tyrants also thematically reflects Koster's fictions. The two main themes of revenge and desire for power are as prevalent in this work as they are in any of the three Tinieblas novels. Indeed, as the following overview of *In The Time of The Tyrants* will show, many figures in Panama's history achieved their fame and notoriety while engaged in the pursuit of these two passions; their stories are often identical to those of their fictional Tinieblan counterparts.

The period in Panamanian history that Koster and Sánchez primarily deal with in the book is 1968 to 1989, the time when military governments ruled the republic. Though this is largely a different period from that in which the novels are placed, there is some overlap. The Omar Torrijos regime of 1968 is clearly the basis for Genghis Manduco's junta, as described in *Mandragon* (published in 1971), and though there is no fictional counterpart to him in the trilogy, Manuel Noriega represents the culmination of Tinieblan/Panamanian themes and concerns; the fictions point to the inevitability of a Noriega emerging in Central America.

There is a short section at the start of *In The Time of The Tyrants* which summarizes Panamanian history leading up to 1968. The country is depicted as an almost insignificant banana republic not yet completely consumed by political corruption (47-52). Indeed, this vision of Panama largely resembles Tinieblas during the Alejo Sancudo era, a country of undeniable intrigue and danger, but nothing like the totalitarian state it became during Manduco's rule. What little political instability there was in Panama during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century was negligible, according to the authors, especially when compared to the problems encountered later during the 1970's and 1980's; in fact, Tinieblan politics evolved in much the same way.

Koster and Sánchez recount the rise in Panamanian militarism during the 1940's and 1950's, attributing it to the efforts of Policia Nacional commandant José Antonio Remón, a figure whose career, not to mention obese appearance, bears more than a passing resemblance to an early Tinieblan strongman, Epifanio Mojón. During his tenure, Remón took firm control of the police and made it into "a base for personal power, a

thing not managed before and one a less forceful personality would likely have failed at” (54). As commandant, Remón organized the force, strengthened its military capability, and made it into a right-wing political machine (54-56). He then won a Presidential election with police assistance, increased the force’s power even further, and renamed it the Guardia Nacional (55). Remón was murdered in office (like Mojón) by a machine-gun firing assassin, so he aptly died a victim of his own militaristic efforts (53).

Koster and Sánchez describe this rising militarism as one of three “dark clouds” on Panama’s horizon. The second cloud formed in the person of Arnulfo Arias, doubtlessly the historical model for Tinieblan president Alejandro Sancudo. Arias, according to the authors, was “the most interesting figure of Panama’s republican history and its salient political personality during six decades” (58). His political career is outlined over ten pages and it appears almost identical to Sancudo’s life: Koster and Sánchez’ description of Arias’ early Nazi sympathies (61) reminds us that Alejo too is a Fascist and claims the title “Gauleiter of Middle America, named by Adolfo Hitler himself!” (*Prince* 70); the authors list numerous examples of Arias’ deranged behavior during four terms in office (60-65), all of which bring to mind Alejo’s “madness that power and his craving for it had made chronic...” (*Diss.* 199); Koster and Sánchez note Arias’ inexplicable yet undeniable charismatic appeal to voters (58-68), and though that popularity is impressive, it falls short of Kiki Sancudo’s assertion that “Even the pelicans would vote for [Alejo] if they had the vote” (*Prince* 40). With such a man as Arias perpetually prominent on the political scene, Panama was in chaos throughout the fifties and sixties, just as Tinieblas was in flux during

the Sancudo years. In both the fictional and historic republics, the armed forces saw themselves as the only orderly institutions in unstable countries.

The third cloud in Panama, the authors claim, was the people's belief that their lot was poor and could only improve with political change. "They looked at Panama and felt ashamed and outraged, said things couldn't go on the way they were going" (66). Perhaps the military was not respected by the Panamanians, but it was not feared to the point that people tried to block its ascent to power. Koster and Sánchez write that "the attitudes of the people contributed greatly [to the military's rise to power]. It was as if they were scared they'd miss the twentieth century and not collect their due share of its horrors, as if they craved to live in interesting times" (67). The military coup in 1968 was therefore inevitable. Arias was in power, governing erratically, and when he tried to bring the guardia under his control, the officers took over. It is noteworthy that the transfer from civilian to military power in Tinieblas occurs in much the same manner, with Alejo underestimating the officers and the people almost meekly accepting the new régime (*Man.* 146-151).

Though Arias and other leaders had their faults, and though there had always been a certain level of graft and inequity within Panamanian society, that country's nightmarish descent into corruption and brutality began in earnest only after the coup. Like Tinieblas after Manduco takes office, Panama suffered "...the abolishment of party politics ... the suppression of the rights of assembly, expression, and habeas corpus, and the establishment of torture, exile, and official murder as means of persuading people that the general has their interests at heart" (*Diss.* 286). Koster and Sánchez go into minute detail

about the economic swindles, drug deals, killings, and torture that started on a small scale during the rule of General Omar Torrijos, escalated when General Rubén Paredes took power, and became almost a routine part of Panamanian life after General Manuel Noriega seized control over the country. That human beings could be capable of such extreme maleficence as the Panamanian generals is almost beyond belief; that there was a strong American presence in the country during that time, and that the Americans did very little to stop the atrocities -- indeed, the authors claim the American government often helped the generals along -- is a major, recurrent, sombre theme in the narrative.

According to Koster and Sánchez, the Torrijos government was, for all its failings, adept at convincing others of its legitimacy. Just as the American government supports Manduco's Tinieblan junta, "a form of government they have never chosen to embrace themselves but which they think is just the thing for [Tinieblas]" (*Diss.* 279), the U.S. backed Torrijos' régime. They considered the Latin American military to be "the essential force for constructive social change" in the region (*I.T.T.* 119); moreover, Torrijos was careful never to aggravate the Americans beyond the limits of their tolerance. In fact, "When the United States needed a favor, Torrijos came running" (125). Torrijos understood the workings of American *realpolitik* and applied many of its principles in his own political dealings.

Take, for example, Torrijos' relationship with the Panamanian peasantry. He was not concerned with winning support from those peasants as they "had no class coherence, were illiterate, and seldom saw money, so that even if someone commanded their total loyalty, there was little of practical use he could put it to, in an election, say, or a strike, or

a boycott, or a coup d'état or a putsch or an insurrection" (148). However, Torrijos could find support from other groups and individuals if he seemed to be helping these impoverished souls. Torrijos therefore made himself a champion of the common man by organizing collective farms and providing a modicum of health care and housing (149, 151). He then invited guests in staged visits to these collectives to see the "progress" he had made. In reality, Koster and Sánchez claim the collectives were a complete failure (149), and only served as expensive photo opportunities for Torrijos. Of course, if strengthening one's hold on power and increasing prestige is the aim, then a successful, internationally observed photo shoot has a practical purpose.

What Torrijos showed to the world was that his government had built a successful welfare state. He shouted slogans like "what I want for my children is what I want for my country" (152) to prove his concern. He also denounced opposition as "agents of imperialism" and "tools of the oligarchy" (151). In his empty rhetoric, Torrijos is almost identical to the manic, drunken, Tinieblan Manduco who proclaims "Let reactionaries and imperialists beware!" (*Man.* 151). In the case of the historical dictator, however, many people believed his speeches -- intelligent, renowned, respected people. The novelists Graham Greene and Gabriel García-Márquez were two of Torrijos' most willing supporters, both writing in praise of the dictator (146).

Yet, according to the authors, while Torrijos was putting up a smoke screen to fool the world, he was torturing and killing people who believed in real change for Panama. The authors devote an entire chapter to "the Martyrdom of Hector Gallego" (148-68), a Catholic priest who practiced liberation theology among the peasants in

Veraguas province. It seems that Gallego was delivering on providing a higher living standard for the peasants rather than just promising a better future, as Torrijos was doing. Gallego helped the Veraguas people collectivize and start an educational system. After two years, “this will and effort, this patient teaching by word and example, paid off in a self-sustaining cooperative with a store that granted credit on decent terms and a second-hand four-wheel-drive station wagon” (158). The authors claim that because Gallego was successful where Torrijos was a failure, the dictator had the priest captured, tortured, and, while still alive, thrown into the Pacific Ocean from a helicopter (158,165).

The similarities between Gallego and the fictional priest, Father Celso Labrador, in *The Dissertation* (317-318), are striking: both men are foreign clergymen (Gallego was Columbian, Labrador is from Tinieblas’ neighbouring fictional country, Costaguana) working for the betterment of the peasantry; both men are embarrassing to their respective dictators; both men are caught and tortured by soldiers; both men achieve a sort of martyrdom dying at the hands of police. It is notable that Labrador is not thrown from a helicopter like Gallego, but another of Koster’s characters, a journalist critical of the Manduco dictatorship, suffers that fate (*Man.* 152).

All things considered, the Torrijos régime is depicted as the epitome of a successful military junta: the colonels, majors, and generals held absolute power, controlled the population, tortured and killed their opponents without fear of retaliation, yet convinced the world that they were progressive Marxists working for the betterment of Panama and mankind. Foreigners with clout thought highly of the generals’ régime, so it was able to secure massive bank loans, foreign aid, and even C.I.A. funding. They

squandered the money of course, the same way Manduco and his family plunder the Tinieblan treasury (*Man.* 147 - 157). As the authors note about Torrijos, “There he was at the start of 1971, smiled on by Lenin the Father and Castro the Son and Marx the Holy Ghost, while the capitalists shoved money at him” (147).

Torrijos stayed in power until 1981, but he died abruptly in a plane crash that some say was an accident and others claim was planned by the C.I.A., Manuel Noriega, or even the Cubans (235). Koster and Sánchez believe Torrijos’ death was an accident, but do not rule out the possibility of C.I.A. involvement (236-37). At any rate, his death created a political vacuum in Panama, and it was not until nine months later that a power sharing agreement was worked out between four officers: Rubén Paredes, Armando Contreras, Roberto Díaz, and Manuel Noriega (256). Under the terms of this pact, Paredes took control of the Guardia and the country first. He ruled in much the same manner as Torrijos, heavy-handedly, and in little over a year Paredes presided over a massive real estate and insurance fraud as well as imposed strict censorship upon the media (257-71). Paredes was eased out of power by Noriega and Díaz (Contreras lost an earlier power struggle) and then Noriega forced Díaz out of government (269). When Manuel Noriega assumed full control over the Guardia in August 1983, he was the *de facto* leader in Panama, and he remained in charge till U.S. Marines forced him from Panama City almost seven years later.

Koster and Sánchez reserve their most venomous criticism for Noriega, a man they portray as being universally despised. They recite numerous documented and undocumented stories of colossal greed, saurian torture, and manifestly brutal murder.

Panama, during Noriega's time, became Latin America's "first narco-military state" (287). The authors cynically manipulate Abraham Lincoln's Gettysberg Address and speak of Panama under Noriega as a nation "Of The Criminals, By The Criminals, For The Criminals"³. Of the numerous murders documented in the book, the 1985 death of Hugo Spadafora is given the most extensive and prominent coverage. It is the incident which dominates the first chapter, and also the incident to which Koster refers in the preface to the Norton *Mandragon*: "Now I know that what I was really doing [in *Mandragon*] without knowing it, was describing a vision I had of Panama's future, the dictatorship that currently exists here and has, since, say, September 1985, when a certain person was murdered in a particularly nasty way." The Spadafora murder obviously affected Koster profoundly for him to cast light on it in a preface and give a detailed description of it in the first chapter of *In The Time of The Tyrants*.

Hugo Spadafora was in Nicaragua with the contras in 1985, having decided to abandon the Sandinistas, with whom he had fought in the 1970's against dictator Anastasio Somoza. Feeling "haunted by compassion for the downtrodden and the lust to have a cause ..." (19-20), Spadafora was happy to be with the contras till he found out about their drug-smuggling operations. His mistake was to make his knowledge known to others; Spadafora did not realize that the United States government was "allowing and abetting the smuggling of illegal drugs across U.S. borders in order to pursue an illegal war [in Nicaragua]" (24), so when he told Drug Enforcement Agency officials about contra drug deals with Noriega, and then publicly promised to "set off a bomb" (20), he was in greater trouble than he thought. As the authors put it: "The minute he opened his

mouth, he was a corpse” (24). Spadafora crossed the Costa Rica border into Panama the morning of September 13, 1985, and was dead by nightfall.

In short, this is what happened to him: Spadafora was tailed by Panamanian government agents from the moment he crossed the border. When he arrived at the town of La Concepción, about fifteen miles from Costa Rica, he was detained by a Defense Forces sergeant, but not before Spadafora managed to identify himself to a bus driver (26). He was then escorted to a barracks in Concepción, where his seven hours of torture began. Various soldiers beat Spadafora, cut him, forced sharp objects under his fingernails, and mangled his genitalia. He was tortured in at least four different towns as soldiers dragged him from barracks to barracks “like a band of carousers dragging the bridegroom from tavern to tavern on the last night of his bachelorhood” (27). He was finally killed at the town of Corozo, where “The cook in the detachment sat down astraddle his chest and plunged a butcher knife into his throat” (31). The same cook decapitated Spadafora. His body was later found across the Costa Rica border, but the head was never recovered.

The decapitation is startling in itself, a crime of the utmost brutality. It is also remarkable for another reason: decapitation recurs as a central image in Koster’s trilogy. When Palmiro Inchado de los Huevos discovers Tinieblas, he cries “Jesus of the Great Power, free me from this darkness!” and then jumps into the ocean. Later, his “shark-surgered head was found washed up on a beach ...” (*Prince* 16). At the end of the third novel, after the apocalyptic destruction of Tinieblas, Mandragon’s severed head “Floats out to sea” (*Man*. 346). Thus, both the beginning and end of Tinieblan history are marked by this same violent image. That Tinieblan and Panamanian history connect on this one

point is extraordinary (after all, the Spadafora incident occurred a full five years *after* Koster completed *Mandragon*), and considering Koster's portrayal of Noriega as an inhuman brute, it is therefore appropriate that the Spadafora incident sounded the death knell for the Noriega régime. The entire mess provoked disgust throughout the Americas and signaled that "Manuel Noriega's easy days [with the U.S. government and C.I.A.] were over" (38).

The rest of the main narrative⁴ chronicles various other crimes committed by the Panamanian military and Noriega after the Spadafora incident, the deterioration of Panama--United States relations, the American invasion, Noriega's flight from U. S. soldiers, his asylum in the papal nunciature, and finally his arrest by American authorities. Throughout Koster and Sánchez' summary of these events, Noriega appears deranged, desperate, and ultimately pathetic. The narrative ends with Sánchez' recollection of a conversation he had with the papal nuncio shortly after the American overthrow. In the course of the talk, the nuncio told Sánchez about how afraid Noriega appeared during his stay at the nunciature; Noriega was so tense that he took a machine gun with him when he went to bed. Sánchez was struck with just how far Noriega had fallen in such a short time, but could not help smiling at the thought of a sleeping Noriega clutching his weapon. Sánchez' observation concisely sums up Noriega's psychotic personality: "It [the gun] was his teddy bear" (381).

Reviewing these episodes from *In the Time of The Tyrants*, it becomes apparent that there is often close relation between Panama, the historical referent, and the fictional

prose in the trilogy. Panamanian historical figures display similar motivations to Tinieblan characters, and the result is that many fictional episodes bear significant resemblance to historical events. The Spadafora incident shows in fact that the relationship between history and fiction is often so close in Koster's work that even a later event in history can reflect earlier episodes in fiction. Indeed, the moral of Koster's various writings does not substantially change over the years, and it applies as much to the historical prose found in *In The Time of The Tyrants* as it does to the fiction in the novels: those who seek revenge or power in Latin America involve themselves in the most dangerous of pursuits.

I

The Prince is the life story of Kiki Sancudo, a remarkable individual in the history of the equally remarkable fictional Latin American Republic of Tinieblas. Kiki himself is the narrator and focalizer, and his egomaniacal perspective makes the story all the more remarkable; Kiki tries to persuade his audience that he is more superman than man and his life more of an epic struggle than the simple story of a person living out his days. He is at various times an Olympic gold medalist, the most profitable and least scrupulous gun-runner in the Americas, an ambassador in Paris, and an immensely popular candidate for the presidency of Tinieblas. Yet when Kiki is shot by a would-be assassin, his life changes dramatically: instead of walking with the grace and ease of a natural athlete, Kiki is confined to a wheelchair, a quadriplegic with no hope for recovery; rather than speaking with the skill and passion of an experienced politician, Kiki's speech is impeded to the extent that it is nearly impossible for those around him to understand. From the moment he learns of his disabilities, Kiki is possessed with a burning desire to get revenge for the maiming, and the main narrative is devoted to Kiki's efforts to take that revenge. Throughout the story he tells, the once mighty Kiki struggles to come to terms with the fact that he can no longer be a man of action, but a diminished being capable only of thought.

As G.B. Crump points out, "the clash between the man of thought and the man of action" is the driving force behind Kiki's narrative ("Koster" 441). Kiki is forced into a life of contemplation; there is nothing else that he can do but think. And all that he knows, or at least all that this egotistical man cares to think about, is the experiences he had and the

life he once led. Thus, *The Prince* is more than the story of one man's quest for revenge. It is also Kiki's compulsive attempt to make a history out of his experiences, to give these experiences "human reality", a relevance they would not have if left uncollected and unrecorded (441).

Surrounding Kiki in this novel are a number of other notable characters. The most significant of these, in terms of national prominence, is Kiki's father, Alejandro Sancudo. An almost mythical figure (there is speculation in Tinieblas that Alejo Sancudo is a werewolf) and the most popular politician in Tinieblan history, Alejo holds executive power on a number of occasions. Each time, Alejo and his whimsical policies, based more on astrology and fascism than any less tempestuous ideology, nearly ruin the country; either American forces or Tinieblans themselves have to depose Alejo every time he takes power. Nevertheless, there is a certain charisma about Alejo that ensures he remains popular even after grossly abusing his authority (40).

On a personal level, Alejo is too preoccupied with fulfilling his dreams of personal political destiny to have much time for Kiki or Kiki's brother, Alfonso. There is a moment in the novel where Alejo meets a teen-aged Kiki and has to ask "You are Kiki, aren't you?" (100) This lack of a meaningful relationship with his father affects Kiki deeply, and causes bitter resentment. When Kiki later forms a whisky smuggling partnership with an American soldier, he is asked what he plans to do with his money. Kiki answers "I'm going to buy my father's girlfriend and fuck her in his bed" (115). Alejo, for his part, has no problem throwing his own son into jail when Kiki is caught sleeping with the Presidential mistress⁵ (131).

The most charitable comment one can make about this father-son relationship is that it is businesslike. After Kiki is paralyzed and Alejo is devising his last run for the Presidency of Tinieblas, the two men make a deal concerning Kiki's would-be assassin, Ñato Espino: the father agrees to present a captured Ñato to the son in return for the son's support in the election (313). This is not a deal made out of love or loyalty, but out of expediency.

The most prominent male relationship that Kiki has in the novel is with Ñato Espino, the man he wants so desperately to capture and kill. Kiki himself realizes and admits that Ñato is his physical double, a man exactly the same height, weight and age as Kiki (228). Yet for all their physical similarities, the two characters possess completely different personalities: where Kiki is assertive, Ñato is weak; where Kiki is resourceful, Ñato relies on others. However, the shooting changes matters. The two characters are still opposites, but Kiki becomes the weakened figure and Ñato becomes the dominant figure in the relationship. As G.B. Crump notes,

Kiki's wounding by Ñato is dictated by a script the two are acting out -- Kiki, the reformed reprobate turned ethical politician, confronting Ñato, the corrupt friend foiled in his dream of illicit gain. The inevitable conclusion of this situation effects an ironic reversal of their previous relationship: the heretofore subservient weakling Ñato "magically" transforms the strong-willed and dominant Kiki "into a vegetable with his nine-millimeter auto-loading wand." ("Transformations" 242)

Nothing can reconcile these disparate personalities until death brings peace between them.

There is considerably less turmoil in the relationships that Kiki has with the main women in his life, though these relationships are not without problems. Kiki's mother dies when he is only a child, and her story is only briefly alluded to in the narrative, but her

memory affects Kiki strongly. She dies by suicide, having been driven into an asylum by the demands of her husband. There is bitterness in Kiki's narrative as he tells how his father drove the woman insane, and this bitterness helps to explain certain aspects of his relationship with Alejo (42). For example, it sheds light on why Kiki later has such a strong desire to enrage his father by sleeping with the mistress. It also accounts for why Kiki can speak critically of Alejo and why the two men have a formal relationship at best.

The two most important women to Kiki, his second wife and his mistress, are also the two most loyal people in his life. His wife is a famous international actress named Elena Delfi. Though she is wealthy, young, and beautiful, she shows allegiance to Kiki by staying with him despite his disabilities and the fact that he took a mistress during the marriage (48, 159). The mistress, Marta, also worries about Kiki and stays with him after his accident. She even tries to get Kiki to give up his plans of revenge against Ñato and leave Tinieblas instead (53). Whether this loyalty is genuine or not is ultimately difficult to determine, but Kiki, the focalizer, never gives indication that it is false. Because both of these women demonstrate loyalty to and emotional dependence upon Kiki, he feels his manliness and importance are both intact even after the debilitating accident.

Kiki's first marriage to Olga Luciérnaga Tristealegre is not as successful as his relationships with Marta and Elena, mostly because Kiki makes many of the same mistakes with Olga as Alejo had made with Kiki's own mother. He is unable to lend emotional support to Olga and does not know how to react when her sanity starts to slip. Eventually, she responds to analysis, tries to live with Kiki, but eventually leaves him (257-269). In retrospect, Kiki realizes where he went wrong: "Why would she want to leave? What

amazes me now is that I persuaded her to stay. Olga said later that I did so out of stubbornness, and I imagine that was part of it. And vanity: Kiki Sancudo wasn't the sort whose wife walked out on him" (255). Kiki's own pride and vanity cloud his perceptions of what was really wrong in the relationship, and by the time he realizes his failings, Olga has left.

The larger themes in the novel are revealed in the relationships between characters. Revenge, for instance, is the main theme; Kiki's thirst for revenge against Ñato is explicit from the first page of the novel until the end. The importance of righting perceived wrongs is more subtly apparent when Kiki deliberately sleeps with Alejo's mistress; as we have seen, Kiki is not only attracted to the woman, but also motivated by the desire to get some revenge against his negligent father.

Desire for power is the novel's other major theme, and it is manifested not only in the relationships between characters, but on a national scale. Kiki is as thirsty for power over Ñato, Alejo, Olga, and others as Alejo is over the entire nation of Tinieblas. Once power is attained on both the personal and national levels, characters wield it heavily and inevitably abuse it. Kiki, for example, is more concerned with asserting a husband's authority over his wife than he is with understanding and caring for Olga. Alejo, a character who well understands Koster's statement "the body politic is a fantastic lay" ("Surprise Party" 23), is more concerned with using his power to try to satisfy personal lusts than in guiding Tinieblas to economic prosperity and social equality.

Both the themes of revenge and desire for power have one element in common: they are irresolvable in the novel. Those individuals that seek revenge and power find that

they can never be satisfied with small amounts of gratification. They always want more. Alejo is not satisfied with retirement after being President three times -- he *must* have power again; it is his “destiny” (40). Kiki also is not satisfied that he intimidates Ñato by threatening retribution. Instead, he *must* have that retribution, if it costs him his health or life; even when he is warned by Marta and others that his obsession with revenge is foolish, Kiki ignores them all (53). The impression left by these two men is that if Kiki could kill Ñato twice, he would -- and if Alejo were thrown out of office again, he would return for a fifth term.

It is important to note that Kiki and Alejo are not the only obsessive individuals in *The Prince*. In this sense, they are like representative Tinieblans, for the whole nation seems to be obsessed. Take the national fixation on attaining the presidency, for example. As Kiki notes on several occasions, “Everyone wants to be President” in Tinieblas (51, 123, 215, 293), and Tinieblans will do anything to attain that office: “Nacho Hormiga wants to be President and figures the best way is to be my father’s Vice President because my father always gets thrown out before the end of his term, and Lino Piojo wants to be President and is running as Pepe’s Vice President because, after all, León Fuertes got blown up and the same thing could happen to Pepe...(51)” This obsessive desire for power and revenge is a common element in Tinieblan history and life. Indeed, it is the very force that propels that society. If *The Prince* illustrates anything, it is that revenge and desire for power are the key constituents of the Tinieblan mindset in particular, and since Tinieblans are Latin Americans, perhaps of the Latin American mindset in general. If Kiki’s story

serves as a moral, the message is clear: obsessive pursuit of either power or revenge is a hazardous practice.

II

Of the three novels that form Koster's Tinieblan triptych, *The Prince* is the most conventional fictional narrative. *The Dissertation*, the second novel in the trilogy, is structured as a doctoral dissertation in history and operates on two distinct narrative levels: the dissertation body recounts Tinieblan history and the life of former Tinieblan president León Fuertes; the endnotes relate the narrator's personal history and fantastical ideas. The last novel, *Mandragon*, is filled with magic and prophecy and told by a narrator of indeterminate sex and ontological status; the reader is never certain exactly who, where, or what the narrator is. *The Prince*, however, because it focuses upon one man's story, and is essentially a straightforward succession of events, stands as the most orthodox of Koster's three fictional narratives. That being said, Koster manages and manipulates this narrative very cleverly. He uses a variety of narrative techniques to translate history into fiction, to construct a highly structured novel out of disarranged experience.

Roman Jakobson's ideas concerning the speech act are helpful in understanding how Koster produces his translation of history to fiction. Jakobson explains that language works according to two operations: selection and combination (Lodge, The Modes of Modern Writing, 74). When a person speaks, he selects certain words and then combines these words to form coherent messages. History too is a process of selection and combination. The historian chooses from the unconnected, unassimilated number of experiences that constitutes extra-textual history, excluding the ones he feels are not

relevant to his study, then combines these experiences in his historical text. A writer of fiction selects events from both history and his imagination to arrange them in a narrative. Since the historian and the fiction writer are both selectors and combiners, the difference between the two is the nature of their mimesis. A historian tries to be as faithful as possible to the extra-textual experiences that he puts into text, but since both selection and combination are arbitrary and subject to the historian's personal biases, his history is always fictive to an extent. The fiction writer can construct *fantasy* from his imaginative selections, but because the very language he selects is derived from his own life experience, there is always an element of history in his narrative.

In *Carmichael's Dog*, this issue is also briefly but directly discussed. Koster writes: "The literary and scientific imaginations differ only in their degree of objectivity. Carmichael's knack was quirkishly subjective, and would work best when applied to telling stories" (82). Thus, Carmichael's fiction involves scientific selection and combination, and his job as a biology professor is highly influenced by fictional selection and combination --one of his biology courses at university, a course of "his own design", is called "mythopoesis" (311). Carmichael's work constantly involves movement on the axis between scientific reality and personal fantasy, just as Kiki's narrative also moves between one pole and the other.

In the course of his selecting and combining, Koster plays some intriguing variations upon traditional narrative strategies, including the division of narrative into hierarchically-ordered levels. Catherine Belsey claims that in classic realist texts there is a two-tiered hierarchy with the upper tier being the level of history and the lower tier being

the level of discourse (71). The level of history is akin to what some theorists call the omniscient point of view. "History narrates events apparently without the intervention of a speaker. In history, there is no mention of 'you' or 'I'; the events seem to narrate themselves" (71). Mention of 'you' or 'I', usually in the form of dialogue between characters, occurs on the level of discourse. Koster blurs the dividing line between history and discourse by making the historical narrator one of the discursive narrators as well. This, of course, is not a new approach to narrative. In *Heart of Darkness* Marlow is both the narrator of the story and a character within the story, but even Conrad introduces a third-person narrator who interferes on occasion to remind the reader that the story is narrated by a man on a ship moored on the River Thames.

Koster, on the other hand, makes no such intrusions to set up a larger narrative context for Kiki's story. All of the action, all of the conversation, all of the history takes place in Kiki's mind. There is no extradiegetical comment on this; the reader simply comes to understand it as the novel unfolds⁶. The fact that the narrative takes place wholly within the bounds of Kiki's mind sets up certain logistical problems, however. The reader knows that Kiki is a cripple with the ability to think, but a drastically impaired ability to converse, and no ability whatsoever to write. Indeed, there are a few instances in the novel, such as Kiki's interview with Phil the film director (120-28), where the severity of his disability becomes obvious. An apparent question is how can this narrative be told when there is no means whatsoever to tell it? In classic realist third-person narratives, there is an understanding that the focalizer has a privileged perspective on the story; in a first-person classic realist narrative, the focalizer is a participant in the story, and the reader either

knows or deduces that the focalizer has the verbal or written means to communicate. None of these perspectives completely apply to *The Prince*.

What Koster has done in the novel is give the perspective to the reader. The reader is expected to make a leap of faith and assume that he is the privileged observer of the workings of Kiki Sancudo's active and able mind. Theoretically, then, the question of how Kiki is able to tell his story becomes irrelevant. Of course, in reality, the story is very carefully formed by Koster -- he tells it. But to enter the imaginary world of Tinieblas as represented by Kiki's thoughts, one must assume that the story is produced through the work of some ghost in the narrative machine.

Ostensibly, what Koster attempts to write is a purely mimetic novel. That is, he tries to create the illusion that it is not he who speaks. But this is ultimately not possible, because he is the writer; Koster writes therefore Koster speaks. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan notes "the representation of speech comes closest to pure mimesis, but even here - I believe - there is a narrator who 'quotes' the characters' speech, thus reducing the directness of showing. All that a narrative can do is create an illusion, an effect, a semblance of mimesis, but it does so through diegesis" (108).

To give a specific example of this from *The Prince*, the novel begins with a dream. There is no extradiegetical comment at all suggesting that it is a dream. Instead, the reader is presented with the dream *in medias res*. The only indication something out of the ordinary is taking place is that the entire section is in italics. The reader is given a further clue at the end of the dream when the first words not in italics are "That's the way it'll be" (13). At this point in the story, the reader is not aware he is observing the workings of

Kiki's mind, but he has seen some clues and further clues later in the narrative will unravel the mystery. What is important to note is that Koster carefully disguises his diegetical role. An extradiegetical comment such as "This is Kiki's dream" would ruin the semblance of mimesis, but the use of italics, though still a formal diegetical device, is a more subtle means of indicating a dream-state.

By giving the reader close to direct access to Kiki's mind, Koster fosters a tight relationship between the character and the reader. There is not the separation that a strong authorial presence would necessarily bring. Because Koster's authorial presence is so inconspicuous, the novel operates primarily on the level of discourse (that is, there is no historical narration from a privileged perspective; all narration emanates from the first-person narrator, Kiki). Despite this, Kiki also tells Tinieblas' history, so both the history and the discourse emanate from the same speaker -- or since Kiki cannot speak, they emanate from the same thinker. Kiki sets himself up as the authority on all aspects of Tinieblas, the reader interprets Kiki's thoughts, and both a fictional discourse and a fictional history are the result.

To lend a measure of credibility to his authoritative focalizer, Koster develops a flesh and blood Kiki Sancudo that possesses the variety and complexity of emotions any individual in the extra-textual world would also possess. Kiki at times demonstrates rage, self-loathing, elation, sadness, selfishness, tenderness, and allegiance towards family. The complexity of the man, his capacity to feel a number of emotions at once, is revealed throughout the narrative, often within the scope of a single phrase or paragraph. Take the following sentence for example:

And next door fluffy-bearded Phil the documentary director -- who, I hope for both their sakes, laid Marta last night, not in my house, of course, but in one of the pushbutton assignation nooks on the airport road, while a poorly maintained air conditioner wheezed at them and ... she pretended it was the old Kiki putting it to her -- and Carl the cameraman and Sonny the soundman are tenting their bedclothes with piss-rods... (53)

In these few words, Kiki reveals himself to be both caring towards his former mistress and jealous that other men are able to have physical relations with her. This jealousy is tinted with pride, for he tells himself that all the while she was engaging in those relations, she was dreaming of "the old Kiki". Kiki also reveals his obsession with sex, a function that a formerly active person confined to a wheelchair would undoubtedly miss. Thus, the narrator often gives the reader the impression that he is a thinking, feeling and caring man. By developing a rounded character like Kiki, Koster contributes to the illusion of reality in *The Prince*.

Koster's use of *illusionism*, a fictional element which Catherine Belsey classifies as a common characteristic of classic realist narratives (70), is another means by which he mediates history. J.A. Cuddon summarizes illusionism as "the semblance of reality and verisimilitude in art which most writers seek to create in order to enable the reader to think that he is seeing, feeling, hearing, tasting, smelling, or, conceivably, having some extra-sensory or kinaesthetic experience" (442). Illusionism then is very similar to Platonic *mimesis* where "the poet attempts to create the illusion it is not he who is speaking" (Rimmon-Kenan 106). When a writer creates the illusion that the work is presented without the interference of an artificer (as is the aim of *mimesis*), then an illusion of verisimilitude is created. Likewise, a writer uses illusionism to create an ambiance of

extra-textual reality within his text. Because historical Panamanian events are fictionalized and fictional Tinieblan events are historicized, the technique of illusionism makes itself felt in the narrative.

Koster's most visible means of creating illusionism in the novel is to refer to real historical personages, places, and events, incorporating them into the world of Tinieblas. People such as John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson are characters within *The Prince* (Fictional characters also bear strong resemblance to particular historical figures -- Alejo Sancudo's similarity to Panamanian dictator Arnulfo Arias being a noteworthy case.⁷). Places such as California, Panama, New York, and Paris are settings for certain episodes in the novel. Tinieblas is founded in 1821, the same year in which several other Latin American countries, including Panama, became republics. Even events like the 1962 San José conference of Central American Presidents are incorporated into the novel (on page 177, Kiki refers to contributions made in San José by Tinieblan president León Fuertes).

One notable example where both a historical personage and a real event are brought into the world of Tinieblas is found early in the novel, when Kiki describes some intermission conversation during a performance by Sarah Bernhardt. Kiki states that the performance took place at the Tinieblas Municipal Theatre "When Saturnino Aguila was in his third year as President of Tinieblas..." (21) According to the Presidential list, that year would have been 1878. Bernhardt was an extensive traveler, giving performances throughout the world. She went on tour to Central and South America on a number of occasions, but by her own admission, Bernhardt could not possibly have been to Central America in 1878: "I had never been on the sea when it was decided that the artistes of the

Comédie Française should go to London” (Lesburg 71). This trip to London was taken in 1879 (Richardson 77). Thus, the story about Sarah Bernhardt is credible because the actress toured world-wide; this particular event remains within the realm of fiction, however, because it takes place in an imaginary country at an impossible time.

Koster establishes a place called The Reservation in Tinieblas, and the existence of this place within the fictional realm of the novel shows again how deeply the novel is grounded in history and the extent that it relies on historical illusionism. The Reservation exists because of an agreement between the United States and the Republic of Tinieblas “under which the United States agreed to pay all debts owed to the German Emperor and Tinieblas agreed to grant the United States a nine-hundred-and-ninety-nine year lease on a tract of land adjacent to the capital [i.e. The Reservation]” (22). This agreement was negotiated by an American named Day and a Spaniard named Cornudo⁸; the contract was signed in Washington, and no Tinieblans were directly involved in the process. Ratification of the treaty by the Tinieblan legislature came eventually: “When the terms of the treaty were published, some Tinieblans felt they had been betrayed, but when the second American cruiser trained its guns on the capital and prepared to debark marines, the members of the Chamber realized that the treaty was fair and ratified it” (23).

These events mirror closely the treaty negotiated and signed that created the United States Canal Zone in Panama. The terms of the historical Hay-Bunau-Varilla pact were similar to the fictional Day-Cornudo treaty in that the historical contract paid Panama a sum of money, gave the Americans possession in perpetuity of a ten-mile zone on both sides of the canal, and the Panama representative in the negotiations was a

foreigner (a Frenchman named Bunau-Varilla). No Panamanians had a direct say in these negotiations (McCullough 392-401), just as no Tinieblas negotiate the terms for establishing the Reservation. Moreover, the Panama government, like the Tinieblas government, was also threatened in order to expedite signature of the treaty: "...he [Bunau-Varilla] sent a 370 word cable to Minister de la Espriella that struck an entirely new note of fear. If the government of Panama failed to ratify the treaty immediately upon the treaty's arrival at Colón, then the almost certain consequence would be an immediate suspension of American protection over the new republic and the signing of a new canal treaty with Bogotá"⁹ (396).

Obviously, the Reservation is not the Canal Zone, and because Koster's textual world involves imaginary people and nonexistent places, the level of illusionism can never approach the near fidelity of the illusionism found in history. Nevertheless, the similarities between the Reservation and the Canal Zone are unmistakable: both areas are created through negotiations between foreign powers, both treaties are enforced through gunboat diplomacy, and both the fictional and the historical treaties give the United States political control over the areas for vast periods of time. Even though the Reservation is not quite the same as the Canal Zone, the Canal Zone is very clearly Koster's model for the Reservation.

Interestingly, in Koster's semi-autobiographical novel, *Carmichael's Dog*, there is considerable discussion of novel creation, relevant discussion to *The Prince* and the other Tinieblas novels. One of several narrative strategies deliberated in *Carmichael's Dog* is fictional name development. The narrator notes that Carmichael "took to making up clever

names in hope that interesting people would be born from them” (201). Throughout the narrative, these clever names abound: there is the great writer “Robin Speckshaft”, who resembles William Shakespeare; a butcher is named “Fleischmann” (“Fleisch” is German for meat) (68); names of countries mentioned in the novel like “Hellas” (62), “Iberia” (77), and “The Associated Sovereignties of Ultrania” (199) echo the names of existing nations like Greece, Spain, and The United States of America. Similar playful name development occurs within Koster’s three Tinieblas novels, and it is particularly prominent at the outset of *The Prince*.

In the prefatory pages to this novel, the reader is given a list of all the Tinieblan presidents since the fictional republic was declared independent in 1821. More than merely a register of dates and names, the list is also suggestive of several narrative strategies Koster uses in the rest of the book, including name development. It is in this list that the reader first sees the name Tinieblas. *Tinieblas* is a Spanish word that can mean darkness or ignorance, and when used figuratively, it signifies confusion. On another prefatory page, Koster cites the following passage from Genesis:

*Y la tierra estaba desordenada y vacía y las tinieblas
estaban sobre la faz del abismo.*

And the earth was without form, and void and darkness was
upon the face of the deep. (1:2)

From these introductory comments, there is every indication by the author that the country he will present in *The Prince* is a chaotic place, a nation of darkness. If any further evidence of this is needed, it is given in the first pages of the narrative itself. Here the reader is informed that the fictional Spanish discoverer of the country, Palmiro Inchado de

los Huevos, exclaimed upon his arrival: “‘Jesus of the Great Power, free me from this darkness!’ (‘Jesús del Gran Poder, líbradme destas tinieblas!’)” (16).

In both the quote from Genesis and in the words spoken by los Huevos, allusion is made to the Judeo-Christian creation myth. This is common practice in Latin America. Numerous cities and towns named Asunción or Concepción were founded out of Christian notions of hope and light; Koster’s Tinieblas is ironically founded out of a biblical sense of despair and apocalyptic confusion. By naming his country Tinieblas, Koster ironically questions the Latin cultural tradition of naming places according to Christian principles of hope.

In the prefatory list of Presidents, Koster names the various leaders similarly to the way he names Tinieblas. That is to say, in a strikingly unorthodox and mostly derisive manner. It is evident at first glance that many of the surnames are satirical. One president is named Bodega (wine store), another Canino (dog). In some cases, both first name and surname are irreverently chosen, as in Amado Del Busto (Breast-lover) and Pacífico Pastor Alemán (Peaceful German minister). Ajax Tolete has the first name of an obsessive mythological character, who “demented by resentment because the arms of Achilles have been awarded to Odysseus, has vented his wrath by slaughtering a flock of sheep” (Harvey, Paul 16). His surname, translated to English, signifies a billy club. Indeed, another satirical reading of the name, based on an English homonym, could be “Ajax Toilet” -- “Ajax” being the name of a popular brand of household soap. His name then translates to something like “Toilet Cleaner.”

Ajax Tolete is also an interesting case of the name reflecting the “reality” of the fictional bearer (Hutcheon 151). If my first interpretation is considered, then Tolete is a violent type, perhaps lacking in basic intelligence -- a person who believes in forceful authority. Tolete is the head of the Civil Guard in the novel, a military man who eventually rises to lead a junta (216, 292). Similarly, León Fuertes (Strong Lion) is portrayed as a well-respected, assertive, man of natural authority (177, 322). So while the names of characters within Koster’s narrative are satirically chosen in many instances, they also frequently reflect the fictional “realities” of their respective referents. The effect of this is unsettling and paradoxical, for reality is simultaneously skewed, given an unreal aspect, and yet a referential context is maintained.

Koster’s use of a stream of consciousness narrative also is a means to create a form of reality within the novel, because in the narrative’s attempt to trace the thoughts of one character, it gives a semblance of mental verisimilitude. Paradoxically, this imitation of mental reality stretches the bounds of realism because of the randomness and complexity of the narrator’s thinking process. Throughout the novel, we get Kiki’s thoughts and perceptions as they come to him. There is a certain arbitrariness to the narrative as a result; many events and characters are only partially discussed early on in Kiki’s story, but receive fuller explanation as the narrative progresses. Thus, responsibility is placed on the reader to be attentive enough to piece together the narrative shards and construct some meaning out of them.

If we consider as an example the story of Ñato Espino, Kiki Sancudo’s evil double and would-be assassin, it becomes apparent how Koster’s stream of consciousness

technique works. The first paragraph of the novel is all about Ñato yet his name is not mentioned:

Jaime will get him. No, Alejo will have him delivered. An officer and two guardias will bring him to the ranch, smartly wrapped, in one of those vans with the Alliance for Progress handshake stenciled on the doors. The guardias will set him down on the porch, and Jaime will sign the receipt. Then he'll carry him over the threshold.

(11)

Not only does the reader not know who “him” is, but there are several other questions that could be asked about this passage. Who is Jaime? Who is Alejo? Where is “the ranch”? What kind of organization is the “Alliance for Progress”? Why is this section written in italics? The reader might guess from the two mentioned names that Hispanics are involved in this story. The Spanish word “guardia” suggests that the local police force is also Hispanic and that the locale must be either Spain or Latin America. Because “him” is “smartly wrapped” and pulled out of a van by two guards, there is a possibility that the locale is also a police state; the seemingly Orwellian name on the side of the van, “Alliance for Progress”, lends more credence to the police state supposition. But at this point in the narrative, all is speculation.

It is not till later that the reader learns Jaime is Kiki’s servant (35), that Alejo is Kiki’s father (30), that “the ranch” is a piece of property Kiki bought from his father (36), that the Alliance for Progress is indeed a shady organization more intent on maintaining the status quo than in promoting progress (58), and that the italics indicate Kiki to be in a dream state (13, 153). In section 4, Kiki gives a brief history of Tinieblas and it is there

that the reader learns for certain that the setting is Latin America and that the country has been under various forms of dictatorship throughout its history (16-24).

As for Ñato, his name is first mentioned in the second paragraph of the novel, where the reader finds out that Ñato is indeed the “him” of the first paragraph: “*He will curse and struggle, but Jaime will neither speak nor treat him harshly. I’ll be out of sight of course. I’ll have Jaime wheel me to the bedside once Ñato is tucked in*” (11). It is evident from the gruesome torture that Kiki plans for Ñato that there is considerable hatred in the relationship, especially on Kiki’s part, but the reason why Kiki hates Ñato is not given until three pages later when Kiki reveals “I intend to chastise Ñato for so magically changing me into a vegetable with his nine-millimeter auto-loading wand” (14). Ñato is mentioned several times throughout the narrative, and it is plain to see that Kiki is obsessed with revenge. However, not until section 29 does Kiki go into detail about their formerly close relationship and the fact that Ñato’s insatiable greed caused him to resent Kiki (223-234). Indeed, Kiki later explains that Ñato shot him because he would not agree to a scheme that would make Tinieblas a major drug trafficking centre (333-335).

By the time the narrative nears its end, the reader has pieced together many of the numerous narrative fragments to come to an understanding of Kiki’s story, his perspective on Tinieblas and its history, and the reasons why this consummate man of action was forced into a life of contemplation. None of this information is simply put forth in the narrative, but must be actively wrung from the text by the reader. Despite the seeming coalescence of all these disparate elements, hopes for a unifying closure, in which all the questions raised throughout the narrative are answered, are dashed at the end of the novel.

In this way, the novel ends on a note of indeterminacy, rather than by the classic realist “dissolution of enigma through the re-establishment of order, recognizable as a re-instatement or a development of the order which is understood to have preceded the events of the story itself” (Belsey 70). The reader must be satisfied with the limited narrative information that can be processed and understood; the world of *The Prince* is sufficiently enigmatic that some questions about it can never be completely answered.

There is a point in *Carmichael's Dog* where the writer rages at his wife for getting a puppy, claiming that a pet will disrupt his work. In the midst of his diatribe, he makes some interesting remarks concerning this issue of narrative closure:

Worlds end, Nicole. Ending them's part of making them.
 Don't believe me, ask God. I'm sick of Vama [Carmichael's
 science-fiction world], Nicole, I'm fucking fed up with it. I
 never want to think about it again. I love it too, of course,
 but I want to forget it, and destroying it is the only way to
 be free of it. So I did, I wiped it out, I wrecked it forever
 (123)

What is ironic in this statement is that if one actually does ask God (or his spokesman, St. John) about closure, this is what he says: “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new’” (Rev. 21: 4-5). Rather than an end, there is a new beginning to the world after the biblical apocalypse. Similarly, *Tinieblas* does not end with Kiki's narrative, nor does it cease to exist after the apocalypse in *Mandragon*. Echoes of *Tinieblas* are found in *Carmichael's Dog* -- Sunburst University, the modest institution where *The Dissertation's* Camilo Fuertes submits his Ph.D. thesis, is Carmichael's place

of employment; one of Fuertes' supervisors, Constance Lilywhite, has a sexual encounter with Carmichael (33-34). Despite all that Carmichael says to his wife, closure is not necessarily final, as both *The Bible* and Koster's own works indicate.

Nevertheless, looking simply at *The Prince* as a unit, rather than at Tinieblas as an entire fictional world, critics could argue that closure is not quite so indeterminate. The novel approaches closure, and the reader can make an educated guess concerning the nature of that closure; therefore, for all intents and purposes, the novel is closed. It is certainly possible that Kiki dies at the end of *The Prince*. Earlier in the narrative he says:

My mind keeps chewing at full power, and if left unprogrammed gives off frightful blares and screeches, woof-tweets of rage and terror that flash adrenal signals toward my dead nerves. Which signals go unanswered, clog the circuits, feedback causing more noise, until everything explodes in the gray static of convulsion. And that can kill me. I've had two; another one could kill.

(130)

Clearly, the purpose of this statement is to demonstrate how serious and precarious Kiki's condition happens to be. Nevertheless, the fact remains that another attack *could* kill, but death is not certain. When Kiki has his third attack at the end of the novel, the reader assumes Kiki will die, but is not certain. As a result, the central question of whether or not Kiki will exact his revenge from Ñato is left unresolved. The main narrative of *The Prince* therefore cannot be held up as a prime example of a closed narrative.

Until the final page of *The Prince*, it appears as though the entire narrative is heading towards a classic realist form of closure. The action takes place over the course of one day, a day that is leading to a presidential rally in the evening; chronological deviation occurs only when Kiki remembers or dreams about his past, but the action of the main

storyline unfolds with neither analepsis nor prolepsis. The narrative leads the reader in a certain direction, but when the last page of the book is turned, when the rally is set to begin, Kiki loses control. Our focalizer is lost and closure is problematic.

As we have seen, in certain respects *The Prince* is a historically contingent novel which attempts to represent a real world beyond its pages. Yet the novel is plainly fictional and never pretends to be a serious, closely mimetic history. It contains several sub-narratives, such as Kiki's relationships with different women during the course of his life, which become resolved before the end of the novel, but the narrative as a whole does not lead to a definite closure. History and discourse emanate from the same narrative voice (that is, Kiki), so there is no extradiegetical narration in the novel. For all of these reasons, *The Prince* is a problematic text, a diverse narrative that borrows from, but does not simply fall into, traditional fictional categories such as classic realism.

The relationship of *The Prince* to the postmodern fictional mode is similar to its relationship with classic realism: that is, many of the narrative techniques Koster uses to construct *The Prince* are often classified as postmodern techniques, but the text still defies categorization as a postmodern narrative. Indeed, this problem of classification arises largely because "the amorphous and politically volatile nature of postmodernism makes the phenomenon itself remarkably elusive, and the definition of its boundaries exceedingly difficult ..." (Hawthorn 150); to classify texts as typically postmodern is problematic if postmodernism itself thwarts attempts to stabilize definition.

At the root of postmodernism, and responsible for the volatility inherent in the mode, is subversiveness and a manifest distrust of authority. Lyotard's famous statement

that postmodernism displays a certain incredulity or distrust towards *grands récits* -- *grands récits* being, as another critic explains, “the legitimating narratives [or metanarratives] which purport to provide valid and definitive principles in any sphere, applicable across all societies” (McGowan 270) -- has swung the door open to question *any* individual or theory that takes a position of authority. After all, it is not just the *master* narratives that take positions of universal authority; even a neighbour offering directions on how to care for begonias, or a critic instructing people how to read certain texts, gives advice which is supposedly generally applicable. Therefore, any and all positions on any subject can be brought into question, including those positions which define or categorize postmodernism.

This distrust of authority has not stopped all critics in their attempts to stabilize postmodernism and to define its distinguishing features. Brian McHale claims that postmodernist fictional narratives are different from earlier modernist and classic realist forms, and the reason for this difference is plain: earlier literary modes were concerned with questions of epistemology, whereas postmodernism is more concerned with ontological issues. McHale writes, “...modernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions such as ... ‘How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?’.... postmodernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions like the ones Dick Higgins calls ‘post-cognitive’: ‘which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?’” (9-10).

Closure and verisimilitude were among the tools that enabled classic realists to answer the questions “How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I

in it?” When those tools were no longer sufficient to answer those basic epistemological questions, modernists replaced them with skepticism and more complicated narrative strategies such as multiple point of view. But when modernist epistemological uncertainty became “intractable”, ontological speculation, the realm of the postmodern, took over. To explore these ontological questions, a new set of critical tools (or defining features) have been forged. These features reflect the uncertainty and challenge to old authority that is essential to this new era of ontological speculation: pluralism, destabilization, fragmentation, antifoundationalism, paradox, pastiche, satire, irony -- these are all among the implements at the disposal of the postmodern writer.

Koster makes use of several of these postmodern features in the narrative of *The Prince*. As we have already seen, the paradoxical relationship between history and fiction is a major element of both the list of presidents and Kiki Sancudo’s narrative. Koster displays his own mistrust of the mimetic veracity of historical metanarratives by incorporating fictive elements to subvert them. Hence, the historical “truth” of such events as John F. Kennedy’s appearance at the 1962 conference of Central American Presidents in San José, is mixed with the fictional meeting Kennedy had there with José Fuertes, the leader of an historically nonexistent Central American republic. The result is a hybrid world where fiction destabilizes history: in a purely classic realist fictional realm, fiction and history are regarded as discrete entities; in Koster’s fictional realm, it is often difficult to say where one ends and the other begins.

Another element that often serves to destabilize meaning in *The Prince* is humour. The humour in this text often appears as satire, an ironic satire, where “every reader learns

that some statements cannot be understood without rejecting what they have to say” (Booth 1). At first glance, the humour seems to meet Wayne Booth’s criteria of “stable irony” where the reader is presented with only a limited set of tasks to come to a more or less steady comprehension of the ironical meaning (3). However, when examined more closely, the irony demonstrates a certain instability; the reader recognizes “that negation that begins all ironic play: ‘*this* affirmation must be rejected,’” but the specific authorial intention behind the irony is vague (240).

The most seemingly stable satire in *The Prince* are the political and social varieties which often combine to paint a critical picture of both the Latin American political process and the society within which that political process operates. In the following section of the novel, Kiki describes a portion of the fantastical Tinieblan electoral history:

There followed a famous election between Dr. del Busto and Heriberto Ladilla, Hildebrando’s son. Most people gave Dr. del Busto the advantage, but every one of the fifteen thousand indians in Tuquetá Province voted for Ladilla. So great was Ladilla’s appeal to the indians of Tuquetá that little babies voted for him, and men long dead, so that when Dr. del Busto spoke demanding a recount, he could declare, “Tinieblas is the first democracy to extend suffrage beyond the grave.” But as Ladilla controlled the Electoral Jury, the count stood, and Ladilla took office.

(23)

Readers familiar with historical accounts of Latin American elections are also familiar with countless stories of electoral fraud in the region. Koster assumes the reader has this basic grasp and then creates this satirical account, so ironical and flippant that it not only confirms readers’ stereotypes about fraudulent Latin American elections, but it goes beyond what those readers expect. Fraud in this Latin American republic does not stop

with the stuffing of ballot boxes, but also includes “suffrage beyond the grave.” The crowning irony of this situation, especially in the eyes of the North American reader, is that though Dr. del Busto ensures all of Tinieblan society is aware of this outrageous fraud, it is nevertheless accepted by everyone.

It is not just the Tinieblan political system and society that are satirized. Individuals within that system are also ironically scrutinized and ridiculed. Among the primary characters, Alejo Sancudo is the most prominent example. Throughout the novel, he represents the stereotypical Latin American dictator taken to a comical extreme. He is wild, irrational, and morally bankrupt; Alejo’s desire for power is so strong that nothing else matters, not even his family or his country.

The novel is full of secondary characters that serve as satirical portraits of types found in both Latin America and North America. When Kiki goes to Yale to study, for instance, he meets all manner of stereotypical Americans: there is the quintessential rich undergraduate, Astor Dupont Pelf¹⁰, who buys his way through university by hiring other students, including Kiki, to write his exams and papers (180-181); two Jewish card sharks, slyly named Fox and Lyon, unashamedly make fortunes from less experienced students (182-183); and Kiki even meets two satirically named athletes -- Gil Haddock, an Olympic class swimmer, and Theron Whippet, a speedy football player (188).

There is also situational irony to be found in Kiki’s American experiences, for he lives a debased version of the American Dream. In less than a year, he makes his girlfriend Karen pregnant at a Balling, New York motel¹¹, but instead of marrying her, getting a job, and living happily ever after, Kiki arranges for her to have an abortion. Then, he makes his

fortune opening up illicit gambling parlours, brothels, and inspired by his experience with Karen, abortion clinics. Before long, Kiki is pursued by the I.R.S., police, and mafia, and just manages to elude capture before slipping out of the country (192-194).

What makes all of this ironic satire so slippery, so difficult to stabilize, is that it is nearly impossible to trace any of it to Koster. Because the narrative is focalized through Kiki, and there is no third-person intervention, the source of this satire and irony appears to be Kiki himself. Certainly, Kiki Sancudo is an R.M. Koster creation, and Koster is physically responsible for writing Kiki's satire, but that does not mean that the character's views are necessarily consistent with the author's. Indeed, Koster could be satirizing his character by allowing Kiki to make so many cruel observations. This would certainly explain the blatantly anti-Semitic comments Kiki makes concerning Fox and Lyon, the poker players:

Each time he [Fox] shook his thin Dachau-gray face sadly and gazed with compassion out of pogrom-stained eyes and shrugged his persecuted shoulders and held up his palms with their beef-red stigmata of Roman spikes, while his partner [Lyon] growled: "Tough shit, schmuck; we don't take markers from little fish."

(183)

It would also explain many of the easy generalizations made in the novel about Latin American and North American society and politics. However, if this is how the generalizations can be explained, is Koster the American making a statement through his Latin narrator about the unreliability of Latin Americans in general? Or is Koster the writer simply having fun playing with stereotypes? These questions of authorial intent are

not resolved within the pages of the novel, though one can assume the narrator, by virtue of his generalizing, is not completely reliable.

Along with the paradoxical relationship between history and fiction, and the presence of satire and irony throughout the text, *The Prince* displays another destabilizing fictional trait: pastiche. That is, there is in Koster's text a combination of literary elements borrowed from a variety of sources. In *The Prince*, the egocentric narrator creates a pastiche to tell his story in an exciting and remarkable way -- as Crump points out, "Kiki's erratic career as Olympic Wrestler, gunrunner, ambassador, and pimp is a pastiche of heroic roles from movie melodramas" ("Transformations" 242) -- but also in the best way possible to make his tale believable. Consequently, the story has all the magical, superhuman elements one would expect to find in epic or fantasy, the suffering hero often found in tragedy, and also the air of credibility of a history. From Kiki's perspective, the pastiche works to stabilize his narrative because it forces together seemingly disparate fictional elements such as fantasy and history.

However, if we take into account that pastiche is at times used by writers "in a derogatory sense to indicate lack of originality..." (Baldick 162), it follows that Koster is satirizing none other than his own narrator/pasticheur and that narrator/pasticheur's unoriginal, egomaniacal perspective on the past. Kiki's story often reads as "bad fiction" (Crump "Transformations" 243) as a result of his inclination to exaggerate his own accomplishments and lifestyle. That the narrative has a feel of historical accuracy only proves Kiki has a modicum of skill in manipulating history to suit his own needs; after all, he claims to have taken the subject at Yale, "studying the texts with pleasure" (192).

Koster's portrayal of Kiki as a pasticheur in this novel serves to cast more doubt on the narrator, and therefore also casts doubt on the notion that ultimately singular meaning can be derived from Kiki's narrative.

What all of the postmodern elements found in *The Prince* have in common is that they bring indeterminacy to the text: there is uncertainty in the often paradoxical relationship between fiction and history; satire is used in such a way that the reader often has difficulty determining what is being satirized, the object of Kiki's ridicule, or Kiki himself; pastiche too is a form of ridicule that discredits the narrator's ability to present truthfully his own life and the world in which he lives. These postmodernist elements call into question Kiki's own *grand récit* -- they challenge the authority that Kiki tries to assume.

Also present within *The Prince* are examples of magic realism, a fictional and artistic mode that, like postmodernism, works as a challenge to convention and authority. As Stephen Slemon has noted, the very words *magic* and *realism* can be considered contradictory; they suggest "a binary opposition between the representational code of realism and that, roughly, of fantasy" (10). These two seemingly disparate words were first joined by German art critic Franz Roh to describe a "counter movement" to impressionism in painting through which "the charm of the object was rediscovered" (Simpkins 141). Over the course of the twentieth century, the term's meaning has changed to the point where it is used to mean a variety of things. It is, however, most frequently applied to Latin American Literature¹². Critic William Spindler, in his paper "Magic Realism: A Typology", presents a contemporary definition of magic realism which takes

into account how the term has developed and how it has been used differently by different critics. Spindler suggests a tripartite division into metaphysical magic realism, anthropological magic realism, and ontological magic realism (79-82).

Metaphysical magic realism is closest to Roh's original definition. It is found in texts where "a familiar scene is described as if it were something new and unknown, but without dealing explicitly with the supernatural" (79). Often the reader is "confronted with an allegory or a metaphor of something which remains almost within grasp and yet, unknown" (80). As an example, Spindler cites the occasion in Gabriel García-Márquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude* where Aureliano's father shows him ice, something the young boy has never seen nor heard of before: "Something very ordinary is presented as if it were a real prodigy by describing it through the eyes of a character for whom this is the case" (84).

In works where anthropological magic realism is prominent, there is antinomy, or a paradoxical conflict, between "a rational point of view" and "that of a believer in magic... This antinomy is resolved by the author adopting or referring to the myths and cultural background (the "collective unconscious") of a social or ethnic group" (80). Spindler gives general examples of this form, stating that Miguel Angel Asturias alludes to Mayan myths, Alejo Carpentier relies on the Black Haitian cultural background, and that Juan Rulfo and García-Márquez use folklore from small communities in Mexico and Columbia to resolve antinomy (80). Spindler notes that many critics feel European magic realism is generally metaphysical, whereas Latin American magic realism is most often anthropological (80). The ice episode in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* provides

evidence, however, that Latin American writers also work effectively outside the bounds of anthropological magic realism.

The third category, ontological magic realism, “resolves antinomy without recourse to any particular cultural perspective” (82). Supernatural events happen and there is no reason, logical or otherwise, for their occurrence. Spindler states that the narrator “is not puzzled, disturbed or sceptical of the supernatural; he simply accepts it as normal” (82). The realistic explanation of incredible situations in ontological magic realism is opposite to that of metaphysical magic realism where the real situation is explained as though it were in some way incredible (82). Spindler mentions Julio Cortázar’s story “Axolotl” as a clear case of ontological magic realism:

... the narrator explains at the beginning of the story that he is an axolotl, an amphibious creature from Mexico, and then proceeds to recount how he became one. He used to be a man who became obsessed with the axolotls when he visited the aquarium. After studying them intensely for many days, he actually became transformed into an axolotl. No surprise is expressed by the narrator in the face of such an unusual occurrence ... (83)

In the case of *The Prince*, Koster places his novel firmly within the Latin American magic realist tradition. Numerous episodes in this narrative fall into the classifications that Spindler provides, with the majority conforming to the ontological and metaphysical categories. An example of ontological magic realism, with overtones of the metaphysical variety, occurs early on in the narrative when Kiki mentions President Epifanio Mojón and that man’s practice of feeding political prisoners, common criminals, and young virgin girls to sharks (17-21). There is an almost religious element to the proceedings because the victims are crucified in the middle of a bay during low tide.

Indeed, to attract the sharks with the scent of blood, one of the victims is shot through the palm of his left hand, thereby resembling the traditional Christian image of a crucified Jesus bleeding from the nails driven through his own palms (18).

Where this scene leaves realism and enters the realm of the magical is when Mojón is overthrown and placed on his own crucifix:

The tide came in, and with it the sharks, and they began eating the Mexican aide-de camp as soon as they could reach his feet, but none of them would bite General Mojón. The tide rose and fell and rose again, and the sharks swam round and round General Mojón's cross, but none of them would touch him, used as they were to human flesh and hungry too, for the Mexican was a short wiry man with little meat on him ... The next morning [Mojón] died; by noon his flesh was rotting off him, but the buzzards wouldn't eat him either (20-21)

The antinomy here is between the natural (sharks feeding on a corpse) and the supernatural (both sharks and buzzards leaving a particularly obese corpse alone). Though it may suggest a moral reason for the sharks leaving the corpse to rot -- that is, Mojón is so filled with evil and corruption that sharks, predators that epitomize amoral violence in the animal kingdom, make the moral decision not to eat Mojón's flesh -- the allusion to the Christian myth is not adequate to resolve the antinomy. For his part, Kiki "is not puzzled, disturbed or sceptical" of these events and he accepts them as a matter of course. Because Kiki recounts this incredible story realistically and without questioning its veracity, as though it were not incredible at all, this episode in the novel is most clearly representative of ontological magic realism.

There is a more evident mythology surrounding the personality of Alejo Sancudo. He is fascinated with the supernatural and, as Kiki tells it, cultivates occultism from an

early age: "...he had begun to study Nostradamus ... along with theosophy, numerology, and occultism ... Alejo is not unique (See Lew Garew, *The Latin American Lycanthrocrats*), but ... there have been very few in his class this century" (28-29). Before long, Alejo brings his brand of occultism to the people of Tinieblas and finds that it is a good means to gain their respect:

And Alejo already had all his superpowers there in Remedios: the gleaming bronze eyes that sear men and spear women, the aura of sacred untouchability (even the richest planters called him only by his title), the utter fearlessness (born, perhaps, from the knowledge that Tinieblans do not load silver bullets), the hoarse, compelling voice, the pitiless frown in adversity, and, for brighter moments, the demonic grin. (29)

Lycanthropy is the mythical transformation of a person into a wolf, or in other words, werewolfery. Because all of these strange, powerful elements in Alejo's personality are not lost on the populace, legends begin to develop, including one that he is indeed a werewolf. Kiki alludes to this particular legend on several occasions, and though he never explicitly states that Alejo is a werewolf, the "facts" are presented in such a way as to leave little doubt. For example, Kiki tells the story about

a *campesino* [who] was attacked by what he said was a wolf though clearly it was some kind of cat --it chewed a cube steak out of him before he cut its left paw with his machete -- for there are no wolves in Tinieblas ... An expedition was mounted to track down the marauder, but Alejo, who was easily the best shot in Angostura, if not the entire province, had to decline a place in it, for he had cut his left hand seriously while sawing wood...

(27-28)

The reader is left to draw the parallel between Alejo's cut hand and the wolf's cut paw.

Later Kiki states that "by night, he [Alejo] schemed, hurling mute howls at each full moon

... There he sat in his absurd nightcap, wondering if the country was ever going to put on its red hood and set out for grandma's" (29).

It is anthropological magic realism that is inherent in these strange stories of Alejo Sancudo since Kiki explains them according to the myths and cultural background of Judeo-Christian society. To readers of like background, Kiki's explanation is at least culturally understandable, though the magical/supernatural elements lessen the story's level of verisimilitude.

There are numerous other instances in the novel where magic realism is apparent in both its anthropological and ontological forms. There is the anthropological episode where Kiki and Elena are visited by what Kiki believes to be the ghosts of his long dead mother and her long dead father (150). There is an ontological example where Kiki inexplicably develops a layer of bullet-proof skin that saves his life during a gun-running episode in the neighbouring country of Costaguana (247). Another occurrence of anthropological magic realism takes place when Kiki purchases a steel testicle noose from a witch, a noose which tightens each time he makes his wife Olga unhappy (252). Again, these are but a few of the many magic realist episodes that occur on almost every page of the novel.

Taking into account *The Prince's* numerous, varied, narrative techniques, it is apparent that the Latin America Koster portrays in his contingent fiction is a complex entity. Koster borrows from traditional narrative modes such as classic realism to construct *The Prince*, employing elements like illusionism to create a sense of historical reality in the text. This sense of an historical, palpable reality, however, is undermined by

the constant presence of fantasy in the novel; It is difficult to know if and where the line between fantasy and reality exists. Likewise, Koster twists and manipulates other traditional elements like closure and hierarchy of narrative levels; there is only one explicit diegetical level, and at the end of the narrative, there is no neat closing off of possibilities.

Both the postmodern elements and magic realist episodes in the novel work primarily to destabilize meaning. Fiction and history clash, satire undermines the credibility of the narrator -- and, by extension, his vision of Latin America -- and the pastiche of styles in the narrative further compromises Kiki's credibility. That anthropological and ontological magic realism operate visibly in this novel indicates just how difficult it is to come to a stable interpretation of this Latin American world: anthropological magic realism explains the world only in terms of obscure mythology; ontological magic realism does not try to explain it at all.

The unreliability of the narrator is ultimately the greatest source of interpretive difficulty for the reader of this novel. Latin American history becomes fiction as it is focalized through Kiki Sancudo; rather than clarifying history, Kiki skews it, distorts it, causes it to become indeterminate. He does all of this in spectacular fashion, spinning fabulous historical tales. In fact, it is largely because of Kiki's rich gifts as a storyteller that the reader regards with skepticism this portrayal of Latin American life and history. At best, this story is a slanted perspective on Tinieblas, subject to Kiki's prejudices, egotistical whims, and narrational legerdemain. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of Tinieblas in particular and Latin America in general, the reader needs

more than Kiki Sancudo's history; other narrative perspectives are necessary, and two more are provided in the other panels of Koster's fictional triptych.

I

In *The Dissertation*, the second volume of the Tinieblas trilogy, a new narrator, Camilo Fuertes, is introduced. Like Kiki Sancudo, Camilo is the son of a Tinieblan president, and his narrative, written in the form of a doctoral dissertation in History, is largely devoted to biography of his father. Also like Kiki, Camilo possesses a considerable ego and so devotes a sizable portion of his paper to discussing his own life. There are notable tracts where the dictatorship under which Camilo lives is described, the particulars of Camilo's personal relationships are examined, and Camilo's experiences in a distinct ontological realm, which he calls by a variety of names including "the next world" and the "Astral Plane" (297, 303), are related.

The title which Camilo gives to his dissertation is The Life and Times of León Fuertes Forty-Third President of the Republic of Tinieblas, and the main portion of the text serves as a grand exercise in justification for the peculiar behavior León demonstrates throughout his life. Though a goal in all textual recordings of history is to explain satisfactorily certain events to a readership, Camilo's history often seems to be an attempt to explain satisfactorily certain events in León's life to himself. As G.B. Crump writes, "... León is the center of his son's emotional universe, the object of filial love Camilo fears is unrequited. This filial love comes out in the dissertation's unabashed hero worship." ("Transformations" 247) As a result of his blind love, Camilo cannot depict his father as a hypocrite or a man of many faults, even though León's behavior would suggest as much. Camilo instead invents a León of various personalities: when León conducts affairs with women other than his wife, he simply acts as "León, lecher" (182); when León is called to

the bar and engages in corruption on an epic scale, he merely acts out the role of “León, lawyer” (167). Camilo states that

... he [León] had no personality, was by nature protean and undefined, felt himself liable to slip from avatar to avatar without control, and hence invented characters (attending to the details of each one so that they would not merge) and played them out, taking what care he could not to get publics and supporting casts mixed up, nor to be caught uncostumed in the dressing room.

(91)

Camilo's León is not a typical man, with normal human failings, but a great actor, capable of playing several distinct characters; he is not therefore bound by a personal code of ethics, but by a Stanislavskian fidelity to each of his multiple roles.

Camilo discusses the main events in León's life in chronological order. He begins with the stories of four generations of Fuertes women named Rosalba, Raquel, Rosenda, and Rebeca. The first three of these women seek out Tinieblan presidents to father their children in the hope that those children might one day also become President of the Republic (3, 5). None of them is successful in this regard, but the last woman, Rebeca “without the help of any president, military or civilian, constitutional or no, gave birth to not one but two presidents, León and José Fuertes” (7). Camilo concentrates on Rebeca's story, telling how she leaves Tinieblas in disrepute, and spends the next fifteen years living at various locales throughout the world. In this time, Rebeca works as a ballet dancer in Europe, inexplicably metamorphosizes from woman to man, and travels to the Orient to work as a journalist (21-26). As inexplicably as before, Rebeca changes back into a woman and works in a Chinese brothel till she is impregnated and bears León's brother José (28). Rebeca decides to return home to Tinieblas at that point to “find a man to buy

that house for her” (28), and the man turns out to be León’s father, a rich landowner on the Tinieblan island of Mituco named Dr. Azael Burlando (29).

Burlando dies the moment León and his twin sister are born, and Rebeca is apprehended by the Mitucan populace on suspicion of witchcraft. She is convicted at trial, but miraculously escapes the island, with her son in her arms, while awaiting sentencing. Camilo claims the escape is engineered by spirits from the Astral Plane to ensure that León will live to one day claim the presidency of Tinieblas (49-50). León grows up in Ciudad Tinieblas, the capital, and as a child displays wiles and savvy beyond his years. He supports his family by thievery and selling black market cigarettes, and by the age of fourteen is “a street beast whose horizon reached no farther than the gutter, a night-prowling, tart-doweling petty-hustler, addicted to tobacco and afflicted with the clap ...” (67) León is saved from a life of street-crime then by a Dr. Escolástico Grillo who, seeing phrenological signs of intellectual promise in the young man, adopts him from Rebeca and gives him a formal education.

León proves to be an exceptional pupil with a photographic memory. He masters languages, mathematics, philosophy, and literature in short order. He also applies his talents to music, becoming a singer of such stature that “had León continued to train seriously, he would have been the tenor of his age” (80). When León tries his hand at sport, he leads the Tinieblan national baseball team to glorious triumph over an American squad composed of several major league players (84-90). Even at love, León seems to have the greatest of success, falling for an operetta troupe actress who appears to be his perfect match: “From their first moment in each other’s arms Rosario and León felt they’d

been joined before, felt that they were, in fact, the severed halves of one sole life, separate for years, now reunited” (101-102). However, the couple’s intimations turn out to be horribly prophetic as León discovers Rosario is his long-lost sister, left behind when Rebeca fled Mituco with León (103-104). Stricken with grief, Rosario commits suicide and León tries to do the same. His attempts are unsuccessful and “León realized that he was not destined to know the felicity of suicide” (104). He leaves Tinieblas instead on a self-imposed exile.

León’s first destination is New York, where his grief becomes so intense that he loses all sense of self-esteem. León becomes a beggar, catamite, and morphine addict. When the second World War breaks out, León receives visitations from “his three military ancestors”, Generals and Presidents Mojón, Bodega, and Luna (122). These visitors from the Astral Plane implore León to fight to reclaim his sense of self-worth and León resolves to do just that: “He [León] viewed the war not as a struggle between good and evil but as a personal opportunity, and since it seemed the Axis had it all but won, there was a better chance for death or glory with the Allies” (123). León therefore leaves New York, lands in Marseilles, crosses the Sahara desert *on foot* and joins the Army of Free France. Fighting in Africa and then in Europe, León’s moment of glory comes at the battle of Monte Cassino, where he takes charge of a company of men and captures a crest from the Germans (147). Shortly thereafter, León comes to the realization that “his whole life had been a constant self-indulgence” (154). This knowledge does not completely change his self-indulgent manner, but he vows to bear his selfishness “consciously” (154).

Revivified by his new sense of personal identity, León returns to Tinieblas to begin his law career and to start a family. As in so many ventures that León undertakes in his life, he is phenomenally successful as a lawyer: "This may be exaggeration, but one cannot disregard a remark by that feared advocate Dr. Innocencio Listín, who after nine hours of behind-the-doors argument over Aquilino Piojo's divorce declared that he would rather be cystoscoped than bargain with León Fuertes" (166). Before long, there are calls throughout the land for the sporting legend/war hero/ lawyer extraordinary León Fuertes to run for President of Tinieblas. But León is reluctant to don the mantle of power. Such reticence is remarkable amongst Tinieblans, for as Camilo writes, "your Tinieblan takes to politics as alligators do to fragrant swamps, and will, at the least chance, plunge in and wallow for as long as possible" (192).

León is simply content to act out the roles he has developed over the course of his life, and does not want the bother of adding "León, President of Tinieblas" to his repertoire. Moreover, he is worried that power could be as addictive to him as morphine or "his taste for killing" cultivated during the war (193). His admirers, however, are persistent; León finally accepts the nomination, and wins the election. Though León states repeatedly that he can do little to better conditions in Tinieblas, the populace expects miracles from him and is disappointed when these miracles do not occur. He is seen as ineffective in foreign affairs when he fails to convince President Kennedy to renegotiate immediately the Day-Cornudo treaty (229-234), and when León's attempts to institute land reform are less than satisfactory, his domestic policy is considered a failure (235-238). By the time León dies by assassination, his political career is a shambles.

Oddly for a prominent politician, it is not León's politics, but his acting the role of "León, lecher" that does him in. He is observed in the embrace of his best friend's daughter by her brother. The young man is enraged by what he sees: "In the space of seconds, without benefit of conscious thought, all his beliefs concerning León Fuertes were revised, all his attitudes reversed ... León Fuertes was a traitor to his country and the human species; he had to be destroyed" (263). The young man purchases a large quantity of plastic explosive from an arms dealer, waits in the passenger seat of León's car, and blows up both himself and León shortly after the President arrives (266).

All of this information about León is found in the text of Camilo's dissertation, but the notes are also important for the information they yield about Camilo himself. Though the notes serve to elucidate certain passages in the text, they also betray several of Camilo's weaknesses and obsessions: the reader discovers that Camilo's marriage is a mess, that he has been committed to a mental institution in the past, and that he has "visitations" from Astral Plane spirits.

It appears in these notes that Camilo might indeed be mad, but having been committed to a psychiatric institution in the past, Camilo is sensitive to the issue of sanity. At every opportunity, he tries to explain and justify his bizarre behavior and beliefs. As early as the fourth note, Camilo attempts to legitimize his communications with spirits by referring to those communications as "research procedure" (273). He writes of spiritual communication with the authoritative voice of the historian -- which is the precise scholarly profession Camilo believes himself to be contributing to in his dissertation:

True science refuses to dismiss those phenomena it cannot yet explain, but with the rise of scientism this perfectly natural form of communication [i.e. communication with the

spirits of the dead] has been cruelly discredited, so that serious thinkers have, for the most part, neglected it, abandoning the field to charlatans Now, the truth is that the "dead" --and in these notes I put the word in quote marks to cleanse it of taints of finality -- can talk to us and we to them, though as with everything else, some people are better at it than others. I have a gift for such communication. (273)

However, when Camilo explains later in the same note how he cultivates his "gift for such communication", it becomes apparent that science *can* explain a good many of his visitations. Camilo simply uses the technique used in the past by numerous religious prophets and tribal shamans -- he attains vision, or a state of delirium, through physical deprivation: "I abstain for at least one week from sexual activity. I fast for at least twelve hours. At dusk I isolate myself, assume an attitude of poised repose (the lotus position, for example), and come to complete immobility. As my heartbeat and respiration slow, I concentrate on the spirit I wish to interview" (275). Such admissions cast dubious light on Camilo's assertions that he has special powers of communication, and therefore throw the historical validity of much of Camilo's paper into doubt.

The notes in which Camilo discusses his marriage and the difficulties caused by his wife's lover, an American novelist named Sigmund Heilanstalt, are also ostensibly included for research purposes. Camilo claims his dissertation "is not one of Siggy's novels, all sloshed with overflowing ordure from the author's private life. I mention difficulties merely to document my scholarly dedication" (280). The fact of the matter is that the notes are indeed "sloshed with overflowing ordure". Even giving short, simple notes of personal problems or family concerns is well outside the bounds of scholarly research, yet Camilo goes far beyond even this level; he produces a running commentary

and emotionally charged analysis of every aspect of his personal life. To give an example, at one point in the notes Camilo recounts an argument with his wife Elizabeth: "...I was clutching Liz's throat and howling: "I AM A SCHOLAR, YOU IGNORANT GRINGA BITCH! MY WORK IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEN AND MONKEYS! YOU WILL LEARN TO RESPECT IT OR DIE!" (277) Such writing is fine melodrama, but falls short of the objectivity valued in historical texts.

Camilo's purpose in including personal information is not to outline difficulties encountered in the writing of the dissertation, but instead seems to be a more shameless effort to boost his own image in the eyes of his examiners. This becomes apparent near the end of the paper when Camilo writes of Elizabeth's arrest by government authorities (398-400). Camilo begins his account of the arrest in note 82, recalling that he first learns of it when Sig Heilanstalt arrives at his door to explain that the Guardia have taken Elizabeth away. Despite the fact that he has discovered Liz and Sig's affair, despite the fact that he is separated from Liz as a result of the affair, and despite the fact that he owes Liz absolutely nothing, Camilo, like the proverbial knight in shining armour, goes down to Guardia headquarters and arranges to swap custody of himself for the freedom of his wife (402-406). He is subsequently subjected to intense, painful torture at the hands of the Guardia before being released (410-414;420). Camilo's intent then is to show not only that he is a fastidious researcher, exploring the next world in order to find new, historical evidence, but that he is also a selfless human being, willing to sacrifice his physical well-being, not to mention a certain amount of pride, to protect and keep the woman he loves.

The major themes that dominate *The Prince*, revenge and power, are also manifest in *The Dissertation*. Camilo Fuertes' Tinieblas, like Kiki Sancudo's, is filled with people greedy for power and obsessed with revenge -- and of all living Tinieblans, León Fuertes is the most skilled at getting both. Indeed, he does not even need to seek power, for it is an innate gift that he masterfully exerts in a variety of ways: León uses his sexual power to dominate both women and men; he wields intellectual power of such strength that in negotiations he gains great advantage over formidable foes such as John Kennedy; he uses physical power to crush opponents in both sport and war. Likewise, when León looks for revenge, he always gets it: a thug, who robs the nine-year-old León, has a scorpion placed in his shoe (64-65); an American baseball player, who slides into León with his spikes high, is later knocked out cold by León's intentionally hard throw to home plate (88-89); as a lawyer, León never yields a point in court "without getting three in return" (166). Within the bounds of this novel, nobody approaches León's ability to exercise power over others or his skill in the art of revenge.

In his own small way, Camilo demonstrates that he too holds a certain power over others and that he has also known the satisfaction that revenge can bring. Though he is cheated on by Elizabeth, Camilo gets the pleasure of insulting her lover:

... as we entered the plaza, Sig began attempting to apologize for having horned me.

"Some women fuck dogs," I interrupted. "Others, they say, fuck donkeys. *The Arabian Nights*, with which, as you know, my wife is familiar, has several stories about women who fuck apes or chimpanzees. Kinsey and Pomeroy devote a portion of their report on *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* to what they call 'animal contacts.' I find the subject tiresome."

"Camilo ..."

"Please shut up"

I herewith acknowledge a debt of gratitude to Mr. Sigmund Heilanstalt for providing me sufficient fresh rage to dispel my fearful imaginings temporarily. Thank you, Sig. You may now exit this dissertation and my life.

(401-02)

Because Camilo chooses to document this humiliation of Sig Heilanstalt, it is apparent that revenge, and making certain that others know revenge has taken place, is important to him. Likewise, Camilo's successful efforts to release Elizabeth from jail also demonstrate to the readers that Camilo has a certain power within Tinieblas, an ability to "make things happen." That Camilo has to endure torture at the hands of the Guardia demonstrates that his power is modest. Nevertheless, his own release from jail occurs because foreign authorities, such as American congressmen and the President of Costaguana, deem that Camilo is a man of enough importance that efforts should be made on his behalf (407, 420). Camilo, like his father, and like other Tinieblans including Kiki and Alejo Sancudo, is a man of pride and vengeance; in true Tinieblan style, he does not hesitate to explain these traits within the pages of his doctoral dissertation.

II

Because *The Dissertation* is written in the form of a doctoral dissertation, its narrative structure is essentially different from that of *The Prince*. While *The Prince* is a first-person stream of consciousness narrative, *The Dissertation* alternates between the third-person Text and the mostly first-person Notes. Thus, Camilo Fuertes' scholarly effort takes place on two narrative levels, rather than on the one level Kiki Sancudo presents. As Koster himself points out, the two-tiered narrative "allowed [for] ... the

method of counterpoint: one story in the Text and one in the Notes” (Preface to *Diss.* 2). Though the stories in the Notes and Text do not always remain discrete, the Text is almost entirely devoted to León Fuertes’ biography, and the Notes present the activities and difficulties in Camilo Fuertes’ life.

The other prominent writer in Koster’s fiction, Desmond Carmichael, is driven almost to the point of criminal insanity by a case of writer’s block. One night, he spends many sleepless hours in his study trying “to conjure a book out of rational thought, the most pointless of all possible exercises” (199). Whether this is a pointless activity or not, Camilo Fuertes also attempts an exercise in rational thought by putting together his historical study of Tinieblas during the León Fuertes years. Camilo states in his Foreword that “Tinieblans know their country through the lies of demagogues, or through the half truths of lazy poseurs. There is, then, a clear need for authoritative investigations by qualified scholars into aspects of Tinieblan history and culture. This dissertation is such a work” (xviii). An expectation, therefore, of Camilo’s history is that it functions as a “locus through which the representations of the past circulated by the institutions comprising the public historical sphere [or, as Camilo puts it, the “demagogues” and “lazy poseurs” through whom Tinieblans have learned of the past] are brought into contact with the historical record in order to be either corrected by it or allowed to change with it” (Bennett 50). As Tony Bennett writes, any credible history must indeed be an exercise in rational thought and work according to “a specific set of rules and precepts governing the discursive moves which may be made in relation to the [historical] record” (50); adherence to rules ensures that those discursive moves are not arbitrary, but instead meet “certain

conditions” (50). Camilo’s history, to be acceptable to his readers, must be harnessed by rational system in a way that Kiki’s free mind-play cannot.

But Camilo’s history does not approach the level of scholarly credibility found in the histories that Bennett refers to. Koster himself admits that Camilo’s work is not serious scholarship by any means: “I resolved to do a dissertation and a novel at once, and (in passing) a send-up of Ph.D.’s and their foolishness” (Preface 2). Though Koster’s narrator is earnest about his work, he flouts the rules and precepts Bennett feels are so important to the discipline of History. On the authorial level, an argument can be made that subversion of historical regulation is committed out of Koster’s postmodern distrust of scholarly authority.

On the narratorial level, Camilo’s subversiveness cannot be explained as a postmodern exercise. Rather, Camilo commits scholarly sins out of pride in *his own* authority and a belief that communication with the dead is a legitimate means to collect historical data. One could also argue that Camilo himself suffers at times from that laziness he detests in “poseurs”. At one point, Camilo despairs that “conventional techniques of scholarly investigation simply will not work [in Tinieblas]” because of the government’s tyrannical control over people and information (274). At another point, when quoting Ortega y Gasset, Camilo writes “don’t expect me, pig-headed examiners, to interrupt the crafting of this Foreword to track down and snare page references for you” (xviii-xix). At any rate, Camilo is aware that “Dissertations must be documented” (Preface 2); he simply has his own theories about how that documentation should be selected and combined.

That Camilo is a blatantly unreliable historical narrator, recording something other than the results of sober research, becomes plain from the beginning of *The Dissertation*. The title page, for example, is written in a traditional form with the names of the university, the doctoral candidate, and the referees listed; upon closer examination, the university name, Sunburst, seems unfamiliar, and the names of both referees, Constance S. Lilywhite and Dustin Grimes, seem peculiar. These are the first clues that the reader will be entering fictive territory: Sunburst University does not exist, and the two professors' names, signifying purity and filth respectively, simply continue the prominent wordplay found in *The Prince*. Despite these playful clues, there is also evidence on this same page that *The Dissertation* will demonstrate a degree of faithfulness to the fictional history developed in *The Prince*. It is stated in the title that León Fuertes is the forty-third president of Tinieblas, and this corroborates Fuertes' place on the list of presidents given in *The Prince*. From the beginning then, it becomes clear that Camilo's dissertation exists as, and can be evaluated as, a history of a fiction; insofar as this text is faithful to any particular world, there is a higher degree of fidelity to Kiki Sancudo's Tinieblas than to the extra-textual real world.

That being said, Camilo begins displaying his unreliability as a narrator of *any* history in the Foreword to the dissertation. Rather than making an attempt to assure his examiners and readers of his even-handed approach and treatment of his subject, Camilo instead dramatically proves Lawrence Lerner's argument that "... the ideology and the verbal strategies of the historian will determine what he chooses to notice and how he describes it ..." (334). He admits to being obsessed with Tinieblan history and his father's

place within that history: “I care about my subject passionately. Much is made, nowadays, of the value of scholarly objectivity, as though the less one cared about his subject, the better he would treat it” (xviii). He makes several contemptuous comments aimed at his examiners, and attacks the “strident ignorance one finds in academe” (xvii). Camilo also exhibits his considerable ego by stating “It is not often that an act of historical inquiry is also one of filial piety and civic duty; or that the grist of scholarship is also that of national epic and universal cosmology; or that the material of a Ph.D. thesis is the stuff of pity and terror” (xviii). The most obvious example in the Foreword of Camilo’s unreliability is his comments on the footnotes to the dissertation:

The Notes document the Text, but because of the original research techniques I have developed and perfected (see note 4), also provide extensive information about the next world, our life after so-called “death”. No writer since Dante Alighieri has addressed this subject in comparable depth. My treatment is less panoramic than Dante’s, but a good deal more accurate. (xviii)

Besides serving as another example of Camilo’s egotism, this excerpt also reveals his peculiar belief in the next world and his eagerness to use spiritual visitations as a “research technique”. Before the first page of the dissertation is presented to the reader, there is considerable reason for that reader to question the ability of the narrator to present anything other than pure whimsy.

At one point in *Carmichael’s Dog*, the narrator states a theory that the best writers use the personal pain they feel in a constructive way, changing their anguish into artistic fantasy: “Converting pain into fantasy ... involves transmuting it into something higher, now and then into the highest reality, beauty/ truth. The quantum of pain in the world is

thereby reduced” (60). In Camilo Fuertes’ case, his attempts to convert pain into fantasy are at most times brilliantly successful; indeed, working on his paper is one of the few means, if not the only means, Camilo has to lessen some of the pain in his personal life -- his “obsession” and “passion” for the work are therefore understandable. However, just as Carmichael encounters opposition from his academic colleagues for letting fantasy influence his science (73-74), Camilo will undoubtedly face rejection of his dissertation for allowing fantastical poesis to affect his historical mimesis.

G.B. Crump believes Camilo’s credibility as a narrator is undermined from the moment in the Foreword where he admits the dissertation is an obsession (“Transformations” 245). From that point on, “Camilo offers an extreme example of how unconscious needs and conscious preoccupations structure man’s perceptions of facts, sometimes to the point of ignoring facts altogether” (246). One need that alters Camilo’s perception of facts, according to Crump, is his longing for “a sympathetic father figure” (246). León simply does not fulfill that need for Camilo, what with his frequent absence from the family and his constant womanizing. To “reconcile the father he hopes loves him with the amoral philanderer who betrayed familial love”, Camilo re-invents León as the multi-personalities actor discussed earlier in this chapter. It is impossible to tell whether or not Camilo has the most legitimate perspective of León Fuertes, but Crump states with good logic that Camilo’s analysis is “apparently meant to absolve León for his infidelity” (247).

It is also strikingly apparent that Camilo’s needs affect his perception of the facts in his marriage. Dramatic irony is created early on in the narrative when the reader learns

from the notes of Elizabeth's infidelity. Camilo, the very source of all information concerning the marriage, does not seem to realize fully what she does. He writes of one instance where Liz jumps out of Sig Heilanstalt's sportscar and greets Camilo with a flushed face, sparkling eyes, and messy hair (325-26). Even when Camilo notices that Liz's "flesh was warm, and ... her body quite prepared for love", he does not appear to be suspicious. Rather, he remarks lamely that she is disheveled from "running up the stairs, I suppose" (325). It is not until a considerable time later in the narrative, after a vivid image of the sinning couple is ostensibly planted in his mind by an Astral Plane spirit, that Camilo admits knowledge of Liz's affair with Sig (350-52).

Interestingly, Camilo states that he knew all along about the affair (350). There is some evidence to support this assertion: from the very first note in the book, Camilo refers to Sig in derisive terms only. Camilo never provides specific reasons why he despises Sig, giving rise to the possibility that jealousy is the cause. Likewise, Camilo devotes considerable time describing Liz's strong sex drive, her wanton behavior throughout the years, and how she betrayed Camilo in the past by having him institutionalized (275-79, 302). By dwelling on the negative aspects of these two people, Camilo displays a simmering bitterness towards them.

Camilo is not blind to the affair; he simply chooses not to acknowledge that it is happening. Eventually, Sig and Liz are so blatant about their relationship that Camilo has no choice but to admit that something illicit is taking place. His behavior is reminiscent of Kiki Sancudo's when he finds out that his wife Olga has been having liaisons with other men. Upon receipt of a piece of jewelry from a motel clerk, Kiki wonders

... whose ring is this anyway? I opened my fist to find a Florentine silver band chased with sprawled cupids, quite similar to the ring I'd bought Olga six years before in Italy ... Thieving wops mass-produce a ring, then sell it off as an antique for thirty thousand lire! I ... peered inside at a minutely carved inscription: "O/Q Siempre Insieme." Now that was odd. I'd had the jeweler scrape that same inscription in the ring I'd bought Olga ... (*Prince* 264)

Kiki goes on to deliver a marvelously imaginative story about life's little coincidences, but he eventually concludes "All the same, and though I prefer miracles to logic, I stood up and clasped the ring in my fist and went out into the bedroom" (265).

Just like Kiki, Camilo proves throughout *The Dissertation* that he prefers miracles to logic, but also like Kiki, Camilo eventually has to face the reality that his wife sleeps with other men. Having to face that reality is the last thing Camilo wants to do, and it brings out the worst rage in his soul:

I have known from the first. I have been called insane, but never stupid. In my own home, on the first night they met, within instants after headache drove me to my bedroom, they were at it like a pair of goats or monkeys ... Liz with her rump raised; Sig slavering onto her nape ... There was no point in saying anything. When one is married to a demented nymphomaniac, when one has given one's good name to a she-otter, when one has pledged oneself in God's sight to a scumbag, one keeps one's mouth shut.

(351)

Because he chooses at first not to acknowledge the reality of the affair, because he claims that spirits force him to confront that affair, and because his response to the affair is so passionate, Camilo proves himself to be emotionally unstable, perhaps insane, at the time he writes his dissertation; this fact, coupled with the egomania and passion Camilo

displays in the Foreword, further confirms that he is often an unreliable witness to both the history of Tinieblas, and the world that surrounds him.

Desmond Carmichael is described as a man impartial towards phenomena and theories for which science has no explanation. Rather than showing complete faith in scientism,

he viewed science as useful in dealing with certain aspects of reality but not to be puffed up into a religion ... Whenever science-worshippers, lay or ordained, took to fulminating bulls and proclaiming dogma, anathematizing heresies and execrating heathenish creeds, his middle finger achieved instant erection, and his lips emitted a flatulent buzz. He was tolerant of whatever the faithful shunned or couldn't account for, including creationism, the heritability of acquired traits, clairvoyance, faith healing, and astrology.

(138)

To dismiss Camilo's dissertation as being wholly the rantings and delusions of a madman, or even to regard it solely as an ironical tale, is to judge the work prematurely. It is better to take Carmichael's approach and look more closely at what the unconventional narrator of *The Dissertation* is saying. In many areas this bizarre set of text and notes closely resembles the fictional history of Tinieblas as constructed by Kiki Sancudo in *The Prince*: both narratives address similar historical events such as Julio Canino's sacrifice of Tinieblan virgins to sharks or León Fuertes' meetings with John F. Kennedy in San José, Costa Rica; each story comments at length on the overbearing presence of the military in Tinieblas; Camilo and Kiki draw similar conclusions about characters such as the famous adulteress Irene Hormiga, the astrology-obsessed Alejo Sancudo, and the distinguished statesman León Fuertes; even their comments about the national obsession with the presidency of Tinieblas are similar. Both Kiki and Camilo are unreliable narrators.

However, the resemblance of so many elements of their respective narratives suggests that there exists a more stable, underlying fictional history of Tinieblas.

That the narratives are written in complete isolation lends further credence to this notion of a more stable, underlying Tinieblan history. Camilo cannot gain access to Kiki's history because, as has been discussed in the previous chapter, that history is trapped within the bounds of Kiki's mind; Kiki, at the time Camilo writes his dissertation, has no physical means to convey his story to other Tinieblans. Kiki's narrative is also isolated from Camilo's by time; his thoughts take place on a specific day years before Camilo researches his own history, so Kiki cannot use Camilo's work as a resource. It is true that Kiki and Camilo both belong to the same privileged class of ruling families, but they are from rival families and therefore do not closely interact with one another; at no point in either narrative is there any suggestion that Kiki and Camilo discuss or debate Tinieblan historical matters. It is remarkable that two similar narratives emerge from two different, isolated, and seemingly unstable sources. On the authorial level, what Koster accomplishes is a sense of fictional illusionism; he constructs a second narrative, *The Dissertation*, that has characters and a setting which bear verisimilitude to the characters and setting in the first narrative, *The Prince*.

Not only is the fictional world developed in *The Dissertation* comparable to the fictional world of *The Prince*, but the narrative strategies used in both novels are similar as well. Continued, for instance, is the historical illusionism that is so prominent in *The Prince*. There is constant reference to real historical places, people and events in order to create an atmosphere of extra-textual reality within the pages of the novel: Certain

episodes take place in America, China, Italy, and Costa Rica; John F. Kennedy reappears in this novel, and other historical figures such as Sigmund Freud and William Shakespeare also play roles in Tinieblan history; León Fuertes takes part in important historical events including World War II and the 1962 San José conference of Central American Presidents. Tinieblas, then, functions as a natural part of the real world -- Tinieblan characters affect the real world and its history, just as real historical figures, places, and events impact upon fictional Tinieblans and their fictional history.

One particularly notable historical event linked with the world of Tinieblas is the American Watergate scandal. Camilo specifically addresses the infamous Nixon tapes and the mysteriously erased “eighteen minutes of signal from ... a conversation held on 20th June, 1972, in the office of the Honorable Richard M. Nixon, President of the United States” (378). He cites Alexander Haig’s assertion that “some sinister force” was responsible for the editing and claims that the sinister force was actually the Astral Plane Spirit of Joseph Stalin (380-82). According to Camilo, who learns of this matter from the spirit of General Epifanio Mojón, Nixon had been negotiating his own fate in the next world with the spirit of Stalin during those eighteen minutes. Stalin was worried that the publication of the tapes would hurt “the cult of his personality, already gravely damaged since his ‘death’” (381). In order to salvage his reputation,

... the only action the Chairman [Stalin] felt he could take was to destroy the evidence of his visit to the White House ... The “sinister force,” then, to which General Haig referred was a beam of thought waves from the Chairman of the Committee for the Dissemination of Terror and Despair, which demagnetized that portion of the tape whereon his chat with Richard Nixon was recorded.

(382)

As far as the individuals and dates are concerned, Camilo's facts on the tapes scandal correspond for the most part with facts presented in other more closely mimetic textual histories¹³. The illusionism in Camilo's work begins to fall apart the moment he invokes spirits from another realm. However, his story succeeds in one area where other histories have failed: if one accepts Camilo's premise of an Astral Plane, his narrative brings a form of order and resolution to the Watergate affair.

The unique form of this fictional narrative, a dissertation in History with text and notes, both contributes to and compromises illusionism. Unlike the reader of *The Prince*, the reader of *The Dissertation* does not have immediate access to the narrator's conscious thoughts. There is instead a barrier of "noise" (Brooke-Rose 86), in the form of the text and notes, between the reader and Camilo's thought processes. Therefore, there is not the same high level of mental illusionism in the second Tinieblas novel as there is in the first.

That being said, the very presence of the notes and text form in *The Dissertation* demonstrates that some historical illusionism takes place in the narrative. Certainly, we have already seen that the text and notes are crafted by an often whimsical narrator, but we have also already seen that in certain instances, the text and notes closely reflect other scholarly interpretations of the "real" historical record. When Camilo's interpretation of the Tinieblan fictional history is considered, it too corresponds in many instances to Kiki Sancudo's interpretation. Illusionism, then, is present throughout *The Dissertation*, though as in *The Prince*, it is often distorted by the narrator's subjectivity.

At one point in his notes, Camilo recalls a game of tennis he played with Sig: "It made me forget for a solid hour that I am not in this world to live, but rather to make

sense out of the lives of others” (294). This casual remark explains part of the motivation behind Camilo’s writing, and it also shows that his aim is to come to a state of closure. His goal “to make sense out of the lives of others” is in effect an attempt to reduce “meanings to a single and complete sense that excludes the claims of other interpretations” (Baldick 38). By the end of the narrative, Camilo succeeds in bringing about this closure. León’s life is chronicled from birth to death, and the mystery behind the assassination is solved. At the same time that Camilo brings closure in the text to the life of León Fuertes, he resolves satisfactorily in the notes a turbulent episode in his own marriage to Elizabeth.

Granting that Camilo makes some kind of sense out of the chaos surrounding both León’s life and his own, the *means* by which he comes to closure, and the nature of that closure, are dubious. Camilo betrays the validity of his research early on in the narrative when he mentions his “demonic drive to *fabricate* the past” [Italics mine] (6). The Latinate root of fabricate, *fabricare*, means to make or construct, and in that sense, there is nothing unscholarly in fabricating the past; to *construct* a history is of course essential to the historian’s work. In contemporary usage, however, to fabricate can also mean to lie. The double meaning of this word appropriately sums up Camilo’s writing: in constructing a new, definitive Tinieblan history, Camilo often resorts to fantastical fabrication to pull together historical elements that otherwise do not connect; the results of his research are completely credible only to those who share his fantasies.

Despite this fantasy that weaves in and out of Camilo’s narrative, there is also the appearance of a distinct hierarchy of discourses, a two-tiered hierarchy which Belsey claims “establishes the truth of a story” (70). The text serves as the history (or *histoire*)

level because it narrates the story events from a privileged perspective: “History narrates events apparently without the intervention of a speaker. In history, there is no mention of ‘you’ or ‘I’; the events seem to narrate themselves” (71). The notes, on the other hand, operate on the discourse (or *discours*) level because there is “a speaker and a hearer” (71); first and second person dialogue between characters occurs at this level. While it is true that the notes in *The Dissertation* work as *discours*, there is constant intrusion of *discours* into the level of *histoire*. Time after time, Camilo inserts his own subjective commentary into the *histoire*, polluting the “truth” Belsey believes can be portrayed at the level of *histoire*.

An example of this occurs subtly in the first sentence of the novel: “General Isidro Bodega (1780-1848, President and Dictator of Tinieblas 1830-1848) was the first and longest-lived of our uniformed gorillocrats” (3). The tone of this sentence is subjective with the deprecatory term “Dictator” used as well as Camilo’s own neologism “gorillocrat”. Though there is no mention of “I” in this sentence, a strong subjective presence is felt; the author’s hand is evident, and this sentence does not seem to “narrate itself”. Not much further along in the text, a much stronger intrusion occurs. Writing of León’s great grandmother Raquel Fuertes and her first love affair, Camilo states: “If she had waited another month, we would have got the stolid bourgeois genes of Alicibiades Oruga ... not General Mojón’s. But then my father, León Fuertes, might have lacked some of his greatness and I my demonic drive to fabricate the past. Well done, Doña Raquel! You waited just long enough” (6). Here appears the “I” of *discours*, not to mention the congratulatory, value-laden comment directed towards Raquel Fuertes.

One could argue that Camilo gives his own family history in the text, and since he is a part of that family and its history, his use of the first-person “I” belongs in the *histoire*. This use of the first person when Camilo discusses León’s role as a father is legitimate since Camilo himself is both a part of, and the main source of information concerning, the family. However, he transgresses the bounds of *histoire* by using the “I” and other subjective language to discuss other events in the Fuertes history where he was not directly involved.

It has already been stated in the first chapter that critics including Belsey consider illusionism, narrative which leads to closure, and a hierarchy of discourses as the three pillars of classic realist literature. As we have seen in this chapter, these three elements are present within the pages of *The Dissertation*. What all three have in common, however, is that they are undermined in some fashion or another in this novel. Illusionism is compromised by the reader’s indirect and therefore poor access into the narrator’s thinking process; it is further subverted by the blatant subjectivity and unreliability of the narrator. Closure comes as a result of Camilo’s fabrications, so it too is problematic. The hierarchy of discourses is so often disturbed, that at times it is impossible to differentiate the *histoire* from the *discours*. Clearly, Koster succeeds in doing a “send-up of Ph. D.s and their foolishness”(Preface ii), and also in making sport of the three constituent elements of classic realist literature.

This comedic violation of the canons of realism is one of many subversive, postmodern elements in the novel. Like *The Prince*, *The Dissertation* is marked by other postmodern fictional elements such as ironical, satirical nameplay and pastiche. Unlike *The*

Prince, Camilo's text and notes include and describe a new ontological level, Camilo's "other world." All of these fictional narrative techniques combine to destabilize *The Dissertation* and playfully pull the reader away from narrative coherence or unity into a more uncertain state.

If the preponderance of nameplay in *The Dissertation* is any true indication, Koster indeed takes a certain postmodern "delight in the artifice of writing rather than in using writing to describe or make contact with a perceived extra-fictional reality" (Hawthorn 156). Many of the satirically named characters from *The Prince* are, of course, also present within the pages of *The Dissertation*, and a few names are added. There are the American soldiers, Victor Steel and Dan Hardcock, for example. Both of these men bear names that signify aggressiveness, power, and male virility; they are by no means rounded characters possessing complex human characteristics and emotions, but instead are simple symbols of American imperialism in the Latin American region.

Steel's symbolism is especially striking. He is called upon to throw out the first ball at the aforementioned baseball game between the Tinieblas national squad and the American base team. This tribute is his because he "had recently received the Congressional Medal of Honor in regard for the number of Nicaraguan insurgents he had killed" (87). Thus, not only does this soldier's first name suggest martial triumph and his last name suggest the basic material for instruments of war, but his honoured presence at the game is a threatening display to all Tinieblans; after all, to them, Steel is a living representative of the often ruthless American imperialistic presence in Latin America.

Hardcock too is an awesome foreign presence to the Tinieblans, and León Fuertes' battle against him on the baseball diamond certainly has allegorical significance. For this small struggle of Latin versus American in sport is analogous to the struggle of Latin versus American on a national scale. In fact, when León wins the game for Tinieblas by knocking out Hardcock with a lightning throw to home plate, the populace celebrates as if the entire American military had been crushed by the Tinieblan Guardia. "That night, at a reception at the Presidential Palace, León Fuertes received the Order of Palmiro Inchado in the degree of Grand Cross and several ladlefuls of presidential praise" (90). The American presence in Tinieblas, in reality, is overwhelming, but the locals attain a sort of moral victory when León renders Hardcock "limp" (89).

Just as traits of American imperialism are implicit in the names of servicemen Steel and Hardcock, the opportunistic nature of European imperialism is implicit in the name Jean-Luc Bout de Souffle. "Bout de Souffle" is French for "out of breath." From the brief description Camilo gives of him, this particular character so busily robs Tinieblas that he can barely catch his breath: "Among the several Europeans [who] advanced all out of proportion to their merit was a French adventurer, Jean-Luc Bout de Souffle, who stole enough during three years as Minister of Culture to finance his repatriation, his retirement, and his reminiscences" (3). There is a very close historical precedent¹⁴ for Bout de Souffle, namely Philippe Bunau-Varilla, the famous cosignatory of the Hay-Bunau-Varilla treaty that ceded control over the Panama Canal zone to the United States. Koster and Sánchez, in *In the Time of the Tyrants*, describe Bunau-Varilla similarly to Camilo's description of Bout de Souffle: "Philippe Bunau-Varilla [was] one of the great hero-rogues of the

imperialist era, the equal of the almost mythical Cecil Rhodes and Conrad's all-too-lifelike Mr. Kurtz" (383). Noting Bunau-Varilla's work on the Panama Canal, Koster and Sánchez write

The contract he got [from the French Government] was revolutionary ... Its terms were so generous that the Compagnie Universelle's general secretary resigned in protest when he heard them. In two years of activity, for slightly more than one-fifth of the work allotted it, Bunau-Varilla's firm collected more than 32.5 million francs and turned a profit of almost 11.5 million -- 6.6 and 2.3 million dollars respectively ... (385)

After selling sovereignty of the Canal Zone to the United States, Bunau-Varilla, like his fictional counterpart Bout de Souffle, returned to Europe to write his autobiography and to live "in wealth and honor" (*ITT* 384, 395).

Further examples of nameplay include naming of the men in the powerful, ruling-class Manduco family after Mongol warrior-leaders; one of the men is called Genghis Manduco and another is Kublai Manduco (330-31). Two fictional American universities, one in New York and the other in Vermont, are respectively named Thornchasm College and Maidenhair College (277, 289); this appears to be a satirical comment on the staid, puritanical atmosphere at women's colleges in the Northeastern United States¹⁵. Within Tinieblas, certain institutions suggest stereotypical Latin images; there is a Pelf Bank in the capital, for instance, and this name reflects the notion that Latin America is rife with corruption (398). It is rare, in the extra-fictional world, to find names that so closely and satirically reflect their referents. Indeed, it is in this nameplay that the reader can see how Koster's fictional world is, to use his own prefatory words, more of a "careful fake" than the "sloppy actuality" that is the extra-fictional "real world."

What is peculiar about Koster's "careful faking" and his statement that "This book is fiction. I made it up", is that it always refers to the "real world" -- at least indirectly. After all, there could be no satire in naming a character Kublai Manduco if the historical personage Kublai Khan did not exist. In the case of places like Thornchasm and Maidenhair colleges, there are no such institutions physically existing in the extra-fictional world; however, Koster must perceive, and there must also be a perception among Koster's readership, that such *types* of places *could* very well exist -- it is this perception that gives the names Maidenhair and Thornchasm such satirical qualities. As a result, Koster's nameplay in *The Dissertation* is paradoxical and therefore problematical: on the one hand, his names refer to the "real world", and on the other hand, they refer to a world that simply does not exist. Linda Hutcheon's comment that "Postmodern fiction neither brackets nor denies the referent (however defined); it works to problematize the entire activity of reference" (152) is appropriate to Koster's second novel.

Again, in *The Dissertation*, as in *The Prince*, it is difficult to trace the irony and satire to Koster. In fact, an argument could be made that Koster can be absolved of any responsibility for the satire and irony because his narrator is at best eccentric, at worst insane: everything that is written in the text and notes has first passed through the prism of an obsessive, passionate Camilo Fuertes, just as the satire and irony in *The Prince* can be labeled the product of a vengeful, bitter Kiki Sancudo. Nevertheless, as in other aspects of these two novels, when one compares the satire in *The Dissertation* with that of *The Prince*, striking similarities abound, suggesting that stability is beginning to emerge.

Take, for example, Camilo's satirical comment on the will to power that is seemingly inherent in every male citizen of Tinieblas: "... your Tinieblan takes to politics as alligators take to fragrant swamps, and will, at the least chance, plunge in and wallow for as long as possible" (192). It is a remarkably similar comment to Kiki's "If they hanged Tinieblans for wanting to be President, rope would be worth more than rubies" (*Prince* 51) or "your legitimate Tinieblan seeks the Presidential Palace as water does its own level" (*Prince* 215). Both of these narrators are clearly unreliable, each frequently making sweeping generalizations in their respective histories. But when their satire hits the same targets, is it unreasonable to assume that they are airing views espoused by their author? Or could it be that Koster, by giving his readers Kiki Sancudo and Camilo Fuertes, is also giving his readers two examples of the Latin Everyman? One can still defend Koster with the argument that he is simply having fun playing with stereotypes and that questions of authorial intent cannot be resolved simply because there are similarities in Kiki and Camilo's satire. These similarities are, however, flares to the reader that Koster may have a stable, political agenda for his satire.

If there seems to be potential to stabilize the satire in *The Dissertation*, it is offset by the presence of a destabilizing pastiche in the narrative. As was noted in the last chapter, writers at times use pastiche to indicate a lack of originality and in *The Dissertation*, just as in *The Prince*, it appears Koster's pastiche indicates a lack of originality in his narrator. Not having much credible evidence due to poor research forces Camilo to improvise and change his writing style throughout the narrative; it is simpler for him to invent scenarios and conversations rather than to engage in vigorous investigation

and precise documentation. Simply put, Camilo attempts to mask the faults in his third-rate historical narrative by using a variety of elements from other, mainly fictional, types of narratives. By engaging in this manipulation, Camilo is revealed yet again to be a dubious historical authority.

Often the pastiche is discreet, and it seems the narrative still retains the high degree of illusionism valued in historical writing. On a large scale, the text section of the narrative is similar to naturalistic fiction because it takes a quasi-sociological look at León Fuertes: like one of Zola's characters, León is a case study and the reader observes how he is "miserably subjected to hunger, sexual obsession, and hereditary defects" (Baldick 147). More specifically, chapter 8 -- "Learning" -- naturalistically describes how León's education was elemental in forming an individual capable of assuming the presidency of a nation (67-76). Camilo precisely describes how León was taken on as a student by Dr. Escolástico Grillo, the subjects León studied, the length of time he studied, and finally how the education affected León's personality. In the end, the reader is given a portrait of León which logically explains his seemingly paradoxical behavior later in life:

[Dr. Grillo's] laudable approach made León see things whole, although his native urge was to simplify by separating. In recitation, in argument, and in the papers that he wrote, León forever strove to sever science from religion, math from music, politics from poetry and, generally, to unweave Dr. Grillo's integrated tapestry into its separate threads, just as, in later life, he chose to be a number of separate men, each with a separate worldview, style, career, persona, and collection of accomplices, each fully formed and native to a special habitat, each different and distinct from all the rest, rather than be a single, integrated human.

(74)

This entire section is simply composed out of Camilo's fevered imaginings, of course. The reader is alerted to this at the beginning of chapter 8 when Camilo notes, "Following his 'death' in 1939, Dr. Escolástico Grillo, who is the chief source for this chapter, entered Learning ..." (321). Because the reader is fully aware Camilo conjures up this story, the supposedly serious naturalism is revealed as yet another farcical element in the narrative.

Another narrative form pastiched in the novel is romance fiction -- a prime example of which is found in the section concerning Rebeca's life (14-20). Poet François Villon's account of Azael Burlando's fraudulent manipulations in the "other world" (299-301) is filled with images and words commonly found in detective fiction. As with the naturalism in *The Dissertation*, these two narrative forms are used by Camilo to try to bring about some sort of sense and order to his history, but they ultimately serve Koster's purpose to satirize his narrator and to undermine that narrator's credibility.

In many ways, Camilo's text and notes also resemble magic realist narratives. As in *The Prince*, magic realism is prevalent on almost every page of the text and notes. It is most often manifested in the ontological form, but at times both anthropological and ontological forms combine. This happens when Rebeca Fuertes metamorphosizes from woman to man and then, several years later, changes back from man to woman. It was mentioned earlier in this chapter that neither incident is satisfactorily explained by the narrator. Instead, Camilo appears to accept these events as completely normal and only briefly remarks that "God" is responsible. Take, for example, the first change. At this point in her life, Rebeca is at the mercy of the ballet dancer Sukasin, who brutally beats and injures her and threatens to force her into prostitution as soon as she recovers:

So it went until Rebeca's cast was chipped away and God, weary at last of putting out the naturalistic drivel any hack can write, regained his sometimes wandering sense of humor and the marvelous. As Rebeca Fuertes awoke the next morning from troubled dreams, she found herself transformed into a man. (23)

From this point, Rebeca simply learns to adapt to her new status. No further explanation is given.

Likewise, the second change, occurring five years later in China, happens without any attempt at logical explanation. It seems that "God" is responsible, but even that is not certain:

He woke next morning to hoarse shouts and hammering on the door and found himself changed back into a woman. The Viceroy's torturer, sent out to eunuchize the trespasser, saw that Rebeca had been miracled back beyond his razor's reach and sold her across the province boundary in the Treaty Port Tsinan.

(26)

Both of these metamorphoses reflect anthropological magic realism because "God" is mentioned (or at least implied) as being responsible; thus, the Judeo-Christian societal concept of God is alluded to in order to try to resolve the antinomy. The antinomy is not entirely resolved because the reference to God is vague and off-handedly given; it does not serve as much of an explanation at all. Each time metamorphosis occurs, Rebeca's sexuality is threatened: the first time by the threat of forced prostitution, the second by threat of castration. It seems as though fear and necessity combine to force God's decision, but this is still not a sufficiently logical explanation to resolve antinomy. Because all of these events are so matter-of-factly recounted by Camilo, they also reflect ontological magic realism where the narrator "is not puzzled, disturbed, or sceptical of the

supernatural ... he or she describes it as a normal part of ordinary everyday life” (Spindler 82).

It can be argued that the episodes in the novel involving Astral Plane spirits bear resemblance to the anthropological magic realism Stephen Spindler describes in his article “Magic Realism: A Typology”. Antinomy is resolved by reference to a specific context -- Camilo’s own mythological world. However, this world is of the narrator’s own devising, Camilo’s fabulous imaginative construction, and it is not based on the larger, socio-cultural context that Spindler describes (80). Even though there is resolution of antinomy in these episodes, it is an unorthodox resolution based on one man’s fantasy.

Much of the narrative that is devoted to explaining León’s behavior and actions is filled with ontological magic realism. One aspect of León’s character that is noted on several occasions, but never adequately explained, is his magical ability to heal himself physically. During the baseball game against the Americans, for instance, León, playing second base, is spiked by a sliding Dan Hardcock as he tries to cover the bag. The wounds are severe because “... Hardcock had spent forty minutes that evening honing his spikes on an emery wheel” (88). Despite a doctor’s recommendation to have the gouges attended to in a hospital, León does not leave the field:

León said nothing, knit his brow in meditation, then pointed to his legs. All bleeding ceased and the wounds closed up like tulip folds at sunset. Dr. Gusano rubbed his eyes with the backs of his fingers and relented ... Then León pulled up his tattered stockings and limped to his position.

(88-89)

More notably curious than the healing at the baseball diamond is the occasion when León, distraught at discovering the woman he had been sleeping with was in fact his long-lost sister, attempts suicide but is unable to harm himself:

That night León stepped off a chair in Dr. Grillo's attic with a noose around his neck, but the inch-thick Manila hemp parted as though axed ... He then tried to blow his brains out with a Colt revolver ... but all six chambers misfired. Next he took poison but couldn't keep it in his stomach long enough. (104)

This episode is remarkable because León himself cannot control the magic, nor can he or Camilo pinpoint the force behind it. All of these failed attempts could be a chain of amazing coincidences, but it is unlikely. All Camilo offers by way of explanation is a vague “León realized he was not destined to know the felicity of suicide” (104).

There is less emphasis on anthropological magic realism in *The Dissertation* than there is in *The Prince*. Instead, ontological magic realism is the form that dominates the narrative. The reason for this is a practical narrative consideration on the part of the author, I believe. Koster writes that he decided to make Camilo a “spirit medium so that he could cull his data from imaginary ‘dead’ people. All sorts of wonderful things ensued” (Preface 2). One of those “wonderful things” is the invention of the Astral Plane, a realm that is not described within the pages of *The Prince*. Because Camilo posits an “alternative ontology” (McHale 24) by conjuring up his Astral Plane, magic is not explained in terms of cultural myths (as it is in anthropological magic realism). Rather, events involving the Astral Plane are explained “without recourse to any cultural perspective” and are presented “in a matter-of-fact way as if it did not contradict reason” (Spindler 82). These otherworldly episodes therefore typify ontological magic realism; the sheer importance of

the Astral Plane in *The Dissertation* dictates that Koster foregrounds the ontological variety of magic realism.

The wide variety of narrative techniques used in *The Dissertation* reflects well the complexity of the Latin American society portrayed in the novel. In its complexity, *The Dissertation* is similar to *The Prince*, though the two narratives differ in several key areas: first, contrary to *The Prince*, there is definite closure to both the text and the notes in *The Dissertation*; by the end of his research project, Camilo's goal of "... chaos ordered -- or else madness" (303) is achieved, but by *very* dubious means. There is also a hierarchy of discourses in the second novel, but it is a hierarchy that often breaks down. In *The Dissertation*, stream of consciousness technique is replaced by the dissertation form, distancing the reader from the mental workings of the narrator, but ostensibly giving that reader a more balanced, scholarly view of Tinieblan society; this sense of balance breaks down quickly, however, when the reader realizes that the narrator is admittedly subjective and most often unreliable.

That any established order in Camilo's narrative ultimately breaks down is the one aspect most similar to *The Prince*. As in Kiki's story, Camilo's narratorial authority is subverted by satire, irony, pastiche of narrative forms, and the frequent presence of ontological magic realism. His claim to be providing a stable, "authoritative investigation" (Foreword xviii) of León Fuertes and Tinieblan society is, in the main, farcical.

Textual evidence exists, however, suggesting many of Camilo's statements are in accord with the Tinieblan historical record provided by Kiki Sancudo. The substance of Camilo's writing about the presidency of Epifanio Mojón, León Fuertes meetings with

John Kennedy, and the typical Tinieblan obsession with political power resembles Kiki's observations. Both narrators are plainly unreliable, but the similarity of their independently drawn conclusions indicates a more stable Tinieblan history is beginning to emerge. Now we turn to the third Tinieblas narrative, *Mandragon*, where the fictional country enters the final stages of its history.

I

Mandragon, the last of the Tinieblas novels to be published, is an apocalyptic story told by the most peculiar of all Koster's narrators. Mandragon, the fictional character, is a "hermaphrodite, shaman, and magician" ("Transformations" 248), and his ontological status is much more complicated than that of Kiki Sancudo or Camilo Fuertes. Mandragon has the unique capability to change in the most extraordinary ways: at various times he metamorphosizes from hermaphrodite to man to woman, from human to animal, from corporeal entity to spiritual presence¹⁶. Not only can Mandragon effect such magical changes upon himself, but he can also alter his environment and the people around him. He casts spells, controls weather, plays pranks, and even raises the dead. Mandragon has contempt for individuals "whose sanity [depends] on reality's being commonplace and law-abiding" (121), for he values unreality over reality, magic over rationality, poesis over mimesis.

What is it that enables Mandragon to possess and wield his magic? The reader is never given a clear indication because Mandragon himself professes to be uncertain. On several occasions, he claims to be simply a vessel for something known as "power" and that he never wishes for magical abilities; they are thrust upon him by "power". Early in his narrative, Mandragon explains:

I had no idea why I had been chosen ... Power had use for me, power had plans, and would let me know when knowledge was required ... I didn't request that revelation either, any more than I'd asked for my other gifts. They were forced on me. Light was stuffed into me without my leave. (38)

Mandragon never claims that “power” is the “God” of organized religion; he receives no specific revelation, or even an indication, of such a thing. Nevertheless, Mandragon seems to believe that there are connections and similarities between “power” and theories of God postulated by world religions. Mentioning Doctora Matilde de Ardilla, a pilgrim who pays homage to him, Mandragon has nothing but praise for her belief in numerous religions, forms of worship, and the “power” which possesses Mandragon:

Doña Matilde believed in Jesus and Gautama and the Sufis, in Zen and Yoga and the Kabbala, in all sorts of things Mandragon had never heard of till she mentioned them. She believed in astral bodies and in transmigrating souls ... She didn't merely keep an open mind. She believed -- which was why, though she was past seventy, her eyes still sparkled and her heart was young ... Doña Matilde was already in harmony with the universe.

(244)

It is apparent from the above quotation, and from Mandragon's own comments concerning “commonplace” reality, that he highly values an unquestioning belief in everything. Thus, even though he never thoroughly understands the essence of “power”, Mandragon eventually accepts “power” totally, and his faith in its existence does not waver.

Mandragon's tale is similar to Kiki Sancudo's because the story consists of the narrator's thoughts over a short period of time. As G.B. Crump notes, “whereas *The Prince* contains the reflections of a single day, *Mandragon* consists of the hero's memories on a single night” (“Koster” 441). Kiki Sancudo's thoughts are collected in anticipation of a significant political rally, and Mandragon's thoughts also lead up to an

important event -- namely, his own execution at dawn. Like Kiki, Mandragon does not simply dwell on the imminent event, but he also contemplates his past, including the five myths concerning his own birth, his youth and adolescence, important events in Tinieblan political history, and the reasons why he is condemned to death. Unlike Kiki, Mandragon claims to have perspective not only on the past, but also on what is to come in the future; he foresees an apocalyptic "End and beginning" (50) to Tinieblas and the world.

The novel opens with Mandragon's first, and most revealing, prophecy of his own execution. Six pages in length, this description is vivid in detail, reporting the location (Ciudad Tinieblas), the festive atmosphere surrounding this public hanging, and the parading of the victim handcuffed to the hitch of a *Guardia* patrol truck. The reader is also re-introduced to Angela de Sancudo, who is mistress to both Alejo and Kiki Sancudo in *The Prince*, but is never alluded to in *The Dissertation*. By this point in Tinieblan history, Angela is back in the limelight after having attained the presidency of the country. It is Angela who orders Mandragon and his acolytes to be arrested, and she is the government official that presides over Mandragon's execution (13-18).

Before explaining why he is condemned to death, Mandragon recounts the major events in his life. He begins with the mysterious circumstances surrounding his birth. Mandragon does not know for certain who his parents were, and even though he admits "I might have divined my ancestry. That would have been within Mandragon's scope" (41), he does not ever make the effort to find out. Mandragon is more interested in myth than fact, so he recites the five theories of his conception and birth as he has heard them.

The first theory states Mandragon was the product of a liaison between Alejo Sancudo and the daughter of a Tinieblan dockhand during Alejo's 1948 presidential campaign (42-44). The second version claims Mandragon's mother was a prostitute, the father unknown, and that the baby was delivered in a brothel by the Tinieblas Minister of Health, one of that establishment's regular clients (44-46).

Next, Mandragon describes a theory that "makes Mandragon's mother a victim of imperialism" (46), because the claim is that American soldiers stationed at the Reservation raped her. León Fuertes is the only lawyer willing to take the poor woman's case against the powerful Americans, but she is intimidated and declines Fuertes' offer. She has the child instead and shortly thereafter commits suicide. From there, Mandragon recounts the fourth theory which has Fuertes himself as the father, a mulatto girl as the mother, and the act of consummation taking place in the back seat of a Bastidas - Tinieblas bus (47-48).

The last version is the most mythical of them all, for it claims that no man ever touched Mandragon's mother. Instead, she is taken on a beach by the wind:

The wind rose, sweeping a cloud across the moon. The wind pressed her shoulders, bending her forward so that her cheek lay against the sand. The wind struck her raised hindquarters and entered her. It filled her with a terrible disquiet. (48)

When her time comes to give birth, this fifteen-year-old girl is too small and weak to pull through the operation. "When the girl stopped breathing, the midwife took the knife she kept for cutting navel cords and carved Mandragon from the corpse" (48-49).

Mandragon's earliest childhood recollections have him in the custody of the charlatan witch La Negra. These memories are far from pleasant as La Negra keeps her

ward in chains and uses Mandragon to attract business: "I was a valuable asset in her trade. The mere presence in her house of my extraordinary groin greatly enhanced La Negra's prestige as an expert in love's mysteries" (56). Mandragon remembers that he did not even possess a proper name but was called "... Raro and Monstrito. Or Rara and La Monstrua. Also Aborto and Abortita" (41). Unsurprisingly, Mandragon does not speak until he reaches "eight or nine" years of age and claims that this is because he does not wish to stop "perceiving things language can't possess" (54). What is left unsaid, but is probable, is that the trauma of a childhood spent without a guardian's love or compassion renders Mandragon mute. As difficult as it is to live with La Negra, Mandragon's difficulties are minor compared with those he experiences later. His final comment on his time spent with the witch is sadly ironic: "That was the last I had of the easy life" (63).

Indications of Mandragon's future magical powers occur throughout his childhood. By remaining speechless for so long, and thereby developing his capacity to "perceive things language can't possess", Mandragon eventually is able to feel the thoughts and physical sensations of both animate and inanimate objects. "I learned, for instance, that vegetables know their destiny and accept it, await it eagerly in fact, since to be eaten's not extinction but rebirth ... Flesh, though, is ignorant and anguished. A cut of meat ... feels unlucky, as though the cow or pig it came from would have lived forever if there were no butchers" (58). Mandragon gives a particularly graphic, personal example of his close affinity with other beings in the following account of boiling lobsters:

None of the lobsters were contented in the basket, the way yucca or limes would be. They missed the sea and felt unlucky. They sulked in various ways. Those near the bottom were fearfully dispirited ... Those in the middle took no comfort from not being farther down but struggled to

climb over one another toward the top. And those on the top worried about staying there. When the vendor filled Nena's order and took out two or three, the accidentally promoted lobsters just beneath them felt intense satisfaction, as from a victory achieved on their own merit, then instantly grew anxious about retaining their high rank. Those picked and dropped into the sink congratulated themselves ... Soon they would be home in the cool sea. So when Nena brought the pot to a boil and dumped them in, their disillusionment was greater than their pain. Their pain was hideous. It set me wailing and raised welts on my loins and stomach ... Their pain was terrible, but their disillusionment was worse.

(59)

Thus, Mandragon feels such a strength of compassion that he absorbs close to the same level of physical and mental torment as the creatures being boiled to death. At an early age, Mandragon displays unmistakable signs of his future ability to magically transform himself and others.

The hard life Mandragon alludes to begins the day La Negra sells him to the circus owner Don Lorenzo Amichevole. Upon seeing Mandragon for the first time, Don Lorenzo treats him with utter disrespect, the same disrespect that he shows to the performers in the circus: "... he seized the waist of my trousers and tore them open so that the buttons popped, so that the crotch seam ripped back to the seat. He snatched one of my ankles in each hand, and rising, jerked me in the air ... Don Lorenzo held my legs apart and rested my bottom on his paunch. He studied my groin" (62-63). Don Lorenzo decides that the hermaphrodite would be a hit as a freak, so he pays off La Negra and Mandragon becomes an act called "El Milagro Doble-Sexo" (74).

In Amichevole's Universal Circus, Mandragon meets a number of other individuals wretchedly dehumanized for profit by Don Lorenzo. These people include: Harry and

Gwendolyn Cox, a pair of Welsh midgets who perform a humiliating song and dance routine (75); the Seal Girl, a young woman with deformed hands and feet whose father, Don Lorenzo claims, “killed the sacred white seal, and was cursed in all his offspring by the shaman” (78); Rebozo the clown, who had been heartbroken by Angela a number of years earlier¹⁷ (121), and whose only source of true pleasure comes from training his Pomeranian and his team of singing ducks; finally, there is Mahotty, the firewalker, who yearns to do his act out of penance rather than for money, but whom Don Lorenzo only insults with comments like “My geek’s worth ten of you nigger pain freaks, with all your filthy heathen gods thrown in ... You take up more space than you’re worth....” (69)

Mandragon’s act is also humiliating almost beyond comprehension. He is placed in a room on a barber’s chair, has his legs harnessed and spread apart, and then is shown off to the crowd by a “doctor” and “a parade girl, done up like a nurse ...” (87) As Mandragon wryly comments, the show is “Most educational and proper, except of course for the cigar butts and the gum, the jeers and jokes, the squawks of ‘Do we get to fuck it?’” (88)

It is in this inhumane atmosphere that Mandragon’s magical powers continue to develop and grow in strength. In 1963, while the circus is on tour in the neighbouring country of Ticamala, Mandragon experiences the most crucial event of his life, an epiphanical initiation into “power”. This initiation takes the form of a dream. Mandragon enters a cave, is seized by walking corpses, killed, dismembered, eviscerated, and has his trunk and head filled with crystals of enlightenment (101). Upon awakening, Mandragon is transformed into “the vessel and instrument of a knowledge that ordered the universe”

(101). This initiation is thrilling for Mandragon because, for the first time in his life, he escapes from drudgery and is filled with joy and optimism: “Out of myself, through the fissures between the worlds ... Murdered and remade, poured full of light. A new person” (103).

From the moment of Mandragon’s initiation onwards, changes take place in Don Lorenzo’s circus. Mandragon realizes that the initiation has greatly enhanced his power over individuals. He plays pranks, frustrating a roustabout’s attempt at changing a tire (105-06), and making dozens of live rats pop out of an illusionist’s hat (107). Mandragon confesses that he feels a thrill observing “... the terror that comes over people when the world stops functioning the way it’s supposed to” (111). He is so pleased with his new magical abilities that he does not concern himself over the nature of the mysterious “power”; when Mahotty, who seems to understand the reasons behind Mandragon’s transformation, offers to teach him to wield “power” properly, Mandragon refuses and says “I don’t want to learn. I want to let it use me as it pleases” (111).

Don Lorenzo realizes after a time that Mandragon is gifted and not averse to exacting magical revenge upon his enemies. He therefore tries to appease Mandragon, improving his contract terms and the general conditions within the circus (118). For the next several years, the circus is run under Mandragon’s influence and draws amazed and incredulous crowds. “Power” gradually manifests itself as a negative force, however, and this worries Mandragon somewhat:

Anguished agitation, pitiable weakness in my limbs, sense of being prey to a cruel ravishment. Then filled with mysterious light, luminous fire, that enabled me to look upon some scene. Or in other trances I saw nothing, but instead grew conscious of the worries of some spectator ...

The trances were unpleasant to begin with. The helplessness, sense of being seized by an alien force.
(128)

Mandragon even thinks about asking Mahotty to teach him about the increasingly worrisome “power”, but instead evades responsibility: “Better stay passive, better not to try to understand. Let it use me as it pleased and not be to blame for it” (130).

Mandragon’s “power” erupts one night when Don Lorenzo, in a fit of rage, kills Rebozo’s precious singing ducks. In front of a Chuchaganga audience, Mandragon causes Don Lorenzo to levitate twelve feet in the air and die by asphyxiation, as though he were being hanged (144-45). Mandragon does not regret the action, calling it a “masterpiece” and a “marvelous noosing”, but he admits that he had lost control over “power”: “Utterly drained, empty ... Realized at last I was responsible for what the power in me did through me. Only an instrument, and yet responsible” (146). As if to admit responsibility, and to try to atone for what he did, Mandragon allows himself to be taken away by police (146).

At the same time Mandragon is touring with the circus, a second narrative unfolds involving Angela de Sancudo and other prominent political figures. Mandragon narrates this story as well, claiming his powers allow him to be witness to concurrent events in different locales (64, 91). The reader learns that since the time Angela carried on simultaneous affairs with Kiki and Alejo, she had been sold by the latter Sancudo to the multi-billionaire American businessman Dred Mandeville (In his Preface to *Mandragon*, Koster refers to Mandeville as “a kind of Howard Hughes figure.”) (65). After spending two decades with Mandeville at his high-tech hermitage deep in the mountains of “Nezona”, Angela is sold back to Alejo “for a consideration, not for money” (251). Alejo

makes her his wife and vice-president, and upon his death, she inherits the highest public office in the Republic of Tinieblas (66).

Angela's years with Mandeville are bizarre, to say the least. Mandeville himself is devoted to pure capitalism, and his greed goes largely unchecked over the years. Resembling the fiends of *Paradise Lost* trying to imitate heaven in hell, Mandeville endeavors to build his own private sub-universe within his mountain cave -- a synthetic realm of robots and computers in which Mandeville himself plays God (91-6). Angela assists him in everything, just for the thrill of power and the acquisition of money: Mandeville uses Angela to seduce clients and politicians who stay as guests at the Nezona cavern; together Angela and Mandeville kidnap a retarded boy simply for Angela to use as a sex slave (93); Mandeville even develops a mind-control device which he implants in other people's skulls, and then he has Angela train them to be "top-flight murderers" (95). By sending out his assassins into the "real" world, Mandeville is able to "deal with annoyances in short order" (95). Mandragon does not specifically state how, but he mentions that "For a time in 1963 it seemed [Mandeville] reached too far" (96), and the reaching causes Mandeville to sell Angela back to Alejo while looking for a place where he could not be apprehended, arrested, or found. The major political event of 1963 was, of course, Kennedy's assassination; Mandragon implies this event may have been orchestrated by Mandeville "to deal with annoyances" in a world that he could not completely control.

To escape, Mandeville kidnaps an American military submarine and stays in a state of underwater limbo until he can be safe in the world again (132). Angela, for her part,

stays with Alejo as he is deposed by General Genghis Manduco. Mandragon spends his time in the Costaguanan jail discovering that he is capable of love:

... turning toward love there in the lockup where they held me till my trial. Cell to myself, a murderer's privilege, but now I was uneasy with solitude. Till then I'd felt complete in myself. I hadn't realized I cared for Rebozo until Don Lorenzo showed me. I'd known love only at second hand, in Rebozo's dreams [of Angela] and years had to pass before I learned one must love everything, on earth and out of it, each insect, tree, and star. (171)

Mandragon has sex with nearly every inmate, partly out of this newfound love of all things, but partly because he has no other choice. Mandragon shows that his is not a perfect, universal love when he bites a prison guard (180), but his subsequent stay in solitary confinement gives him further time to consider both love and the nature of the "power" that courses through him. A visit by Mahotty's spirit (the firewalker had "lost faith in his god" (181) and was scorched to death) teaches Mandragon that "power" has chosen him, and all that he can do is strive to control his use of this amazing force (181). Shortly thereafter, Mandragon harnesses his energy, escapes prison, and transports himself to New York City (182).

In New York, Mandragon preaches the apocalypse, picks up followers, his "remnant" for the post-apocalypse (194), and begins a long journey back to Tinieblas. On the way, he collects more and more followers, people astounded by his magical gifts and prophecies. Mandragon is accompanied by sixty people by the time he arrives in Otán Province (193).

Tinieblas at this time is in the midst of the most extraordinary and severe drought in its history. What makes this drought so exceptional is that it is geopolitical in nature; the

drought extends up to, but not past, Tinieblas' borders and is a result of General Manduco's rise to power (168, 198). Furthermore, Mandragon makes it clear that the drought in Tinieblas cannot end till Manduco's sexual frustration, which began simultaneously with the drought, is overcome: "He would never spritz again until it rained, and it would never rain again until he spritzed" (168). Certainly, this is a great dilemma, one which Manduco tries to solve any way he can, but he seems doomed to failure. Finally, he seeks out Mandragon in Otán province after hearing that the hermaphrodite and his followers are capable of great magic (214). Mandragon cures Genghis by coupling him with various barnyard animals, and when the general finally finds sexual relief with a sow, the heavens open and Tinieblas has rain at last (221).

Genghis is never the same tyrant again as he was before. He neglects state duties in order to frolic with beasts, and before long his government is deposed. Alejo returns to power with his wife and vice-president Angela, ruling with uncharacteristic sobriety and restraint (248-50). For her part, Angela is still obsessed with money, and encourages Alejo to offer Dred Mandeville sanctuary in Tinieblas; giving Mandeville his long-awaited exile would be an ideal way both for Alejo to grant the "consideration" he made to Mandeville earlier and for Alejo and Angela to access that billionaire's fortune (252). Alejo simply puts Angela off until she loses all patience and realizes she has to kill her husband to get all that she wants.

To dispose of Alejo, Angela recruits Mandragon (257). She gets him to agree to her scheme by offering up her considerable sexual charms, charms to which Mandragon has already had magical access:

Angela filled up Mandragon's spirit and emptied it of everything besides. So when I'd summoned up her past and wallowed in it, proved every crevice, seen, heard, tasted, smelled; when I'd enjoyed her in the flesh of all her lovers, and toyed with them in hers, reveled and writhed; when I had wrenched my gifts to that unworthy purpose and worked them to the fullest, I was implacably bewitched ...

(264)

Mandragon is so completely taken by Angela that he postpones Alejo's death, and tortures him instead, in order to enjoy Angela longer. When Mandragon finally kills Alejo by strangulation, he does it from afar while having sex with Angela. He times events perfectly and perversely so that President Sancudo's death occurs the instant Angela and Mandragon climax (286).

Angela's first act as President of Tinieblas is to grant Mandeville his exile. Mandragon is there to greet Mandeville when he emerges, barely alive and on a stretcher, from the submarine (297). In fact, Mandeville dies, but Mandragon mysteriously revives him and keeps the billionaire functioning for a week -- long enough for him to sign over a great deal of assets to Angela. During this time, Mandragon and Angela gain not only wealth, but popularity and power in Tinieblas. Their rule is euphoric until the day Mandragon is confronted by one of his acolytes who "reminded me who I was" (339). This confrontation shocks Mandragon, and "the power that had lived in me was gone" (339). Everything goes downhill from here for Mandragon: Mandeville collapses and decomposes in mere seconds; Tinieblans stop believing that Mandragon is their savior; the military then arrests him; he is sentenced to hang and is 'power'less to do anything about it (339-41).

Feeling “power” gradually returning during his time in the Tinieblan jail, Mandragon fully recovers it the moment the noose tightens around his neck. The awesome apocalyptic destruction of Tinieblas then commences with an earthquake and floodwaters breaking through the seawall. The palace, hub of political corruption throughout Tinieblan history, is crushed. Mandragon surveys this destruction with “a smile immensely tender, loving, gay” (344, 346), feeling satisfied that a cleansing is finally taking place. All that is left over are a few “bewildered” people walking on the shore (they are the “remnant” Mandragon mentions earlier in his narrative) and Mandragon’s severed head floating out to sea (346).

Koster tells the reader in the Preface to this last Tinieblas novel that it is similar to the other two novels in several areas: “... its setting is (mainly) the imaginary Central American Republic of Tinieblas, its subject is (largely) politics, its chief character is a particular sort of leader”. Like *The Prince* and *The Dissertation*, *Mandragon* is also dominated by the themes of revenge and power: Don Lorenzo, for example, exerts power over Mandragon by enslaving him, but Mandragon exacts revenge from Don Lorenzo by strangling him; Angela, to take another example, holds sexual power over almost every man with whom she comes into contact, including Mandragon; Mandragon gets his revenge over Angela, however, by crushing the Presidential palace with her inside. The novel is filled with many other manifestations of power and revenge, but these two themes are taken to their extreme extent in the last few pages. Here Mandragon demonstrates that he is the final power holder in Tinieblas, and by destroying the country, he exacts the highest revenge for a lifetime of abuse at the hands of Tinieblans.

II

Though obvious similarities exist between the three Tinieblas novels, *Mandragon* is unique in that it is a narrative of apocalypse. It is filled with the “arresting imagery and powerful poetry” (Zamora 1) that marks apocalyptic narratives, and thus, at times virtually abandons notions of verisimilitude and close mimesis. Granted, Kiki Sancudo transgresses the rules of verisimilitude in his imaginative memoir, and Camilo Fuertes is rarely closely mimetic in his fanciful history, but neither narrator approaches the sustained level of poesis that *Mandragon* delivers in his story. *Mandragon* is a self-styled visionary (13, 19), and his narrative often reflects the whimsy inherent in visionary narratives.

That being the case, there is also a sense of purpose to *Mandragon*’s story. Lois Parkinson Zamora writes that apocalyptic narratives often “interpret and assign significance to our experience of history” (3), and *Mandragon*’s story certainly does this too. On one level, the narrative “interprets and assigns significance” to the many fictional events mentioned in the first two novels. It also looks at specific developments in twentieth century Latin American history (the recent emergence of powerful military dictatorships in the region is one example) and the various roles United States business and government have historically played in Central and South America.

When the writer in *Carmichael’s Dog* decides to destroy his fictional planet *Vama*, and hence complete his “tetralogy begun thirteen years, eight months, and five days before” (43), he finds it a more complex and emotional exercise than he at first imagined. He manages to do it though by calling “on the powers of anger to furnish him some extra

resolution” (116). This comment demonstrates that rage is a primary catalyst in apocalyptic narratives. There must be a sense of anger on the part of the author and/or the narrator to compose narratives that depict such violent change.

Zamora makes a similar claim that apocalyptic narrators are mostly disaffected individuals unhappy with their society: “ ... the end of the world is described from the point of view of a narrator who is radically opposed to existing spiritual and political practices ... his narrative reflects not only his opposition to existing practices, but also his political powerlessness to change them” (2). By predicting an end to their corrupt, immoral worlds, apocalyptic narrators “envision a millennial order which represents the potential antithesis to the undeniable abuses of human history” (10). In other words, apocalypse is wishful thinking, hope on the part of the narrator that societal corruption and decay will be swept away so that the world can start anew. For Carmichael, a man tormented by mental demons, destroying *Vama* rids him of a world he’s sick of having “on [his] mind” for so many years (124). Only when *Vama* is gone for good does he feel he can get on with his life.

Mandragon, even more than Carmichael, fits Zamora’s general description of an apocalyptic narrator. First, he is undeniably opposed to Tinieblan spiritual and political practices, having been, by his own account, a victim to these practices throughout his life. From his childhood as a chained attraction for the voodoo witch La Negra, to his latter days as Angela’s servant, Mandragon simply moves from one form of slavery to another. In what kind of society could such blatant inhumanity be allowed to happen? Only in the most wretched of places is Mandragon’s implicit answer. Throughout his life, Mandragon

is cast in opposition to society, first as slave and finally as scapegoat, and even though society keeps proving itself to be debased, intolerant, and cruel, all Mandragon ever truly wants is to be accepted into it¹⁸. He finally realizes, however, that acceptance will never happen. Mandragon can barely disguise his disgust and rage when he says:

Mandragon isn't recalcitrant. Worn out, yes. Depressed, as they say. But not rebellious, nowhere disrespectful of authority. Authority happens to consist of three festering dog turds, but that's not unusual in this or any other country. They serve their purpose, and soon earth will be cleansed. (40)

Mandragon's last four words in the above quotation, "earth will be cleansed", reflect another way Mandragon fits Zamora's outline of apocalyptic narrators. His call for a cleansing is like other apocalyptists' calls for a "millennial order", or, to take the biblical Revelation of St. John as an example, a "new Jerusalem" (Rev. 21:2). Zamora is careful to note that apocalyptists do not simply envision mass destruction but rather a complete transition from corruption to purity:

Apocalypse is *not* merely a synonym for disaster or cataclysm or chaos. It is, in fact a synonym for "revelation" ... While it is true that an acute sense of temporal disruption and disequilibrium is the source of, and is always integral to, apocalyptic thinking and narration, so is the conviction that historical crisis will have the cleansing effect of radical renewal. (10)

Likewise, Mandragon foresees a better time to come after his own envisioned apocalypse. In New York, Mandragon addresses a crowd and tells them "Earth will be cleansed" (189); he also describes a gathering of his followers where everyone "... danced and sang the end and the beginning, the mutant monsters, flamed-to-cinders cities, the earth cleansed and renewed. The end was horrible, but they must long for it and love it as

themselves. The beginning was lovely, but full of hardship” (194). *Mandragon* then is typical of apocalyptic narratives because it is a vision of destruction with renewal as its aftermath.

Zamora writes that “the biblical apocalypticist feels himself both inspired and compelled to reveal to his audience what has been revealed to him by God: the divinely predetermined totality of history” (11). Of course, it is impossible to describe “totality” adequately within the pages of any apocalyptic narrative, no matter the physical dimensions of the text. Therefore, this “totality” is summarized by a series of images or signs. Zamora lists some of the signs in Revelation of St. John, such as “the seven seals on the book of destiny, broken by Christ for John to witness and describe, including the four horsemen of the apocalypse, the whore of Babylon, the grapes of wrath ... (11) There are also “arithmythic” symbols representing good and evil (12). Some of these numbers include 666 “the number of the beast and symbol of political evil”, three, seven, twelve, and 144,000 (12). All these signs and symbols ideally work to give the reader clarification of the “totality” of history, though paradoxically this “densely coded text” is puzzlingly complex (12).

Apocalyptic images, signs, and numerical symbols abound in *Mandragon*. These images are often numerical, and two notable numbers are sixty-four and seven. Sixty-four is only mentioned twice, but *Mandragon* draws the reader’s attention to it: “I was born with all my milk teeth cut. I cut my second teeth a few years later -- two sets, sixty-four teeth arranged in double rows, an unmistakable sign” (63). What is unmistakable about this sign, *Mandragon* never reveals. He refers to this sign again a few pages later when

mentioning his enslavement in the circus: “How much [Don Lorenzo] paid for me he never said. A pittance probably ... He didn’t know I’d be the vessel of power. My teeth were a sign, but Don Lorenzo couldn’t read it” (68).

More prevalent in this narrative is the number seven. Again and again it is mentioned: Tinieblas has seven provinces (218); Mandragon enters and leaves Tinieblas seven times while he is a performer in the circus (130); Mandragon returns to Tinieblas for the last time in the seventh year of the Manduco dictatorship; the long drought lasts seven years; Genghis takes seven days to walk from Ciudad Tinieblas to Otán province in order to have Mandragon cure him of his impotence; after Genghis is cured of that ailment, rains last for seven months in Tinieblas (222); Genghis himself only lasts seven more days as ruler after meeting Mandragon; finally, Mandragon keeps Dred Mandeville alive for seven weeks while the businessman attends to financial affairs in Tinieblas. There is no indication in the narrative why seven recurs, just as there is no indication why sixty-four teeth is “an unmistakable sign”. Zamora believes the prevalence of numerical signs in apocalyptic narratives, as well as repetition of those and other signs, reflects man’s desire to know history better by quantifying it and giving it an identifiable pattern: “These narrative patterns, when added to the specific temporal and spatial calculations of apocalypse, indicate and also symbolically satisfy the desire of the apocalypticist and his audience for control over the otherwise intractable movement and meaning of history” (13). It is important to note that Zamora uses the phrase “symbolically satisfy” to describe the desire to understand history. These numbers do little to explain history and apocalypse; at most, they only point towards some ambiguous cosmic significance.

In *Mandragon*, the ambiguity of these signs is enhanced by the vagueness of the “power” that controls the universe and history. At least in biblical apocalyptic narratives there is the idea that God and His sense of justice set the apocalyptic events in motion. “Power”, as we have already seen, is never clearly defined in *Mandragon*, but there are certain clues given that indicate it is not exactly like a scriptural “God”. First of all, at no point does Mandragon ever substitute the word “power” with “God”, nor does he ever equate the two concepts. There is also an instance where Mandragon jokingly encourages a Jewish man to “curse God” (126), but he never discusses “power” with such levity. Indeed, when Mandragon talks about Doctora Matilde de Ardilla’s belief in “everything”, he lumps in Jesus and Gautama with astral bodies, tarot cards, and witches, implying that traditional notions of God are no more important than the other unorthodox forms of worship (244).

“Power”, then, is represented as some kind of force that transcends God and Satan, good and evil. This is made especially clear in chapter 32 where Mandragon encounters a Catholic priest in the Tinieblas jail. Reading the priest’s thoughts, Mandragon observes: “His mind functions by separating, works by either/or. Mandragon united opposites. Contraries were joined in me” (300). Mandragon professes to understand why the priest is confused: the clergyman wants to believe in Mandragon’s prophecies, but he can only see them as contrary ideas to the religious doctrine he is sworn to uphold. That doctrine is simply too basic, with its “either/or” structure, for its adherents to come to an adequate understanding of “power” and the immense universe. In fact, it is implicit in Mandragon’s arguments that “power” is too big for any form of human reason to grasp,

and that is why acceptance of “power” is man’s only choice; there is no sense trying to solve the insoluble. Thus, Mandragon never has to explain the nature of “power”, why “power” chooses Mandragon as its instrument, nor why “power” leads Tinieblas to apocalypse.

Despite all of the ambiguity surrounding power and the apocalypse, there is a moral element to Mandragon’s story. This morality is thrust in front of the reader on every page. Mandragon tells us the people of Tinieblas are corrupt. They need to be cleansed. They deserve what “power” will deliver. It is therefore peculiarly ironic that Mandragon, who at once belittles people like the Catholic priest for seeing the universe in simple, dualistic, good versus evil terms, also looks forward to the time when his “bad” enemies are swept away and his “good” followers are rewarded with a purged Tinieblas. This indicates that for all his gifts of persuasion, Mandragon is himself unclear about “power”, God, and morality.

It has already been noted that Mandragon places more emphasis on poesis than mimesis in his narrative, that he values imagination and fantasy over rationality and realism. There are nevertheless points in the narrative where Mandragon strives for a more journalistic feel. Though a pull towards mimesis may not be expected in pure fantasy, it is essential to apocalyptic fiction where the interpretation and chronicling of history are such important considerations (Zamora 3, 13).

Mandragon’s present tense, third-person snapshots of past and future events are one means of bringing a more closely mimetic quality to the narrative. These snapshots are set off in italics from the rest of the text, but unlike the italics in Kiki Sancudo’s story,

these do not indicate fantasies dreamed during sleep. They more closely resemble Dos Passos' "...Camera Eye naively recording events" (Hutcheon 136). These italicized sections work to verify, using the immortalizing present tense and the authoritative third-person, events that Mandragon recounts in past and future tenses. They are, thus, photographs in prose. Just as photographs serve as empirical proof of historical events, these passages verify what Mandragon recounts and back up what he predicts. Take, for example, Mandragon's claim that he uses "power" to tour other people's memories and thoughts. Recounting his investigation of Angela's childhood recollections, Mandragon says:

... when I toured her past, I lived in her as well as in her lovers. I wore her skin as well as theirs. I minced in her slim haunches at her first conquest, as well as flushed and panted with Don Serafino Salma, circus proprietor, promoter of attractions, her mother's uncle and her father's boss.

(260)

Then the text switches to italics and Mandragon isolates that representative memory:

His study: framed glossies of performers on the walls, nimbus of cigar smoke above the buff-and-white cowhide chair. Nine-year-old Angela minces in. Nimbles to his lap, twines his fat neck. "Give me some money, Tío Fino."

"Hmph! Money? For what?"

Lays her cheek on his lapel and, very softly, jounces her young nates. "For ice cream. For something,"

"Bandit! Well, then. We'll see."

Twists her head under his palm and jounces softly.

Then, one day, with a pert wiggle, "What's that, Tío Fino?"

"Nothing!"

"Don't fib," jiggling and giggling. "You've something down there, Tío Fino, I can feel it."

"Nada!"

(260)

A simple first-person, past tense narration of this story does not give it the same air of believability as does setting it off in italics, placing it in the present tense, and giving speaking roles to the two principal characters. The reader gets a more precise picture of young Angela as well as a particular example of her behavior when Mandragon uses this italicized prose snapshot.

There are some longer sections in the novel where Mandragon speaks of Tinieblan history and politics in a more matter-of-fact manner; he foregrounds mimesis over poesis in these parts of the narrative, thereby again diverting his story from pure fantasy. The most notable section includes his description of Alejo Sancudo's short fourth term in office, his ouster from the presidency, and Genghis Manduco's subsequent rise to power (146-158).

This dozen pages reflects much that has been written about Latin American military juntas: it describes a régime based on corruption that illegitimately gains power and controls the civilian population by force. The Tinieblas government resembles those found in Chile and Brazil during the seventies (*Mandragon* was completed in 1978), administrations which "employed torture and political killing as consciously adopted policy" (Silvert 170). With General Manduco replacing Alejo Sancudo and developing his own personality cult (*Mandragon* 153-54), the Tinieblas government also bears likeness to "... personalistic authoritarian dynasties, such as those of Stroessner in Paraguay and the Somozas in Nicaragua" (Ropp 210). The Tinieblas junta leaders are identical to Camilo Fuertes "gorillocrats" (*Dissertation* 3), an unintelligent set of men with no idea how to

govern. Mandragon again invokes an image of lobsters to describe the Tinieblas government:

When the colonels had gathered up all the power in Tinieblas, they began trying to take it from one another. The junta came to resemble a basket of lobsters. Each colonel tried to climb on top of the rest. All were equally untalented, but one was more fearful and suspicious. This was Genghis Manduco. He became Crustacean in Chief. One by one he maneuvered his fellow thieves into exile . Then he promoted himself general and ruled alone.

(147)

Suffering through this ridiculous political climate, Tinieblas, like so many other Latin American nations of the day, inevitably tumbles into economic and moral decline.

More specifically, the general political situation in Tinieblas, as described by Mandragon, closely resembles the general political situation in Panama, as described by a number of historians, after a military coup in 1968. This coup was organized to overthrow the eleven-day-old elected government of Arnulfo Arias (Schooley 483), just as the Tinieblan colonels overthrow Alejo Sancudo's own one-week-old elected régime (*Mandragon* 141). Emerging as strongman in Panama was Omar Torrijos, who established " ... a corrupt military/police institution with no historical sense of its legitimate societal functions and roles ..." (Ropp 215) As Genghis Manduco gives government ministries to friends and family (147, 149, 150), so did Torrijos "[serve] as an arbiter who ensured that each member of the General Staff and his associates received their "fair share" of the graft ..." (Ropp 216) In both Tinieblas and Panama, the colonels leave their countries in economic ruin; Torrijos' Panama amassed "one of the highest, per capita" foreign debts in

the world (Ropp 214-15), while Manduco's Tinieblas is "mortgaged ... to foreign banks to the fourth generation" (157).

More specific similarities between Manduco's Tinieblas and Torrijos' Panama become apparent if *Mandragon* is compared to *In The Time of The Tyrants*. Indeed, Torrijos appears to be a model for Manduco. Koster and Sánchez depict Torrijos as a coward who had to be pushed into power by a "buddy", Demetrios Lakas:

Torrijos was in line to take command. With that established, the four [men] began walking the short, downhill block to headquarters, but after a few steps, Torrijos panicked, wanted to bolt back to the Canal Zone.

"¡Hijo de puta!" squealed Lakas. He yanked a pistol from under his *guayabera* and stuck it in Torrijos's ribs. With his left hand, he seized Torrijos's shoulder and pulled him toward headquarters. He didn't put the pistol back till they got there.

(74)

Mandragon also portrays Genghis Manduco as a coward who has to be bullied into keeping power. When Genghis feels he has robbed Tinieblas of so much money that he cannot possibly expect to remain safely in power, he tells his brother Kublai that he plans to leave. "Was going to cut and run, but Kublai told him shut up, stop being a baby. The cash was gone, but the country still had credit ... If Kublai said so, things would be all right. Kublai was the shrewdest one in the family" (156).

Genghis and Torrijos also display similar methods in dealing with civilian opponents to their respective régimes. A Catholic priest and liberation theologian, Hector Gallego, criticized the Torrijos government for bullying peasants and was consequently kidnapped, beaten, "put on a Guardia helicopter and thrown, alive but paralyzed, into the sea" (164). Likewise, a Tinieblan journalist criticizes government control over print media

and is “put into prison, and later into the Pacific Ocean, from an altitude of two thousand feet, out the door of one of the new helicopters” (152). The similar nature and identical outcome of these fictional and historical events indicate that in this particular case, Mandragon’s narrative is analogical to Koster’s own interpretation of Panamanian history.

In the preface to *Mandragon*, Koster himself admits there are striking similarities between events in Tinieblas and subsequent historical events unfolding in the real world, but that all similarities were unintentional on his part:

Okay, I finished the book in September 1978, and during 1979 I discovered what I was really doing. First, Khomeini takes over, the holy man as political leader, and finally the Shah takes refuge in Panama where they try to shake him down. I had a vision, at once clear and skewed, that previewed events in Iran. I have no way at all to account for it, but I find it interesting.

Koster goes on to write that he was not making a conscious effort to imitate Panama in Tinieblas either. Instead, he “was making up a country that was a *bouillabaisse* of Central America and the Caribbean ...” But what resulted was a vision of his own, as prophetic as any presentiment “power” bestows upon Mandragon: “Now I know that what I was really doing, without knowing it, was describing a vision I had of Panama’s future, the dictatorship that currently exists here ...” Whether Koster’s prophecies are taken at face value or not, they indicate that he made a conscious effort to alter the direction of Mandragon’s narrative. He moves it away at times from the fantastical and poetic to make it more historically specific; his selection and combination process, to use Jakobson’s terms, frequently foregrounds mimesis over poesis. Though, as I have mentioned,

Mandragon's narrative is at times the most fantastical of the three Tinieblas stories, it also has a strong basis in both Panamanian and Latin American history.

This occasional movement from poesis to mimesis is especially evident in ironical passages. The irony seems more stable in this third novel, suggesting that Koster is less interested in problematizing the activity of reference here than he is in criticizing certain aspects of Latin American government and society. This represents a shift from the first two novels where the satirical target is often vague. In *Mandragon*, the reader does not have to search far to arrive at a more steady understanding of the irony.

One reason for this higher degree of ironical stability lies in the narrator's role. Mandragon heralds an apocalypse and, as mentioned earlier, he is therefore opposed to the status quo in society. When he uses irony, he uses it as a form of criticism directed towards the Tinieblan people and government, and because the Tinieblan people and government resemble, by Koster's own prefatorial admission, Latin American society in general, the irony applies to the extra-fictional real world as well.

There is a section in *Mandragon* where the narrator lists the military junta's nationalization schemes. These actions are in reality "... confiscation by the Manduco family or the Guardia general staff" (152). Mandragon points out that all media are taken over with "profits stuffed into satchels, and then their facilities used to tell the people how happy they were, what strides forward they were making under the general's inspired guidance" (152). Only one page further along in the narrative, after listing a number of incidents of graft and suppression of information, Mandragon comments: "The people were happy, as anyone who glanced at a newspaper knew instantly" (153). There can be

little doubt from the context of these remarks that Mandragon does not intend for them to be taken literally. The irony appears stable because its target is the Tinieblas government and its devisor is an avowed government critic. On the authorial level, a case can be made that Koster himself is criticizing Latin American military régimes, for his own remarks that the novel is a *bouillabaisse* of Central America and the Caribbean demonstrate that he is trying to render a credible fictional portrait of the region.

As stable as the irony appears, there is also good reason to doubt Mandragon's credibility as a faithful interpreter of both Tinieblas and the real world. Like Kiki and Camilo before him, Mandragon often only pays lip service to mimesis or notions of historical fidelity; at times he even shows disdain towards individuals attempting to discover any kind of empirical truth in the world (his disparaging remarks concerning the Englishman who values "practical reality" (130) being a case in point). What is so remarkable about Mandragon as a narrator, and it sets him apart from Kiki and Camilo in this one respect, is that he uses cunning, artful, and effective strategies to give himself the air of a reliable authority.

Mandragon's most effective strategy is modesty. Kiki and Camilo portray themselves as proud men, and though they both show signs of frailty at times, their stories are mostly recitations of physical (Kiki) and mental (Camilo) strength and bravado. Mandragon boasts occasionally and sometimes he derides others mercilessly, but for the most part he displays to the world a reflective, self-critical nature. Mandragon admits throughout his narrative that he has used "power" indiscriminately and often wrongly; he confesses that he does not know all the facts about his past; he realizes that he was a fool

to lose his head over Angela (38). All of these self-effacing admissions ingratiate Mandragon with those who appreciate humility in a narrator.

Mandragon also plays the role of victim convincingly enough to elicit considerable sympathy. Indeed, his stories of abuse at the hands of others are compelling. From his being chained to a post by La Negra throughout his childhood to his days as an attraction in Don Lorenzo's circus, Mandragon draws graphic examples to show just how extreme the abuse has been. Even when Mandragon admits to killing Alejo Sancudo, he claims he is sexually "bewitched" by Angela into doing the deed (257, 264). Mandragon's arguments are so well-wrought that he manages to justify even the commission of murder.

However, Mandragon's modesty is ultimately false, and his status as victim is overplayed. Early on in the narrative Mandragon demonstrates that he is as adept at using power over others as others have been at using power over him. In his description of the five girls who follow him, it becomes apparent that Mandragon has organized a cult (26-34). Mandragon controls the girls, names them, and even commands them to perform sexual acts with him (34). No matter how much Mandragon conceals his actions with descriptions of his magical powers and talk of his destiny as "power's instrument", he is in effect using the girls as he sees fit.

Just as Mandragon condemns the good/evil duality of conventional morality yet justifies the apocalypse using similar dualistic criteria, he also condemns irresponsible usage of power yet uses his own powers irresponsibly. Mandragon has no more qualification to be the ultimate authority on Tinieblas than either Kiki or Camilo; he is

irresponsible and unreliable like the other two narrators, and presents himself in an even more deceptively positive light than either of them.

What can be made then of the above-mentioned stable irony? If the narrator himself is unreliable, then it would follow that his ironical statements are not reliable either. Indeed, when regarded in isolation, Mandragon's statements are not stable, but when regarded within their context, the third novel in a trilogy, the statements gain ironical credibility. After all, they reiterate many of the ironical (and heretofore unstable) observations made in the first two novels by Kiki and Camilo. To take one example from many, all three narrators question Latin rulers' sanity and ability to govern: Kiki notes that Alejo Sancudo once worked in a madhouse and comments "... four years of tending the demented, deluded, and deranged is too valuable a preparation for politics to be coincidental" (*Prince* 25); Camilo refers to Tinieblan leaders as "uniformed gorillocrats" (*Diss.* 3); Mandragon too wryly notes that the military leaders "didn't have to give me any trial at all. That's the whole point of government by junta. I'm sure they had things to do and couldn't take all night" (40). None of these comments are to be taken completely at face value; their common characteristic is that they are ironically critical of political leadership in Latin America. When three narrators, all isolated from one another, make more or less similar ironical remarks, those remarks become more stable than when recounted by only one or two narrators.

Furthermore, Koster's authorial commentary in the Norton Edition prefaces and his more specific historical writing in *In the Time of the Tyrants* give the narrators' observations additional endorsement. Wayne Booth writes that accumulation of this kind

of evidence, ironical commentary within the narrative as well as authorial commentary elsewhere, is the most credible means of stabilizing irony:

In short, if we look at the first kind of clue, the author's direct statement in title, epigraph, postscript, or whatever, and ask how we *know* that the author speaks to us in a more direct tone in them than in his other words, we discover that the direct statement is always at best only a hint; our confidence begins to rise only when we come to other clues.

(57)

Even though Mandragon takes numerous flights of fantasy throughout his story, his often ironical remarks and criticism of Tinieblan and Latin American society and government are mostly stable reflections of views found elsewhere in Koster's writings.

At one point in *Carmichael's Dog*, the narrator reflects on "the joy of creation" and how Carmichael is completely addicted to it: "Besides bringing Carmichael something like love's joy and sorrow (thereby giving his life savor and substance), creation took over love's organizing role, subbed for love's maelstrom tug and lodestar attraction, love's obsessive concentrating force. Creative work made Carmichael's world go round" (223-24). There are certain narrative elements which indicate that Koster's own delight in the artifice of writing, his joy of creation, survives undiminished in the trilogy's final novel. Nameplay, to cite one example, is manifest throughout the book. As in *The Prince* and *The Dissertation*, the names in *Mandragon* often closely reflect their referents; there is meaning loaded in every proper noun. G. B. Crump alludes to this signification in the following discussion of two prominent names in the novel: "... Mandragon and Dred Mandeville, the Howard Hughes figure, represent a contrast between organic and mechanical relationships to the universe. As their names imply, Mandragon reunites

humanity with its essentially animal nature, while Mandeville tempts man to fall into soulless technology ..." ("Transformations" 249-50)

The reader is introduced to more of the Manduco family in *Mandragon*, and just like Genghis and Kublai, these other siblings are named after famous plunderers and warriors. Among the men there are Xerxes, Sulimán, Akbar, Mangu, Caligula, Timur, Nero, and Nebucodonosor (148-55). Genghis' two sisters are named after two larger-than-life Roman women, the amoral Mesalina and the vengeful Lucrezia (150, 152). That all of Genghis' brothers and sisters are high-ranking government officials, pilfering vast funds from the state treasury, is no surprise; they simply live up to their names.

Koster does not limit his nameplay to people. He also combines real place names to come up with fictitious hybrid forms -- "Texahoma" and "Kennissippi" are two examples (151). There are also restaurants and services with names that reflect the synthetic, ersatz nature of consumerism: "ZIPPYFRY, FAST-O-SWILL, MAXIGAS, YUMMY-GULP, FLASHBURGER" (190). Even vehicles in the novel sport names that reveal their function: the president's exotic German parade vehicle is a "Hochgesäss Kaiserwagen" which translates to "high-posterior kingmobile" (329); a storekeeper from the provinces owns a four-wheel-drive truck called a "Pitman Dromedary" (237); Genghis' spies drive a suitably evil-sounding "unmarked Piranha V-8" (208). All of this nameplay has a satirical edge and is a continuation of the "careful faking" that marks the first two novels.

Parody is also found throughout the text and it reflects the narrator's irreverent outlook. In this respect, the parody is similar to that found in *The Prince* and *The*

Dissertation, but in those novels, the narrator is often inadvertently the butt of his own jokes. Mandragon is too clever to fall victim time after time to his own use of language. Instead, he parodies others to great effect. When Genghis Manduco suffers from impotency and starts to lose his hold on power, he quickly becomes a pathetic figure. Mandragon capitalizes on the General's loss of status:

At first light, then, General Genghis Manduco, Blahisimo of the Tinieblan Revolution and Commander-in-Chief of the Tinieblan Blah-blah-blah, set out for Otán. On foot, because all other means of transportation were denied him. Alone, because everyone he ordered to accompany him said, "Go by yourself, asshole, you're the one who's cursed" ... in a frayed sombrero and a tattered shirt and a ragged pair of trousers, all of which he begged plaintively from the compound's mestizo grounds keeper after a final attempt at command produced a sneer, a raised middle finger, and a burble of moist wind blown in his face.

(214)

Here the pretentiousness of martial forms of address is parodied when Mandragon uses "Blahisimo ... Blah-blah-blah" to refer to Manduco. The General is further ridiculed when a peasant of mixed race treats him with complete disrespect. That the President of the country is forced to beg to this amused field worker is the final, crowning insult.

Rebozo's singing duck concert is another prominent parodic episode in the novel (136-38). Mandragon describes the scene and music in a tone of high-seriousness, yet what occurs is a burlesque, the reduction of concert hall pomp and ceremony to a debased circus act:

(Rebozo ... Bows deeply -- once, twice, thrice -- to the audience: more applause, then faces the ducks and draws a baton from the breast of his coat. Flourishes it in air, right hand six inches northeast of his temple, left hand clasping his paunch; now sweeps it slowly in a reclining figure 8: left and over, right and over, left):

1st DUCK Quaaaaaaah; Quaaaaaaah; quaaaaaaah; quaaa.
 2nd DUCK (at Rebozo's cue, poked with a slightly
 bent left forefinger) Qua qua, qua qua.

This unorthodox version of Johann Strauss' "The Beautiful Blue Danube" continues on for another page before "Reboscanini" dramatically and triumphantly brings the performance to a close. Clearly, the traditional concert performance and the musical form of the waltz are subverted here. Even the famous conductor Arturo Toscanini is diminished to a clown's level. This scene, to use Linda Hutcheon's words "both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" (11). It is an essentially postmodern paradoxical scene where the paradox itself is the source of humour.

The sheer proliferation of magic realism in the novel also indicates that Koster's delight in poesis and artifice is undiminished at the trilogy's end. Indeed, because magic itself plays an even greater role in *Mandragon* than in either *The Prince* or *The Dissertation*, an argument could be made that Koster's interest in artifice grows. Keeping in mind Chanady's statement that "reality is so astonishing that the greatest difficulty encountered by Latin American authors is making the incredible seem believable to a reader unfamiliar with their world" (Chanady in Hinchcliffe 51), Koster's greater reliance upon magic realist techniques in *Mandragon* reveals that the Latin American worlds he portrays seem to grow even more incredible over the years.

It is more difficult to categorize the magic realism found in *Mandragon* than it is to categorize the magic realism found in the first two novels. Rather than relying on one form over another, Koster most often mixes anthropological and ontological magic realism in this last narrative. That is to say that antinomy in the novel often can be resolved by

referring to cultural and mythological explanations (anthropological magic realism), but those explanations are often not explicit in the text (ontological magic realism). The reader is expected either to know the rationale behind the magic realism or not to worry about finding reasons.

Many of Mandragon's rituals, for instance, have cultural precedents, but these precedents are not specific to a particular society. G.B. Crump researched the various rites Mandragon performs and found that "... Mandragon's three psychic deaths and rebirths, his initiation dream of entering a cave and having his head filled with crystals, his ability to be in two places at once, and his ritual dance with drum and animal costume are all drawn from the traditional folklore of shamanism" ("Transformations" 249). Crump goes on to cite general statements by Joseph Campbell and others, but does not specifically note Latin American or American cultural precedents. Because Mandragon never alludes to a specific myth in any of the above episodes, yet Crump's research shows that it is indeed a general mythology which influences the narrative, these magical rituals represent a mix of anthropological and ontological magic realism.

A more obvious example of this mixture of anthropological and ontological magic realism, an example where a specific cultural precedent is manifest, is the fifth myth surrounding Mandragon's birth. This is the version where Mandragon's mother is impregnated by "the wind". This story is clearly based on the Christian immaculate conception theory -- both Mandragon's mother and the Virgin Mary receive "a supernatural message" and give "a miraculous birth" (Harvey, A.E. 225). The wind "told [Mandragon's mother] to go out to Punta Amarga and bathe there at night, when the

beach was empty. The wind gave her no peace, and so she went” (48). Mary also receives an otherworldly message, delivered by the angel Gabriel: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy child to be born will be called ‘Son of God’” (Luke 1: 34-36). Another similarity between the two stories is the place of birth. Neither woman has the means to secure a conventional place to give birth, so in the agrarian society of Judea, Mary finds a manger in which to have her child; in the military dictatorship of Tinieblas, Mandragon’s mother delivers her baby in the rear of an army truck (49). Though Mandragon never states outright that his own birth bears a remarkable resemblance to the birth of Christ, the immaculate conception is one of the central Christian myths; the cultural precedent is therefore clear to Western readers.

Isolated supernatural acts in the novel most often take the form of ontological magic realism. These acts are spellbinding yet Mandragon simply mentions them and then continues his narrative without further explanation; antinomy is resolved because the narrator simply accepts these occurrences “as normal” (Spindler 82). Of course, the novel abounds with examples: Mandragon operates a typewriter without touching it (126); Mandragon turns a light bulb on and off without the aid of a switch (124); Mandragon tortures Alejo with imaginary scorpion stings (273); Mandragon plays a prank on a roustabout by making the tire the man is in the process of changing bounce away in clear defiance of physical laws (105-06). All of these actions, and many others, are accepted as matters of fact rather than explained. When Mandragon attempts on occasion to rationalize this magic, he simply ascribes it to “power”, an ineffable force.

At one point in the narrative Mandragon implies that his magic does not always work unless observers are in a proper frame of mind. That is to say that his magic is often contingent on others. He recounts an instance when some drunks accost him at the circus:

... a bunch of Chilean naval cadets heckled me, yelled drunkenly I was a fake, and on impulse I tossed a bulb to one of the loudest. Began flashing in his hand the instant he caught it, and then his friends were laughing convulsively, flicking their fingers as if to shake them off their hands ... They took it with them when they left, and one of them returned the next evening and told me it had continued blinking ... into the night, but its light grew dimmer as they sobered up and refused to shine at all the next morning.

(124)

It is noteworthy that this magical incident, and many others of a similar nature, occurs at a circus, an environment where incredible things are expected to happen. Later on, when Mandragon leads the cult, he does not fail his followers; he performs magic like a true mystic. Even when Mandragon becomes a government leader, his reputation precedes him and his magic is almost a matter of course by this time.

Conversely, Mandragon's magic sometimes works best on individuals who have absolutely no faith in it whatsoever. The poor tourist from "Porlock in Somerset" declares Mandragon to be nothing more than a fraud, and to that tourist's chagrin, "when he and his party left the Rotunda it began raining. Poured in torrents, but only on them, only in a circle three yards wide around the gentleman who liked practical reality" (130). The proper frame of mind to witness this magic, then, is twofold: either the witness expects something extraordinary or he is disdainful of anything out of the ordinary.

When the novels are read in sequence, Mandragon's tale has a ring of truth because it endorses the fictional histories put forward earlier by Kiki Sancudo and Camilo

Fuertes. The geography of Tinieblas and its fictional neighbours Ticamala and Costaguana does not change at all in the trilogy. Many local legends, like the magnificently-gifted sex prodigy Irene Hormiga, are alluded to in all three books (*Prince* 87-91; *Diss.* 186-89; *Mandragon* 167). Because none of these historical dates, events, and figures given in the first two novels are disputed, but rather endorsed in *Mandragon*, a valid, stable fictional history of Tinieblas emerges.

It can be argued that a more stable interpretation of Latin American life, people, and politics also emerges by the end of *Mandragon*. Koster indicates in the novel's preface that he has written a "*bouillabaisse*" of Latin America, and the presence of highly mimetic narrative techniques in the novel (such as the prose snapshots and the analogical relationship of Tinieblan events to those in Panama and other Latin American countries) successfully foregrounds illusionism.

Paradoxically, the novel's strong emphasis on poesis also helps to develop a more stable interpretation of Latin American society. As Lois Parkinson Zamora explains, apocalyptic narratives hold "powerful poetry" (1), but because apocalyptic narrators are "radically opposed to existing spiritual and political practices" (2), their narratives are potent social commentaries. By writing an apocalyptic novel, Koster clearly indicates, through his narrator, that there are fundamental problems in Latin American society, frustratingly immense predicaments, that perhaps only radical, apocalyptic change could ever eradicate.

The presence of irony, parody, nameplay, and other varieties of cynical language indicates a subversive attitude not only in the narrator, but also in Koster himself. After all,

this subversiveness does not begin with *Mandragon*; it is yet another common thread running throughout the Tinieblas novels. It strongly suggests that Koster himself believes Western society in general and Latin American society in particular to be worthy of ridicule and scorn.

In spite of all these indications that a more stable interpretation of Latin America emerges by the end of the Tinieblas saga, there is one destabilizing element present in the first two Tinieblas novels that also remains as a strong presence in *Mandragon*: an unreliable narrator. Just like Kiki and Camilo, Mandragon has obsessions and intentions, and they colour the portrait of Latin America that he draws. That Mandragon is more adept at hiding his obsessions and intentions, that his rhetorical gifts are often more subtle than those of the first two Tinieblan narrators, is even more reason to suspect his motives and his story.

Considering *Mandragon* as one panel of Koster's triptych, it is apparent that this particular narrative at times comes closer than the other two to functioning as allegory to Panama. Certain narrative elements, most notably irony, appear to stabilize, and the reader gets a sense that a clear picture of Latin America is emerging. However, *Mandragon* also resembles *The Prince* and *The Dissertation* because its narrator is ultimately subversive; Mandragon's unreliability distorts and renders ambiguous the history that is focalized through him. What results in *Mandragon* is the same indeterminacy that is so significant in the other two Tinieblas novels. Exactly what Koster is saying about Panama, about history, about fiction is still uncertain.

What is left to consider, however, is *In The Time of The Tyrants*. In this book, Koster moves away from creating fiction contingent upon history to a book-length attempt at a scholarly history. By writing this book, Koster turns to the historical referent for the Tinieblas trilogy to examine more carefully that which is skewed by all three of his narrators. In this chronicle of recent Panamanian dictatorships, Koster himself is a narrator and the “careful faking/dreaming” found in the novels is somewhat restrained. *In The Time of The Tyrants* can be found among the non-fiction in most libraries but, as we shall see, this book does not represent a radical departure from the fictional prose of the Tinieblas trilogy.

That *In The Time of The Tyrants* is a book of non-fiction is generally accepted. In a 1992 review of *Carmichael's Dog*, MacDonald Harris directly states that *In The Time of The Tyrants* is “non-fiction” (3). Steve C. Ropp lists it as one of three recommended “recent accounts” of the Noriega régime (113, Note 1). Even the dustjacket on the 1992 hardcover Norton edition of *Carmichael's Dog* refers to *In The Time of The Tyrants* as a “non-fiction exposé of Panama’s former dictator Manuel Noriega.” Certainly, *In The Time of The Tyrants* differs from the Tinieblas books in that it deals exclusively with real people, real places, and historical events that have been documented by other historians in other texts. A persuasive argument can be made, however, that Koster and Sánchez’ Panamanian history contains numerous fictional elements that make the work very entertaining to read but lessen its mimetic credibility. G.B. Crump notes that the Tinieblas novels “blur once axiomatic distinctions between the realms of reality and imagination” (“Koster” 440), and it can be fairly stated that similar blurring occurs within *In The Time of The Tyrants*.

Though the line Koster draws between imagination and reality, poesis and mimesis, fiction and non-fiction, is often indistinct, he employs several strategies to indicate to readers that this work is a legitimate historical account. His first legitimizing strategy was to place Sánchez’ name on the title page, for to have a Panamanian journalist as co-author immediately lends a certain sanction to all that Koster writes about the country. The criticism that “all kinds of suppositions, associations, and fictions appear to crowd the unfamiliar space outside one’s own” (Said 259) cannot be applied easily to Koster’s writing because Sánchez the Panamanian is there to correct those misapprehensions. The

text, on first glance, would seem to be ideally balanced: Koster gives the outsider's perspective on Panamanian politics while Sánchez provides an insider's point of view; easy generalizations on Koster's part could be set right by Sánchez, and emotional or patriotic tendencies in Sánchez' writing could be put straight by Koster.

Scholarly historical texts are built using similar strategies to classic realist texts, with the difference between the two being a difference of degree -- in the process of selection and combination which constitutes the writing of historical texts, there is a concerted effort to deliver faithful mimesis. The degree of mimesis in classic realist texts, on the other hand, is not as high. *In The Time of The Tyrants* is often highly mimetic in the historical sense, but all of the strategies used in classic realism are evident throughout the text. There is, for example, close illusionism demonstrated at many points: historical figures, rather than fictional characters, are used; other scholarly historical texts are consulted and referred to; specific dates for events are given, times which agree with those stated in other historical texts; the events themselves accord with versions provided by other scholars elsewhere. It is plain that Koster and Sánchez often engage in legitimate scholarship in *In The Time of The Tyrants* and usually conform to the procedures and regulations that are intrinsic to the discipline of History.

As narrative which leads to closure is an essential aspect of classic realism, so too is it central to historical research. Tony Bennett makes this point: "For philosophies of history must reduce all differences to the identity of History as an objectively known process which, since it assigns all events their significance, closes off -- or promises to close off -- that infinite deferment of ultimate meanings which Derrida intends by the

concept of *différence*” (59). Indeed, this is what Koster and Sánchez do throughout their text. Torrijos’ story is closed when he dies in a plane crash; Noriega’s story is closed when his government falls to the United States Marine Corps. However, Koster admits historical debate on the cause of Torrijos’ crash continues today and will continue with new evidence or theories of the cause presented in the future (235-36), just as Noriega’s régime and its impact on Panamanian society will continue to be discussed. The historical record then will inevitably change. Koster and Sánchez’ conclusions on Panamanian history are provisional conclusions, not the final word, and will serve as evidential fuel for future historical debates.

The third constituent of classic realist narratives, hierarchy of discourses, is in place throughout the text. The narrative voice claims a position in the text that is detached from both Koster and Sánchez and superior to their positions. Hence, this narrative voice never makes mention of “you” or “I”. When either of the writers are referred to, they are mentioned as figures that took an active part in the history, and the reference is always made in the third person. There is, for example, the following account of an encounter between Koster and Noriega:

“What’s going on, Colonel?” asked Koster. Noriega shook a finger: “Yo no sé nada.” “Then can I report that Panamanian military intelligence knows nothing?” Koster grinned and held out his pencil and notebook. Noriega grinned back at him pointing the finger: “Do that and I’ll hurt you.” (201)

Sánchez too makes several indirect comments including this description of his newspaper work on the Hugo Spadafora story:

Sánchez waited, hoping to hear the same [information] from some other source. Finally, he used a method he had for

dealing with stuff that smelled true but lacked confirmation: he assumed a schoolmaster's tone and assigned homework. "For homework, write one sheet on what happened at Corozo ..." That night the mystery voice called again. The name, it said, had caused panic among Hugo's murderers."

(33)

This narrative hierarchy, with no mention of "you" or "I" at its highest level, and Koster and Sánchez taking the roles of historical figures, is maintained without variation throughout the text. Because the narrative voice is never undermined, it gains a certain authority, authority that is needed in any text which purports to supply truths or provisional truths. Thus, this stable hierarchy of discourses is another strategy the authors employ to give an air of legitimacy to their history.

All of these strategies are effective to a certain extent, and to an indifferent or unparticular reader, they may be sufficiently convincing to classify *In The Time of The Tyrants* as non-fiction. There are, however, several problems that arise in the text, including a constantly subjective tone and peculiar documentation techniques. These are substantial problems for any non-fiction history and, in this case, merit close scrutiny.

Commenting on the place of emotion in novels, the narrator in *Carmichael's Dog* writes:

In fiction, imagination does the steering. Reason sits in the back and keeps its mouth shut -- though now and then, if it notices something important, it may make respectful comment or suggestion. But what's under the hood? The writer's emotions. Without them his book won't make it around the block. (108)

Emotion, then, is intrinsic to a novelist's work. However, in making the transition to non-fiction it must be difficult for a writer to maintain a sense of emotional detachment

or neutrality, especially when people he knows are being tortured or administering that torture. As Koster and Sánchez say in their description of Rubén Paredes' régime: "One remembers it as a succession of T.V. programs, and these would have been very funny had they been fictitious, or set in a country where one didn't live or have friends" (263).

The authors write movingly and personally of a young man, Jorge Camacho, who was killed allegedly on Torrijos' orders: "Koster knew him. That is to say he'd heard him speak and seen him in action. They were tear-gased together one morning ... outside the U.S. embassy on Avenida Balboa, where Camacho and company had gone to throw red paint and Koster to pick up a little of *Newsweek's* money" (209). Camacho had been involved in student politics and was vehemently opposed to the régime. Torrijos murdered Camacho to prevent him from organizing a demonstration during a visit to Panama by American president Jimmy Carter. Obviously, Koster was struck by Camacho's courage and the values the young man had demonstrated in his speeches, for he highly praises the student:

Camacho was a patriot. He believed in sovereignty and national dignity, words and phrases that were just talk to Torrijos. Hence he mocked Torrijos, hence he had to be murdered. The mere existence of Jorge Camacho made those words and phrases rattle emptily inside Torrijos like pebbles in a gourd, and the anguish of it was unbearable.

(210)

Camacho was just one of so many victims that moved Koster and Sánchez: repeatedly, Koster writes of his own shock and outrage at seeing soldiers beat a young boy with hoses (32, 249, 277); Sánchez had a brother jailed by the guardia (98); Sánchez himself spent time in jail for imagined crimes, was released only through the efforts of

friends like Koster, and then spent a number of years in exile (42-46). When a scholar is involved in such events, has friends affected profoundly by the unfolding history, there is a real threat of subjectivity being foregrounded over objectivity in his work. Or, if one accepts Stanley Fish's premise that "the choice is never between objectivity and interpretation but between an interpretation that is unacknowledged as such and an interpretation that is at least aware of itself" (57), Koster and Sánchez' interpretation of Panamanian history displays a high degree of self-awareness.

There is a point in *The Dissertation* where Camilo Fuertes states that "the conventional techniques of scholarly investigation simply will not work [in Tinieblas]" (274). He elaborates by claiming

There are no proper archives in Tinieblas. Few Tinieblans write memoirs; none publish their letters. Tinieblas has no tradition of independent journalism. All newspapers are now run by the state, while before the advent of our current tyranny, each was the creature of some interested faction and its reports no more reliable than the yelpings of wild dogs. More, since General Manduco took over, Tinieblans have become more reluctant to talk about anything more controversial than the weather. (274)

Despite all of Camilo's shortcomings as a reliable narrator, it seems in the above comment that he senses the current state of affairs in Latin American scholarship. Koster and Sánchez also seem to have encountered many of these problems in conducting their own research. *In The Time of The Tyrants* is filled with undocumented rumours and speculation. Though the authors do not resort to Camilo's technique of conducting interviews with spirits, they do cite dubious sources including grudge-holding individuals¹⁹ and *Penthouse* magazine (407).

More disturbing than speculation, biased informants, or *Penthouse* being a bibliographical entry, is the authors' deceptive citation method. There is nothing, no asterisks or numbers, to draw the reader's attention to the fact that works are indeed cited. Instead, upon reading a passage, one must guess that a work has been cited, then turn to the back pages to ascertain the story's provenance. Reviewer Rhoda Rabkin has drawn attention to this problem: "The text contains no footnote markers, but many of its assertions are supported in twelve pages of notes at the back of the book" (354). Perhaps this is the reason why she also writes "Although not a work of academic scholarship, the book contains much information of potential use to scholars" (354). Carrying Rabkin's argument further, not giving precise indication of sources, yet providing referential information at the back of the book is a clever way to hide suspicious research: attention is not drawn to the sources, yet the author can claim that those sources are indeed provided; the onus is artfully placed upon the reader to find the author's sources rather than upon the author to provide clear references.

One among many examples of the problems inherent in this citation method occurs early in the book, during discussion of Torrijos' coup d'état. The claim is that prior to his rise to power, Torrijos had to break up a crowd of student demonstrators, but "At the first sign of action, Omar Torrijos bolted, got shotgun pellets in the buttocks -- somewhat a red badge, but not of courage. His career, at least, suffered no damage. [Boris] Martínez managed things till the students surrendered and told no tales till after Torrijos betrayed him" (71). A reader may well wonder about the source of this remarkable information concerning Torrijos' injury: is it documented in medical records? Did Torrijos at one time

admit to it? Are we to take the clue given in the text that Martínez is the sole source? If Martínez is indeed the source, it is peculiar that the authors would take the word of a corrupt former Panamanian officer, especially one with good reason to lie about Torrijos. At any rate, looking through the notes there is no specific reference to page 71, the point in the text where the above anecdote is printed. The only indication of a source, and this is a vague indication, is the note for page 69 which states: "*La Prensa* published an interview with Martínez on October 10, 1980. Guillermo Sánchez Borbón conversed at length with him in March and April 1988" (401). The most likely conclusion to be drawn is that Martínez is the sole source for the story. Nevertheless, there is no precise reference, and this raises yet more doubt about what is factual and what is fictional in *In The Time of The Tyrants*.

As if to give further backing to Camilo Fuertes' remarks on the failure of traditional forms of scholarship in Latin America, the authors occasionally admit to the rumour and innuendo that is so prominent in their writing. Commenting in a note about riot-control operations in Panama, the authors write "PDF riot control training stressed anger and adrenaline production. Persistent rumours have it that dobermans and paramilitaries were systematically given cocaine before operations" (410). Earlier in the book, the authors use another story, "apocryphal perhaps", to prove President Demetrios Lakas' corruption. The gist of this tale is that an old woman accuses Lakas of stealing ten million dollars, to which he responds "Not at all, señora, I stole twenty" (122). Unsubstantiated reports such as these are remarkable, and work well to stir emotion in certain readers, but they prove little.

Looking closely at the cited sources, it is plain that most share the authors' opinions and general values. It is also evident that these are the sources given the most credence. For example, Koster and Sánchez devote several pages to the observations of Jerry L. Dodson, a one-time U.S. consul in the Panamanian provinces. The authors claim Dodson "believed in things like democracy and freedom and the government's standing up for its citizens" (120). Another source, former U.S. Ambassador to Panama Jack Hood Vaughn, is referred to throughout the text, is compared favourably to another virtuous source, Arthur Davis, and is also called "as competent a person on Latin America as carried a U.S. passport" (189). The majority of textual sources are American journals and newspapers, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Harper's*, and the *Miami Herald*. All of these publications, like the above mentioned diplomats, at least pay lip-service to the core American values that the authors of *In The Time of The Tyrants* continually uphold.

As for other sources, sources which may contradict Koster and Sánchez' historical interpretations, they are mostly absent, or referred to deprecatingly. Writing about the downfall of Boris Martínez, the powerful officer exiled by Torrijos, Koster and Sánchez contend

A pretext, an immediate cause, was required. Not for the country, for the troops. They appreciated Martínez's qualities and might not have stomached his being chucked out for no reason. On February 21, Martínez supplied the makings of one in a radio talk about land reform. Few heard the talk itself, in which Martínez proposed distributing untilled land and other similarly mild measures, but everyone soon heard about it. Radical, that's what it was! Communistic! Variations on this theme were sung by a chorus of tame journalists, then taken up by professional anticommunists with appropriate head shaking and tongue

clucking. Later the mythographers echoed them, so that now even scholarly works make Martínez's "radicalism" the reason for his fall and mention the land reform speech, though without quoting it.

(116)

There is no reference to the "mythographers'" identity, nor to the "scholarly works". The authors criticize these phantom scholars for neglecting to quote Martínez' speech, yet there is no quotation given within *In The Time of The Tyrants* either. To produce such harsh and heavy criticism of other scholars' lack of objectivity, without providing any substantial proof of it, is irresponsibility bordering on hypocrisy.

Setting aside issues of ideological bias and imprecise citation methods, the tone and style of *In The Time of The Tyrants* also often pulls the text further away from close mimesis and nearer to fanciful poesis. As we have already seen, this text often reads more like one of Koster's novels than a serious historical account. Many of the writing techniques Koster employs so masterfully in the Tinieblas trilogy are also manifest in *In The Time of The Tyrants*.

Metaphor is used forcefully throughout the text, enhancing otherwise staid images and enlivening the authors' ideological assertions. The following paragraph, comparing a particular politician to a dog, is a distinctly prominent extended metaphor:

Vice-President Delvalle made no objection. He put on the trappings of office as avidly as ever a dog lapped vomit, nor was any dog more reverent toward its master. As soon as he was sworn in as puppet president, Delvalle went *on foot* the half mile from the palace to PDF headquarters, grinning houndishly all the way, to fawn publicly on Manuel Noriega, and for thirty months thereafter he grinned and fawned -- begged, retrieved, rolled over, heeled on cue -- as the ring of evil tightened on his country and his countrymen were ever more harshly oppressed, till at length he was no longer

useful and Noriega thrust him out as he had Barletta.

(37)

Delvalle is not one of the major figures in the text, yet the sharp, scathing description effectively lowers him to a beastly level. This paragraph not only degrades Delvalle personally, but creates a vivid image of the Noriega government as a contemptible institution wherein status was obtained through sycophancy rather than merit.

In another instance, the authors use a variety of metaphors to describe Noriega himself as an individual worthy of ridicule yet fearsome at the same time:

R.M. Koster escorted [*Washington Post* journalist Sally Quinn] to Noriega's office, and Noriega took one look at her and excused himself and came back reeking of eau de cologne -- a natty little guy in a blue business suit, bouncy, full of energy, victim (it's true) of a bad acne problem, so that his cheeks looked like the landscape at Verdun, shell holes and pools of mustard gas, so that the people called him Cara de Piña (Pineapple Face), but his eyes could twinkle, went glassy reptilian only now and then.

(200)

The assertion that Noriega's face looked like pools of mustard gas at Verdun is both comical and appropriately violent. Considering that many, if not all, readers are familiar with the oft-photographed Noriega's physical appearance, the authors' description also enhances any negative recollections of previous portraits that readers may have. The final metaphor in this passage, describing Noriega's eyes as "glassy reptilian" conjures baleful images of a ruthless, dangerous man. Expressive language like this is undoubtedly the work of skilled fiction practitioners: it serves to energize the prose, giving this ostensibly mimetic work a poetic feel.

Koster's love of nameplay, as we have seen, is evident throughout his fiction. At one point in his last novel, Koster writes that the semi-autobiographical Carmichael "enjoyed names" and played with them constantly (201, 199). It is not altogether surprising then that this recurrent element in Koster's fiction should again appear within *In The Time of The Tyrants*.

In fact, the relationship between name and referent is often close, sometimes paradoxical, in Koster and Sánchez' non-fictional Panamanian republic -- just as it is in Koster's fictional worlds. The authors write of the papal nuncio to Panama, Monseñor La Boa, who first allied himself with "viper" Noriega, but turned out to display a decency and generosity which belied his name (39). Later in the text, the authors describe two Noriega "cronies", Monito Pérez and Tití Sosa: "Connoisseurs of what's-in-a-name will enjoy it that their nicknames translate as 'Monkey' and 'Marmoset,' while Noriega, of course, as a military officer, was a 'gorilla,' according to slang current throughout Latin America. An ape trio" (378). What differentiates the nameplay in the novels from that of *In The Time of The Tyrants* is that there is stability in the latter text. All nameplay in Koster and Sánchez' work has an identifiable moral basis: it is assumed that the "connoisseur" readers share the same American-style, humanist values as the authors and therefore they can all laugh at the expense of Noriega and his ape-like, immoral colleagues. In the novels, as has already been demonstrated, a basis for the nameplay is not always so easily identifiable.

What can be said for the nameplay in *In The Time of The Tyrants* can also be extended to other forms of satire and irony in the book. That is, satire and irony are stable throughout the work. Remembering Wayne Booth's assertion that stable irony is

“*intended*, deliberately created to be heard or read and understood with some precision by other human beings ...” (5), and knowing that a particular, readily identifiable, set of values underlie *In The Time of The Tyrants*, the satire and irony in the text works as yet another means for the authors to put their political message across. Thus, when Noriega is cynically likened to “his forerunner Alphonse Capone” (295), one of the most infamous transgressors of American humanistic values, the satire is not lost on readers. Likewise, when the authors place within quotation marks the phrase “a nation conceived in liberty” (354), it is clear that they regard recent American governments as sorry bureaucracies failing to uphold foundational American moral principles.

In one sense, however, there is a certain instability to the satire and irony. Because these two elements are a constant presence in the text, they are felt even in the most serious passages. When the authors detail the torture inflicted upon Hector Gallego, for example, they include such lighthearted remarks as “We can even hear [Noriega] proposing the method [of killing Gallego]: ‘Let’s see if he’s saintly enough to fly’” (165). Even in the chapter on Hugo Spadafora’s disappearance, the authors wryly comment on the torturers: “When they were finished, spent if you like, they broke two of [Spadafora’s] ribs. This must have had some ritual meaning for them ... Then, like honest craftsmen, they signed their work, used a needle and indelible ink to tattoo “F-8” on Hugo Spadafora’s shoulder” (30). The intention in both of the above comments is to ridicule Noriega and his henchmen; that much is certain. Yet Gallego and Spadafora serve as props in the farce the authors describe, thereby losing a measure of their dignity as faultless victims. Satire such as this is macabre in the extreme; it is as though the authors derive

morbid pleasure by recounting these stories. This dark, ironical satire, found elsewhere in the text as well, is one element which undermines the moral authority claimed by Koster and Sánchez.

It is apparent, then, that just as the distinction between reality and imagination is often obscured in the Tinieblas novels, so too is it indistinct in Koster's only major attempt at nonfiction, *In The Time of The Tyrants*. By working with a Panamanian journalist and using common scholarly writing techniques including a high level of illusionism, the closing off of deferment of meaning, and a rigid hierarchy of discourses, Koster displays academic earnestness in this history. All of the above writing strategies are also found in classic realist fictional works and do not necessarily confer non-fictional status on a text. In fact, the constant presence of rumour and innuendo as well as the imprecise citation methods in the book suggest that Koster and Sánchez frequently stray from scholarly objectivity. The proliferation of fictional writing techniques, including metaphor, nameplay, irony and satire, also suggests that the authors tend occasionally to forsake the historic in favour of the poetic. In short, the text rides along the axis between mimesis and poesis, sometimes moving closer to one pole or another but never close enough for a precise classification.

If *In The Time of The Tyrants* were the work of R.M. Koster alone, it could be summarized as the most direct expression yet of his personal politics and attitudes towards Latin Americans. The name Guillermo Sánchez also appears on the book's cover, so authorial responsibility does not rest solely on Koster. There is considerable evidence, however, that Koster is mainly responsible: the tone, style, and language resemble the

Tinieblas novels, and from the outset it is clear that American humanist values inform the text. Nevertheless, in a collaborative work such as this, there is no sure way of telling which words are Koster's and which words belong to Sánchez. Just as *In The Time of The Tyrants* defies strict definition as a work of fiction or nonfiction, so too do Koster's personal beliefs and politics remain elusive.

After reading and considering R.M. Koster's three Tinieblas novels and *In The Time of The Tyrants*, certain parallels in narrative strategy between the works are manifestly clear. Even though each text is designed to be read independently of the others, these common strategies link them all and mark them as Koster creations. On one level, the strategies bring a postmodern indeterminacy to the texts, yet they also plainly serve two classic purposes of literature, to instruct and delight. The reader leaves Koster's Tinieblas and Panama having received entertaining lessons in both real and fictional history; however, the teacher/artificer himself, his motivations, and his opinions are never fully revealed.

One strategy common to all four books is the simultaneous use of and disdain towards classic realist fictional techniques. Catherine Belsey's constituent elements of classic realism -- illusionism, a hierarchy of discourses, and closure -- are all faithfully applied at times in Koster's books. Hence, as we have seen in *The Prince*, illusionism is enhanced by Koster's presentation of a flesh and blood narrator with emotions as complex as those of individuals in the extra-textual real world. Hierarchy of discourses is maintained in *In The Time of The Tyrants*, where the authors are either invisible within the narrative or referred to in the third-person. Perhaps the most prominent example of closure in the books occurs at the end of *Mandragon*, where Tinieblas is destroyed in a quintessentially apocalyptic fashion.

For each instance of classic realist principles upheld, there are other instances of those theories renounced. Strict illusionism is scorned time after time in *The Dissertation*, where scholarly research, non-fiction's equivalent to classic realist illusionism, is

conducted by a delusional narrator. *The Dissertation* also provides the best example of a breakdown in hierarchy of discourse: Camilo Fuertes constantly inserts his subjective commentary (or *discours*) into the *histoire* and thereby undermines his own claims of historical truth. Closure is most problematical at the end of *The Prince*, where more questions than answers arise; it is also plain from Tinieblan echoes in *Carmichael's Dog* that *Mandragon's* apocalypse does not hermetically seal the world of Tinieblas for once and for all.

Another narrative strategy common to all four texts is the blending of history and fiction. The line between these two realms is often blurred in both the history and the novels. Fictional characters like *The Prince's* Kiki Sancudo are present at historical events such as the Helsinki Olympics. Likewise, historical figures including John F. Kennedy are present in fictional situations like the meeting in San José, Costa Rica with the President of Tinieblas that is described in *The Dissertation*. Also, there are fictional characters who resemble historical figures -- a prime example being Alejandro Sancudo, whose personality, political leanings, and career are remarkably similar to those of former Panamanian President Arnulfo Arias.

All of these similarities between the historical world and the fictional Republic of Tinieblas are brought into a sharper focus in *In The Time of The Tyrants*. In one sense, the book is like a key to Tinieblas, for Koster and Sánchez write of historical figures who must have been models for Tinieblan characters. Dr. Roberto Arias, for instance, is an individual mentioned only briefly in *In The Time of The Tyrants*, yet his impression lasts for one simple reason: he is a mirror image of Kiki Sancudo. Manuel Noriega kept on his

office wall a photo of himself parachute jumping, and one day, Arias, “Arnulfo’s nephew and, incidentally, husband of Dame Margot Fonteyn, the ballerina, visited Noriega in his headquarters office and said (having, like his host a sense of gallows humor, along with plenty of chutzpah in his own right), ‘I assume this is the last picture of Padre Gallego’” (165). It is evident from this short excerpt that Kiki is derived, at least partly, from Arias: he is a relative of a president, as is Arias; Kiki is married to an internationally renowned actress, equal in fame to Margot Fonteyn; finally, Kiki too possesses a high level of chutzpah and often displays in *The Prince* a keen sense of gallows humour.

One of the most extraordinary aspects of the relationship between history and fiction in Koster’s works is that the fictional history works the way real history is ideally expected to work. Keeping in mind Tony Bennett’s remark that historical works make discursive moves in relation to the historical record (50), it becomes plain that Koster’s three novels make those moves as well. However, they are made in relation to the fictional Tinieblan historical record that Koster creates. As a result, on major Tinieblan historical points -- names, dates, and even interpretation of figures and events -- Kiki Sancudo’s observations are similar to Camilo Fuertes’, which, in turn, resemble Mandragon’s. Three different, often unreliable, narrators from very different points of view relate a common history, and there are very few discrepancies among their various accounts. Only in an intricately fashioned fictional world could this happen.

In these four texts, Koster uses humour as a narrative strategy; it is apparent on every page of every book. A variety of humour categories and sub-categories appears with the most prominent being satire, irony, nameplay, parody and pastiche. Similarly to his

other narrative strategies, Koster most often uses humour as a means to destabilize his narratives. For example, we have seen in *The Prince* how Kiki is constantly making satirical yet charming, remarks; he ingratiates himself to readers in this manner. Nevertheless, a good number of his generalizations and satirical comments are conspicuously racist. Is the presentation of these comments a means for the author to satirize his satirist narrator, or do they in some way also reflect Koster's own outlook? "Who do we laugh at?" becomes the question and it is a difficult question to certifiably answer.

Humour and instability are also generated by the recurrent nameplay found within the novels and *In The Time of The Tyrants*. By naming characters according to physical and personality traits, Koster frequently and intentionally creates types rather than more rounded characters. Two prominent examples, Victor Steel and Dan Hardcock, appear in *The Dissertation*, and instead of being described as emotional human beings, they are depicted as clownish symbols of American imperialism in Latin America. Koster also typifies historical figures like Manuel Noriega and his advisors in *In The Time of The Tyrants*; calling them by their simian nicknames is a form of lighthearted ridicule that avoids more comprehensive treatment of their leadership abilities.

The nameplay does not begin and end with individual characters and historical figures. Places, motor vehicles, businesses and other named things are either invented or changed significantly in the novels. Tinieblas itself is an invented place name signifying in Spanish either darkness or confusion; it is an ironic twist on the Latin tradition of naming places out of Christian idealism. Other place names are altered so that they remain vaguely

familiar: “Texahoma” and “Utaho” are two examples (*Mandragon* 192). There is a girlie magazine named *Riggish*, a hamburger joint called “Flashburger”, a Thornchasm College, and two Tinieblas government leaders named Genghis and Kublai Manduco. All of these names are fictional, yet they have a familiarity about them. They indicate that Koster’s Tinieblas has similarities to the extra-fictional real world, yet it is also bizarrely different.

The major themes in the novels and *In The Time of The Tyrants* remain constant. Thirst for power and desire for revenge motivate both fictional characters and historical figures. Kiki Sancudo’s assertion that in Tinieblas “everyone wants to be president” (51) also applies to recent Panamanian history, according to Koster and Sánchez (*I.T.T.* 62, 316). The same yearning for revenge that motivates Lilo Gavilán to kill León Fuertes motivates Omar Torrijos and Manuel Noriega to dispose of political enemies. These twin desires of power and revenge are so strong in Tinieblas and Panama that even a facetious statement like both countries “clock their history in revolutions per minute” (*Diss.* xvii) has a ring of truth about it. Inevitably, bloodshed, misery, and despair are the result of the people’s passion and also the means to perpetuate that same passion. This continual cycle of passionate violence ensures that Latins always live in interesting times.

Of all the narrative strategies Koster employs in the four texts, magic realism is found in the novels only; it is not an element contained within *In The Time of The Tyrants*. As has been noted elsewhere in this paper, most particularly in the chapter on *The Prince*, magic realism can be divided into three main categories: metaphysical, anthropological and ontological. Within the Tinieblas novels, there are numerous illustrations of the

anthropological and ontological varieties (and some mixing of the two), but Koster does not provide any examples of purely metaphysical magic realism.

Magic realism provides Koster with a means to tell fabulous stories. There is a long tradition of magic realism in Latin American literature, and because “Reality is so astonishing that the greatest difficulty encountered by Latin American writers is making the incredible seem real to a reader unfamiliar with their world” (Chanady in Hinchcliffe 51), it is both natural and understandable that magic realism is such a prominent narrative strategy in Koster’s novels. However useful a tool magic realism is to tell incredible stories, its poetical nature problematizes any truth claims made by the narrators concerning Latin American society.

Narrators’ truth claims are also questionable because the narrators themselves prove to be unreliable. Kiki Sancudo is a captivating story teller, often displaying erudition, wit, and compassion, yet he also shows prejudice and egotism. His portrayal of Tinieblas is compelling, but undoubtedly biased. Though Kiki has considerable charismatic appeal, his mimesis is unreliable.

Camilo Fuertes attempts, at least superficially, to give the reader a more faithful mimesis by presenting his narrative in the form of an academic history. However, the reader soon realizes that Camilo is as unreliable a narrator as Kiki Sancudo, if not more so. Camilo claims to have contacts with spirit figures from another ontological realm. He also confuses scholarship with his personal life, as is so often evident in the notes to the text. It is apparent too that the biography of León Fuertes Camilo writes is less an effort at clarifying the historical record than it is an attempt to justify his father’s peculiar behavior.

In spite of the scholarly cosmetics applied to his paper, Camilo Fuertes holds little academic credibility.

Mandragon is also unreliable, but not as blatantly unconvincing as the trilogy's first two narrators. As a practiced shaman and magician, Mandragon possesses considerable rhetorical skill and sleight of hand ability. He has the capacity to present himself simultaneously as modest yet impressive, a victim and a victor. Though Mandragon does not resort to self-praise as frequently as do Kiki and Camilo, he often comes across as a self-righteous individual.

Time after time, Mandragon betrays the positive image of himself that he tries to build. He ruthlessly exercises the power he holds over others, forcing his followers to have sex with him, playing tricks on other people, and even killing Alejo Sancudo. Then he inevitably crafts sly arguments to defend his actions. Mandragon is no more credible a narrator than Kiki or Camilo, but he more adroitly presents himself in a positive light.

Unreliable may not be the most appropriate word to describe the narrative voice in Koster and Sánchez' *In The Time of The Tyrants*; inscrutable more closely expresses it. There is little doubt that this narrator holds a certain set of liberal, humanist values, expresses those values throughout the text, and never wavers from them. The ideology informing the book is therefore clear. What is difficult to ascertain is who exactly is responsible for presenting these values in the book: to what extent is *In The Time of The Tyrants* narrated by R.M. Koster and to what extent is it narrated by Guillermo Sánchez?

While there is no definitive answer provided to this question, clues within the text suggest that Koster's is the predominant voice. The writing style, sense of humour,

themes, and choice of language all resemble those same aspects in the Tinieblas trilogy. Moreover, there are several anti-Latin remarks contained in the book as well as several pro-United States comments. It is more likely that those remarks originate from the American co-author than the Panamanian, though it is admittedly impossible to know this with certainty.

Taking this interpretation of narrative responsibility and expanding the argument further, one can conclude that the Koster who narrates *In The Time of The Tyrants* bears similarity to *Mandragon*'s narrator. Both express a profound dissatisfaction with the state of the respective societies in which they live. *Mandragon* is a typical apocalyptic narrator, channeling his frustration into a vision of a completely destroyed, cleansed Tinieblas. Koster, too, narrates the story of a Panamanian society in the clutches of a foul dictatorship, with its salvation coming in the form of a United States Marine Corps landing. While neither narrator knows what the future will bring, both *In The Time of The Tyrants* and *Mandragon* end optimistically because the desired changes take place.

Also like *Mandragon*, Koster uses certain rhetorical means to draw readers into accepting his analysis. Primarily, he appeals to American readers' sense of justice by asserting his own belief in fundamental American humanist principles. Then he satirizes Panamanian people and politicians, using the aforesaid principles as a foundation for his criticism. The result is a polemical narrative where American ethical superiority to Latins is implied throughout. Note the following examples taken from various points in the text: "Spanish has no word for 'teamwork,' because the thing is so rare in countries where Spanish is spoken" (87). "In the United States and other more or less civilized countries,

the Manuel Noriegas don't make it to the stock exchange" (275). "moral rigor not being a very strong [Panamanian] national trait ..." (329). The first example is simply specious etymology; the second example is an open claim that America has attained some higher level of civility than Panama, an easily countered argument (furthermore, the idea that Wall Street Traders possess higher scruples than people like Noriega is questionable considering the recent criminal acts of individuals like Ivan Boesky and Michael Milken); finally, it is an unfair generalization to claim Panamanians are lacking in morals.

Some might argue that Koster criticizes Americans and the United States government as well as Panamanians, so he is therefore equally severe towards his own people's role in Latin America. Moreover, he gives a well-reasoned argument against imperialism in his appendix concerning the Panama Canal. Rather than promoting American hegemony over Panama and other Latin American countries, Koster positions himself firmly against it.

Koster does indeed position himself against imperialism, but it is essentially a stance against all *previous* forms of imperialism. He supports the United States invasion of Panama because, on this one occasion, for the first time apparently, America acted in everyone's best interests, not the interests of a few: "At both ends of the Canal and on the Pacific coast at Río Hato, Americans were showing courage and competence dismantling the [Panamanian] army other Americans had shown folly in creating" (375). Somehow, if one accepts this line of reasoning, America figured out the morally right course of action and pursued it.

Of course, doing what is “right” and “good” is justification for most acts of imperialist aggression. Lord Balfour used this argument to defend British colonial rule over Egypt in the early part of this century:

I think it is a good thing. I think that experience shows that they [the Egyptians] have got under it [British rule] far better government than in the whole history of the world they ever had before, and which not only is a benefit to them, but is undoubtedly a benefit to the whole of the civilized West.... We are in Egypt not merely for the sake of the Egyptians, though we are there for their sake; we are there also for the sake of Europe at large.

(*Orientalism* 33)

Balfour’s notions are similar to Koster’s for they both use moral arguments to justify their own governments’ aggressive imperialistic behavior. Edward Said writes that Balfour never gives evidence proving the Egyptians appreciate British colonial rule (*Orientalism* 33), and Koster also never produces firm proof that a stronger United States presence in Panama will be appreciated by the Panamanians themselves. On the contrary, his own assertions throughout the book that American foreign policy in the region has been ill-conceived and disastrous for both Latins and Americans makes one wonder how the status quo could ever change in the wake of this most recent U.S. invasion.

If this particular reading of *In The Time of The Tyrants* is accepted, a reading which assumes that Koster’s values dominate the text and that those values are liberal, humanist, and essentially pro-American, then can one simply assume that these are the values which inform the Tinieblas books as well? The answer is not a simple “yes”. Indeed, Koster’s non-fiction prose written in the seventies, notably two *Harper’s* articles on the 1976 Democratic Party leadership race, displays concern for and belief in

fundamental American values, the same concern and belief found in his more recent non-fiction prose writing; Koster still seems to retain the idealism that he displayed first in those early *Harper's* pieces. If one can conclude that the idealism is genuine, that Koster sincerely believes, then the values must inform his fiction as well. However, in novels where narrative reliability is negligible, authorial presence is always covert, and a host of destabilizing narrative strategies are at work, identifying the texts' foundational values is problematical. Even when narrators separately come to similar conclusions about societal problems, tendencies, and issues, those views do not necessarily reflect the author's perspective.

Because the nature of reality is so problematical in these four narratives, and foundational values are so difficult to trace, Koster implicitly makes the point that reality is a relative concept, dependent on individual perception. Certainly, this idea arises more explicitly at certain junctures in the books. Kiki Sancudo says "We make our own reality" (154) and devotes his narrative to putting together a largely melodramatic autobiography; Camilo Fuertes "fabricates" his biography of his father, and not only claims that there is an alternate reality -- the "Astral Plane" -- but offers detailed descriptions of the place; Mandragon says that "People who couldn't stand more than one reality, one stable ordinary state of things, had a terrible time with [Mandragon's circus show]" (128), and refers deprecatingly to the tourist from Porlock in Somerset "who liked practical reality" (130). Even in *In The Time of The Tyrants*, Koster and Sánchez claim "... what makes writing fact (as compared to fiction) unnerving is that life is also often unrealistic, and in poor taste" (100).

There are also episodes in the novels where Koster and his narrators give a number of scenarios and then offer the reader the choice of accepting one or all as real. In *Mandragon*, for example, the narrator offers five stories concerning his birth: "Five myths. I like them all, though I can't say what truth there is to any of them" (42). Kiki Sancudo also speculates on his relationship with Elena and offers his interpretations "in a series of diminished sevenths" (152-53). These episodes foreground the partiality of narrative in particular, and the partiality of reality in general.

When it comes to discussing the larger issues, such as what Koster's narratives tell us about Truth, Love, Art, History, human fallibility, Panama, the answer is that they tell us a variety of things. Koster himself writes that in the Tinieblas trilogy, the "setting is (mainly) the imaginary Central American Republic of Tinieblas, its subject is (largely) politics ... (Preface to *Mandragon*), but he is plainly not limited to these areas. To claim that Koster gives specific answers to specific questions in these novels and *In The Time of The Tyrants*, to conclude that he gives us a certain picture of reality, is to give facile consideration to his writings. Indeed, as we have seen, Koster's various narrative strategies in these four books work to undermine stable, singular textual interpretation.

The recent conflict between Salman Rushdie and the government of Iran is a startling and extreme example of what can happen when a work of fiction is subject to singular interpretation -- as though the work were an author's personal manifesto.

Christopher Norris sums up the controversy:

One line of response in the Rushdie affair has been to point out that this is after all a work of fiction -- "postmodernist" fiction at that -- and should therefore not be judged (much less condemned) as if it were claiming any kind of factual, historical or truth-telling warrant. Or again, to adopt an

alternative idiom: *The Satanic Verses* belongs to the genre of so-called “magical realism”, a mode that typically mixes up the orders of verisimilitude and fantasy-projection to a stage where the reader loses all sense of where the one shades off into the other. From this point of view the whole controversy would seem just an absurd category-mistake, a confusion brought about by the failure to recognize that literary works are not in the business of arguing a case, reinterpreting history or engaging in matters of doctrinal dispute. (51)

Likewise, it is a category-mistake to assume Koster’s trilogy is simply his own political reading of Latin America. That would be placing much more emphasis on instruction at the expense of delight. A “language-game” is an apt way to describe these magic realist, postmodern novels, but like Rushdie’s text, they do not belong “to the “language-game” of presenting truths, offering arguments, challenging scriptural witness etc.” (51). As Koster himself says in the prefaces to two of the novels, they are fiction and he made them up.

The three Tinieblas novels and *In The Time of The Tyrants*, when considered together, deliver to readers magnificently imaginative views of the extra-fictional real world and Koster’s own fictional Tinieblan realm. Koster deftly handles a variety of narrative strategies to construct these four remarkable books, all connected by the landscape of Latin America and themes of power and revenge. Though Koster reveals his personality to an extent through his fictional prose -- he has, for example, a brilliant and sometimes perverse sense of humour as well as a fine eye for detail -- the instability of his texts makes it difficult to draw conclusions concerning not only Koster himself, but his narrators, other characters, and even the various worlds portrayed in the novels. *In The Time of The Tyrants* is the most stable of the four narratives, but even here the narrative is

skewed by the ambiguity of the narrative voice: is Koster, Sánchez, or a combination of the two responsible for the text? That these questions of ideology and narrative responsibility can be guessed at, but never certifiably answered, is not ultimately of great concern: to have taken a journey through Koster's extraordinary narrative worlds is recompense enough.

¹ At one point in the narrative (pages 353 and 354), the authors indicate that the early *Harper's* articles concerning Panama are almost entirely Koster's words: "Sánchez agreed to sign what his friend [Koster] proposed writing, an indictment of military rule in Panama Koster composed from Sánchez's Spanish drafts."

² To give Koster and Sánchez the benefit of the doubt as far as authorship of *In The Time of The Tyrants* is concerned, I will mostly in this paper refer to "the authors" or "Koster and Sánchez" instead of to Koster only.

³ "Of The Criminals, By The Criminals, For The Criminals" is the title of chapter 10 in *In The Time of The Tyrants*.

⁴ There are two appendices in addition to the main text, the first being an outline of the circumstances surrounding the construction of the Panama Canal and the founding of the Panamanian Republic. The second appendix explains a biological analogy to Noriega's Panama. Koster and Sánchez write how the body's natural defense antibodies can be triggered to destroy rather than protect the human host. Likewise, Noriega's defense forces were triggered to destroy rather than protect the Panamanian populace.

⁵ This mistress happens to be the mysterious Angela, a blonde woman with pointed teeth and a tail, who plays a more important role in the third novel of the trilogy, *Mandragon*.

⁶ The prefatory list of Tinieblan presidents could be considered an example of narrative context; functioning similarly to an extradiegetical narrator, the list gives the reader essential political information about Tinieblas. However, unlike an extradiegetical narrator, this list is placed *before* Kiki's narrative in the text and is not therefore integrated with the story.

⁷ Concise, useful information regarding Arias and his turbulent political career can be found in the *Historical Dictionary of Panama* by Basil C. and Anne K. Hendrick, and in Europa Publications' Latin America yearbook *South America, Central America, and The Caribbean*. Koster's own *In The Time of The Tyrants* is an especially good resource for comparing the fictional Alejo Sancudo with the historical Arnulfo Arias; Koster's description of Arias is markedly similar to Kiki Sancudo's description of Alejo.

⁸ "Cornudo" is Spanish for "horn", a traditional symbol of the cuckolded male. Thus, the Spaniard "horns" Tinieblas in much the same manner as Sig Heilanstalt "horned" Camilo Fuertes on page 401 of *The Dissertation*.

⁹ For further analysis of the Hay -- Bunau-Varilla treaty, consult *In The Time of The Tyrants* Appendix A. Here Koster and Sánchez give their own interpretation of the politics surrounding the entire canal project.

¹⁰ Each of Pelf's three names signifies wealth and prestige: Astor is the name of a wealthy merchant class family in America, as is Dupont; Pelf, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, can be a synonym for wealth, (or, ironically, a synonym for rubbish).

¹¹ No town of Balling exists in New York. There is ironical significance in this name because "balling" is a colloquial expression for sexual intercourse, the activity that coincidentally took place in the motel.

¹² For a more comprehensive discussion of Magic Realism, its history and its use in Latin American and other literatures, the following sources are helpful: "Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction" by Angel Flores; "Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse" by Stephen Slemon; "Magic Realism in Spanish American Fiction" by Enrique Anderson Imbert. There is also a collection entitled *Magic Realism and Canadian Literature: Essays and Stories*, edited by Peter Hinchcliffe and Ed Jewinsky. A useful study with an extensive bibliography is Amaryll Chanady's *Magic Realism and the Fantastic*. Complete bibliographical information for these sources can be found in my Works Cited pages.

¹³ Remarkably, some of the basic facts concerning this infamous and relatively recent moment in American history vary from one historical text to another. In his history of America entitled *These United States -- The Questions of Our Past*, Irwin Unger writes, "But then the President's lawyers revealed that two of the tapes requested did not exist and that another, of a crucial June conversation with [John] Dean, contained an 18 - minute gap as the result of an "accidental" erasure" (841). Camilo states it was not Dean but H.R. Haldeman who had the conversation with Nixon (381) and this corresponds with the account given by Strober and Strober in *Nixon: An Oral History of His Presidency*: "In late September 1973, Mr. Nixon's secretary, Rose Mary Woods, began -- at his request -- transcription of tapes subpoenaed by the special prosecutor. One of the tapes Ms. Woods had worked on was the record of a one-hour-and-nineteen minute, June 20, 1972 conversation between Nixon and Haldeman, whose notes of the meeting indicate that the Watergate break-in had been a part of the discussion.

"While it remains unclear how it happened -- and whether by deliberate act or accident -- an 18 1/2 minute gap exists in the tape, covering that part of the conversation that Haldeman's notes indicated related to Watergate" (402 - 403).

This discrepancy in facts (i.e. the confusion of Haldeman with Dean) plainly demonstrates Bennett's theory that carefully mimetic textual histories are prone to error and even the historical records themselves, the very referent for those textual histories are "intra-discursive and so mutable" (50-51).

¹⁴ There is also, it has been pointed out to me, a clear literary precedent -- Jean-Luc Godard's work, *Breathless*.

¹⁵ This naming of colleges to reflect the puritanical tradition in the Northeastern United States is continued from *The Prince* where Koster alludes to "Cotton Mather College" (195).

¹⁶ For the sake of continuity, and to avoid confusion, I will refer to Mandragon using masculine pronouns.

¹⁷ Angela was once a trapeze artist with the circus; in fact, that is where Alejo Sancudo first saw her. cf *The Prince* (106-107); *Mandragon* (65).

¹⁸ There is a particularly heart rending example of how a young Mandragon is rejected by other children on page 60.

Sometimes as I stood by the window, a group of children would collect below, for the whole barrio knew La Negra kept a monster. They'd point and whisper, snicker, gasp disgust, and I would hop about in agitation, claw at the screening, make weird moans -- "Come closer! Come and visit me!" Until La Negra's squawk would bring Nena and Vilma, the one to howl the kids off, the other to soothe me calm.

¹⁹ Among these individuals is Boris Martínez, a power-wielding military officer who, upon being exiled by Torrijos, could apparently only find work as a service station attendant in Miami (*I.T.T.* 101). His testimony is heavily tainted with an anti -Torrijos bias.

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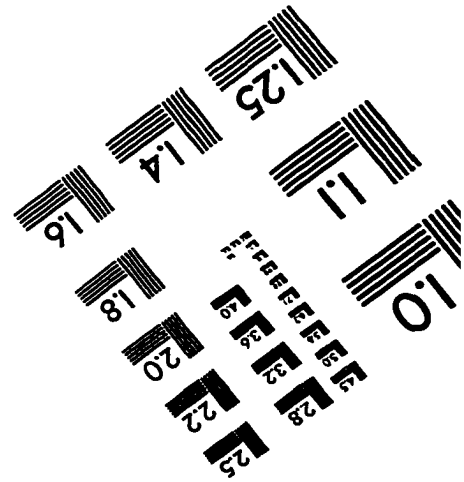
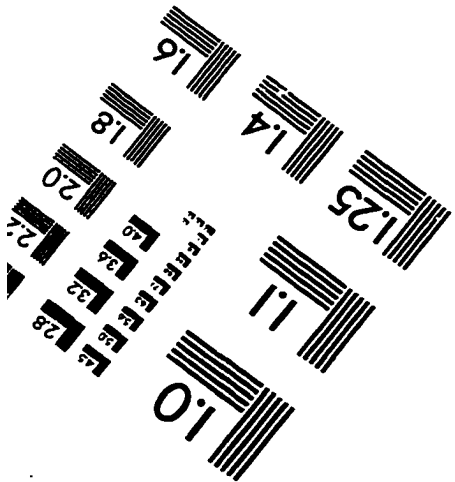
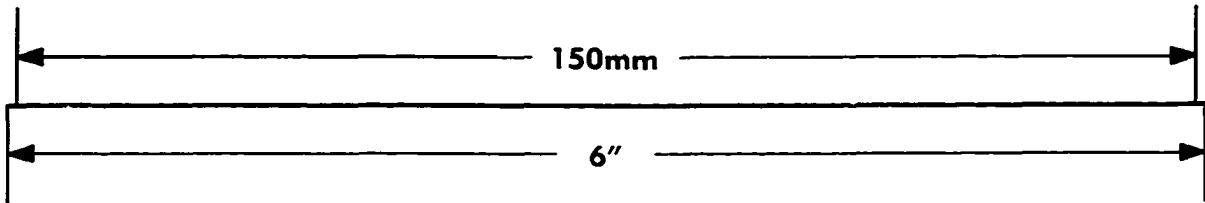
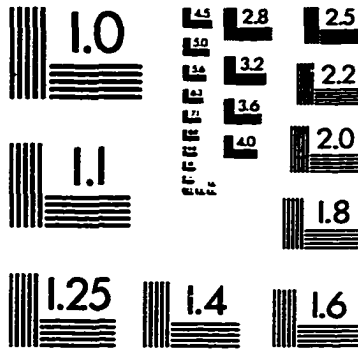
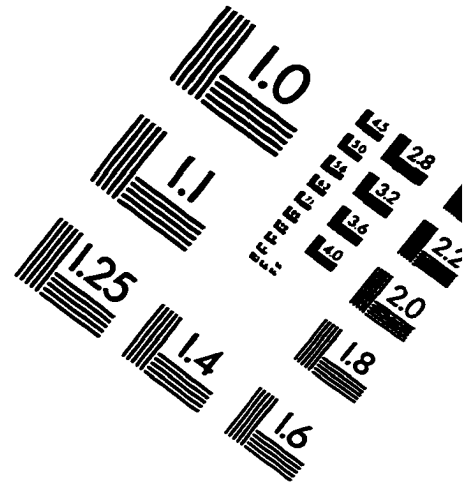
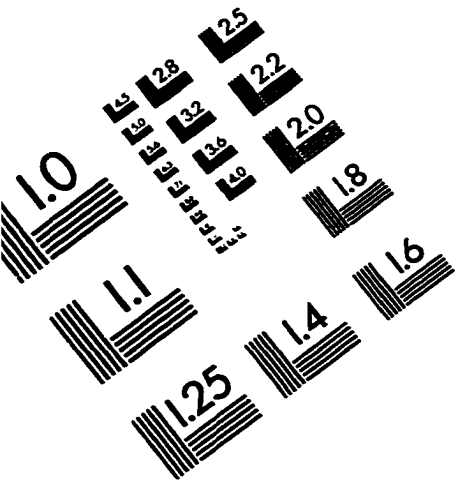
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