
So Which Way is Home?: Retracing Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos* with Xenophon's *Anabasis*

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In the closing “*Nota*” of Alejo Carpentier’s 1953 masterpiece *Los pasos perdidos* (*The Lost Steps*) the author remarks that his characters resemble ordinary personages that any one might encounter on a similar voyage.¹ He speaks in a similar vein of the various cities, villages, and geographical features as “mere prototypes...common to many countries” (xv).² He goes on, however, to plead for the precision and specificity of the lands he narrates “beyond the place called Puerto Anunciación” (xv).³ Similarly, after labeling the *Adelantado*, Montsalvatje, Marcos, and Fray Pedro as types who “represent a reality,” he makes a special mention of Yannes, the Greek miner (xvi). He stresses that he had not even altered the real name of this character that faithfully carried a copy of the *Odyssey* with him on his travels. The only additional information about Yannes, Carpentier admits, is that he failed to mention that “along with the *Odyssey*, he admired above all else the *Anabasis* of Xenophon” (xvi).⁴ The fact that Carpentier places this information in an extra-textual epilogue (signed with the author’s initials) induces the reader to accept it more readily as veridical. Its familiar and forthright tone suggests that the author is inviting us to share a confidence, and reassuring us in our desire to believe that everything we have just read was true to life. In fact, his assertion about the characters is perhaps, in a sense, to be believed. As Roberto González Echevarría points out:

...muchos de los personajes de la novela—el fraile, el minero, el *Adelantado*—están calcados de la realidad; en algunos casos hasta podemos darnos el lujo de ver fotografías de estos seres que iban a ser immortalizados por la novela de Carpentier. (*Los pasos perdidos* 41)

The fact remains, however, that the reader has been deceived in regards to Yannes. While the author explicitly states that he has changed nothing about him, other evidence outside *Los pasos perdidos* suggests that elements of his character are fictional. As Verity Smith reminds us, Carpentier revealed in the newspaper article “El último buscador del Dorado” that Yannes’ character was based on the real-life person Lucas Fernández Peña:

a pharmacist from Valencia who opted out of mainstream society hoping to find gold in the Great Savana. But he had subsequently given up his search in favor of establishing a community in the jungle, the Santa Elena Uairén mentioned in the author’s note at the end of *Los pasos perdidos*. (71)

In other words, contrary to the epilogue’s assertion, Carpentier has indeed changed the name of his real-life character. More importantly, Yannes was not merely a pseudonym for Fernández Peña, lifted whole from real life, because the character of the *Adelantado* also represents elements of his life and personality. Rather than a fictional character being a composite of a number of real life people, Fernández Peña has been fictionalized as more than one character. This question of Carpentier’s sources for the character of Yannes (and for his characters) may seem trivial at first in regard to the telling of the tale. It is not important if Yannes was a pseudonym for Fernández Peña, or even if he was based on some specific person at all. A story, after all, is a story. What is important, however, is that the single revelation of withheld or misleading information establishes the epilogue as fiction, a continuation of the preceding narrative. Rather than being extra-textual and a true author’s note, this “*Nota*” is an extension in a sense of the narrator’s voice. By acknowledging to the reader that not

everything in the foregoing narrative was exactly as it seemed, all that has been said can now be called into question, and the question of what else might have been left unsaid can be asked.

Thus, if the author's "Nota" self-consciously reveals itself as fiction, what artistic merit is gained by saving the reference to the *Anabasis* until the very last sentence of the novel? Why should he even include it, or conversely why does he not associate it earlier with Yannes as he does the *Odyssey* throughout the novel? We contend that he purposefully withholds this important clue of the narrator's formation until the very last word of the text in order to leave a lasting image of the one thing that Yannes admired above all else, even his diamond mines.⁵ By juxtaposing both classical texts together in the work's last paragraph, and leaving "the *Anabasis* of Xenophon" to stand as the final phrase of the work, Carpentier signals to the reader that Xenophon's fourth century B.C. work plays a more important role than a lone notice might otherwise suggest. An examination of the thematic and structural parallels between the *Anabasis* and *Los pasos perdidos* provides a richer understanding of the classical formation of the text and, moreover, a deeper appreciation of the narrator's intentions and ultimate frustration. More specifically, we contend that Carpentier purposefully draws from the *Anabasis* in framing the story of the narrator's quest, expedition, and homeward journey, or rather the unfulfilled realization of these elements. In this "Nota" he unveils to the reader that what we had thought merely to be an unsuccessful *Odyssey* in fact has been more akin to an emulation of the *Anabasis*. In this respect, the *Anabasis*, rather than the *Odyssey* serves as the archetypal struggle to get back home and provides the reader with a clearer interpretation of the novel's ending.

What we hope to show is not only that Carpentier is explicitly adding the *Anabasis* to the many works of the classical world that inform his writings, but also that he is applying his own innovative reading of Xenophon's work, one which recognizes in it elements of narratological sophistication that most classical scholars have missed. In other words, Carpentier's reading of the *Anabasis* is not the standard one. Rather than seeing it as a "naïve teleological adventure story," Carpentier engages with the *Anabasis* as a text that is itself engaging with its own prototypical inter-text.⁶ Essentially, we look to re-read *Los pasos perdidos* with what we hope to show is Carpentier's reading of the *Anabasis*.

In this paper we give an overview of the issue of Carpentier and the classical world in order to frame our particular discussion of his use of the *Anabasis*. We then make a case for why it would make sense for Carpentier and his readers to see the *Anabasis* as a prime inter-text, thematically and generically, for structuring his novel against the urtext of *nostos* tales, the *Odyssey*. A detailed analysis of the parallels between the two works in terms of discourse (structurally and stylistically) and theme, form the core of this paper. In our estimation this reveals the real value in reading *Los pasos perdidos* with the *Anabasis* in mind, namely, the appreciation that the sense of ambivalence and suspension, geographically and existentially, that the narrator/protagonist feels at the conclusion of the story ultimately finds its forebear not in Odysseus, but in the person of Xenophon in the *Anabasis*. The *Anabasis*, then, serves as a corrective to the *Odyssey* as we try to retrace Carpentier's lost steps.

Carpentier and the Classical World

The notion that *Los pasos perdidos* draws from and is informed by ancient texts is not a surprising assertion. Most readers will readily identify the numerous allusions to classical Western mythology. In his critical edition of the novel, for example, González Echevarría states that upon examining the original manuscript of the work he found in Carpentier's own handwriting references to such myths as Prometheus, Sisyphus, Oedipus, Orpheus, Jason and Medea (*Los pasos perdidos* 54). Allusions to these and other classical referents are not merely display pieces, sprinkled liberally to show off his erudition. The greater question, then, does not rest with trying to reconstruct the ancient texts that populated Carpentier's bookshelf. Instead, for various scholars the challenge lies with determining how the classical world helped shape Carpentier's thought and how it affected his novelistic technique. For some critics, such as John Barry, classical elements influence the novel's structure (Vassar 213). For Donald Shaw, their role is "to dignify the narrator and his story by lending them timeless associations" (Shaw, Vassar 213). And in Carlos Miralles' view, the classical parallels figure so prominently that the narrator should be viewed as a "false Ulysses," false in that he is a compendium of the classical world more so than an identifiable and singular replica molded from the single Homeric model (97).

In Inmaculada López Calahorro's estimation, classical elements are nearly ubiquitous in Carpentier's corpus of works in general. As one of the most extensive analyses regarding the influence of the classical world on Carpentier's works, López Calahorro's study examines every one of the author's major narrative texts in light of its classical inspiration, including Ceres ("Viaje a la semilla" 1944), Plutarch (*El reino de este mundo*, 1949), Orestes (*El acoso*, 1956), Lycurgus, Oedipus, Penelope, and Sisyphus (*El siglo de las luces*, 1962), Caesar (*El recurso del método*, 1974), Heraclitus and Orpheus (*La consagración de la primavera*, 1978), and Medea (*El arpa y la sombra*, 1979), among others. In terms of *Los pasos perdidos*, López Calahorro envisions the narrator as a composite of Sisyphus and Odysseus: on the one hand, he is Sisyphus who has been condemned by Cronos as modern time is devoured and also Sisyphus who has been perpetually subjected to the labyrinth of the Minotaur; at the same time he is Odysseus who heroically finds a way to extricate himself from the labyrinth but also a Odysseus who seeks to return to Penelope or, in the narrator's case, Ruth (208-209). Despite her in-depth analysis, however, López Calahorro scarcely makes mention of the closing "Nota," suggesting that she—like others—views it as an extra-textual addendum without symbolic relevance. She acknowledges that Yannes carries with him copies of the *Odyssey* and the *Anabasis*, but she solely focuses on the significance of the Homeric work and surprisingly ignores the reference to Xenophon all together. In fact, in her reading Yannes fulfills only two roles in the text: "Buscador de Diamantes" y portador del libro que se hará único en la obra: *la Odisea*" (218). That is, as the custodian of the *Odyssey* he serves as a bridge that enables the transfer of the Homeric action to the modern work. While it is true that Yannes serves as a means to voice the *Odyssey* and even takes on Odyssean traits himself, it is noteworthy that López Calahorro fails to underscore his importance as the bearer of the *Anabasis* as well.

The incorporation of classic mythology and ancient texts indeed removes the novel from a strict association in time, but it also amplifies its scope in space as well. In Carpentier's own words, aesthetically he attempted to

... des-exotizar la novela latinoamericana. Universarla, pero a base de asuntos y ambientes latinoamericanos.... dignificar nuestros mitos, y llevarlos a la dimensión de los mitos universales, confrontándolos con ellos. (Smith 74)

In other words, Carpentier's works should not be viewed merely as classical emulations; rather he sought to universalize the so-called "new narrative" of Latin America by infusing its American setting with the classical world. In his *weltanschauung*, then, *El Popul Vuh*, *El Chilam Balám*, and the primordial Orinoco setting stand in opposition to and in harmony with *Genesis*, El dorado, and the Mediterranean realm.

Since there is a myriad of quotations, references, and allusions to the classical world in Carpentier's works, it is reasonable to recognize that there is a great variety of ways in which Carpentier engages with the ancient texts, whether in argument with them, or parody, or emulation, or rejection. In the analysis that follows, we explicate the various ways *Los pasos perdidos* is shaped in terms of structure, theme, and existential attitude, by Carpentier's reading of the *Anabasis*.

The Anabasis

Compared to the other classical works referenced throughout *Los pasos perdidos* (and Carpentier's works in general), the *Anabasis* of Xenophon may be less familiar than most. This 4th century work in seven books relates the military expedition of Xenophon and his fellow mercenaries, commissioned by Cyrus the younger to help overthrow his brother Artaxerxes II, King of Persia. In its first two books Xenophon's narrator tells of the expedition through Asia Minor to the heart of the Persian Empire. Once there, however, Cyrus' army is soundly defeated and dispersed. The rest of the work—in fact the majority of the work—deals not with the advance of a heroic army into the interior, or *anabasis*, but more accurately with the homeward journey of the retreating Greek army from Persia. The title "*Anabasis*" then—which literally means "the journey up into"—strictly speaking denotes only their journey from the coastline of Asia Minor "up into" the mountainous interior. In other words, the work could more aptly be entitled *katabasis*, or "the journey back down."

Surrounded by enemies, without food, without guides, unsure exactly how to reach home, the expedition takes on epic struggles as they try to reach Greece. When they finally arrive at the coast of the Black Sea, however, in the soldiers' minds they have been delivered safely from the barbaric lands and are all but home. At this stage in the narrative the soldiers' desire to return all the way to their original homes is depicted as waning, to the extent that it ceases to be mentioned at all. Nevertheless, the character Xenophon's desire for *nostos* is never shown as wavering even as he is consistently stymied through no fault of his own in his homeward journey. In fact, he is even depicted at one point as having already departed by ship for home before heeding the call of duty to turn back and help his former troops (VII.1.38-2.9). Ultimately, his journey home will be unexpectedly aborted when a vote of exile is leveled against him *in absentia*. Despite the long retreat, he will not be permitted to return to Athens. The great dramatic irony in this narrative is the fact, while the character Xenophon is shown trying to get home until the very end, he himself never learns of this vote of exile within the narrative while the reader does. In short, Xenophon finds himself in a heroic struggle that has led him into the barbaric unknown but then leaves him striving in vain to return home to civilization. This note of incompleteness, in both Xenophon's homeward journey and the narration thereof, reverberates uneasily in the reader's mind after the final page has been read. The reader is invited to sense a small bit of the alienation and existential crisis Xenophon must have felt.⁷

Los pasos perdidos as an Anabasis

It may seem fanciful at first to relate *Los pasos perdidos* to an historical document such as the *Anabasis*. The novel contains no extensive set of allusions to it, and so much of its story has the feel of the mythological and Odyssean. Moreover, the only other allusion to the *Anabasis* throughout Carpentier's corpus is found in *El siglo de las luces* where he states, "Now they were headed for the open sea, and beyond that for the mighty ocean of Odysseys and Anabases (173).⁸ In this passage Carpentier seems to be using both classical works interchangeably to evoke, in a general way, the epic voyage. In other words, the *Anabasis* of Xenophon becomes a (small "a") 'anabasis' just as Homer's *Odyssey* becomes a (small "o") 'odyssey.'⁹ While the "Nota" of *The Lost Steps* then stands as the only explicit mention of the *Anabasis* in his entire corpus of works, there is, nonetheless, reason to suppose that Xenophon's work may have been as influential in Carpentier's thinking as any other classical text. Luis Suardiáz cites the *Anabasis* as one of the works that Carpentier admired for its journalistic characteristics: "Valoraba La Anábasis, de Jenofonte, como 'un formidable reportaje de la retirada de los Diez Mil.'" (Suardiaz). It is, however, Luisa Campuzano who has most seemed to grasp the importance of this reference to the *Anabasis*. She briefly alludes to Carpentier's closing reference and rightfully suggests that the failure of the protagonist should be seen, therefore, in light of the historical and not the mythical:

Y esta aviesa referencia a la más famosa de las retiradas, en la última línea de la última página de este libro hecho de libros más que cualquier otro libro, nos indica que el fracaso de su protagonista ya estaba 'escrito' no en el mito, sino en la historia (104).

The last two pages of the novel (before the "Nota") comprise the narrator's final lament upon his realization of "the crushing truth" (276) that he never really belonged in that primordial land, or better, a land not tethered to modern, 'civilized' conceptions of time or history. He frames this in terms of time and history—the ways they are understood or ignored, and the places we occupy within them. So while much of *Los pasos perdidos* seems to evoke Homer's mythical realm, it is the narrator's attempts to come to grips with the fact that he is a modern man, unable to fully access that world, that gives this work its tension.

Moreover, the fact that the *Anabasis* famously defies generic categorization complements Carpentier's work.¹⁰ In González Echevarría's characterization of the novel:

Si la cubierta del libro no dijera 'novela,' ¿qué pensaríamos que fuera este libro? Hay partes del libro que parecen un diario de viaje, otras, en que parece una confesión, otras aun en que más parece una autobiografía. (*Los pasos perdidos* 51)

Both works share this *sui generis* nature. In their broadest scope both seemingly fall within the notion of travel literature, and both, in fact, acknowledge their ultimate connection to the *Odyssey*.¹¹ However, they are more than that as they recount a novelesque (auto-) biography of a protagonist struggling to find his place in a very real, very specific here and now, and thereby stand as chronicles of (self-) discovery.

More specifically, like Xenophon, our narrator finds himself in an epic journey “back to the source” —or in his case a newfound “home” —and yet, having completed his mission, he finds his quest to return unfulfilled when he cannot return a second time. Like his Greek prototypes who are confronted with hostile enemies and forces of nature, he cannot reach his destination due to the dynamic and physical impediments of the jungle. Unlike Xenophon’s paradigm, however, the compelling twist in *Los pasos perdidos* rests with the fact that he cannot return home because he is lost. When in the jungle he is lost in a spatial sense. When in the city he is lost in an existential sense. Either way, he is incapable of returning to the source or his “home.” His exile, then, is no different from Xenophon’s who learns in the end that his epic “journey up into” —or his *anabasis*— has been futile. Xenophon will not be allowed to return to Athens just as our narrator will be confined to remain on the outside of Paradise and futilely seek its secret entrance. In brief, they are both failed adventure stories, the failure being that the adventure has taken them away from the very place to which they wish to return.

Parallels between the Two Works: *Discourse*

It is not only matters of generic similarity, the privileging of the historical perspective over the mythological, or the exiled wanderer that bind these two works together. A textual analysis reveals even deeper thematic and stylistic parallels that defend the generalizations above. Both texts share similarities in discourse: namely, the trajectory of the action, exposition, and characterization. These will ultimately be seen to provide the framework for the development of the overriding thematic parallel: the question of *nostos*.

Despite the complexities of *Los pasos perdidos* and the *Anabasis*, they are first and foremost works of movement. As their titles figuratively imply —*the lost steps* and *the journey up into*— both works entail the notion of making new steps, retracing old ones, and the impossibility of “getting back there.” In *Los pasos perdidos*, for example, one can envision his “pasos” —or the steps of his movement— as a sequential change of state, involving initiation, progression, stasis, regression, rejection, duplication, and finally alienation. More precisely, the narrator’s “lost steps” consist of initiation away from home, progression toward a new sense of home, stasis once there, regression to and, consequently, rejection of the former home, the failed duplication of his journey, and finally a suspended alienation as a result of the failure.

The trajectory of movement is similar in the *Anabasis*. From the perspective of the mercenaries as a whole, one finds a comparable movement of journey to and back, or *anabasis/katabasis*. But the similarity with *Los pasos perdidos* is even more striking when one focuses specifically on Xenophon, the individual. He leaves the city, journeys up into barbaric and exotic lands, attempts to retrace his steps home, is blocked by exile, and, ultimately, is stranded between his initial objective (Persia) and civilization (back home). Given his stasis of exile —or rather his inability to go home as well as his inability to go back— he passes through a similar sequential change of states. Like Carpentier’s narrator, he passes through moments of initiation, progression, failure, regression and finally, and most importantly, alienation.

Furthermore, in both works one finds a change in narrative tone and manner of exposition that evolve as the conflict progresses. In other words, not only do both works share a similar trajectory of action, but in both cases spatial changes alter the tone of the narrator. As the Greek army traverses the mountains of Asia Minor and nears the sea, for example, the tone of the narrative moves from that of an objective, historical document to one that focuses more acutely on Xenophon the person. That is to say, the shift in tone from the objective to the subjective corresponds with the shift in spatial change as the army progresses and then retreats. In *Los pasos perdidos*, one could argue that the shift in space

never results in the narrator truly becoming a man of action. As Smith points out, “the narrator brands himself an observer ... when he is asked to kill the leper and he cannot bring himself to do so” (46). Still, although his station never moves beyond that of “observer” the tone used to describe his action seems to move from the disinterested and passive to the more engaged outsider looking in.

If the similarities between the two works rested solely with the progression of movement, one might attribute the coincidences to the fact that both are merely stories of failed homecomings, an archetypal version of “you can’t go home again.” But once the reader acknowledges that the narrator-protagonist shares a fortune similar to Xenophon’s, other similarities involving the exposition and characterization of both works become evident. For example, the catalyst for the narrator’s voyage begins with the Curator’s proposition to acquire the theoretical primitive instruments (22). The Curator, then, serves as the means by which he legitimizes his quest and for whom he hopes to complete his mission successfully. Similarly, the Curator’s role in the *Anabasis* is carried out by Socrates, whom Xenophon consults for advice before taking part in the expedition (III.1.4-7). Both Socrates and the Curator play minor roles in the development of the action; nonetheless, they serve as the sage elders who get both protagonists underway on their journeys.

A second parallel involves the role of Mouche as seductress and Proxenus as facilitator. In opposition to the Curator who persuades the narrator to undertake the voyage for legitimate reasons, Mouche acts as the temptress who proposes a fraudulent scheme. Her plan consists of traveling to the foreign capital and obtaining cheap replicas of the sought-after instruments rather than expending time and money in seeking the originals (32). In the *Anabasis*, one finds a similar role played by Proxenus, Xenophon’s companion who invites him, under false pretenses, to join the mission of Cyrus that would likely result in no small amount of wealth and glory (III.1.8-10). Unlike Mouche, however, Proxenus’ intent does not entail fraud or deceit since he himself is also unaware of Cyrus’ true plan to attack his brother, the king of Persia, rather than a local, less powerful tribe. The seduction away from a truer or nobler purpose, however, resides in Proxenus’ promise to make Xenophon a friend of Cyrus, a man he regarded as more valuable to him than his own fatherland (III.1.4). This represents ominously the first step away from home for Xenophon as he substitutes a new, ersatz home for the real thing.

Both secondary characters, then, serve to lead the protagonists astray after initial thoughts of legitimate design. In short, even among the cast of supporting characters one finds parallels between the two works. In Carpentier’s version the protagonist initiates his voyage at the request of the Curator, and yet once underway he follows Mouche’s plan to defraud him. For Xenophon the journey begins with one mindset based on the counsel of Socrates, and yet due to Proxenus’ companionship he finds himself on a very different journey.

Once these parallels are established, other borrowings from the *Anabasis* seemingly align as well. For example, if the reader views the *Adelantado* as the archetypal character who presides over the foreign kingdom—which is the destination of the expedition—then one would logically associate him with Cyrus’ brother, Artaxerxes II. Likewise, one would associate the novel’s secondary setting of the anonymous Latin American capital—perhaps Caracas—with Cunaxa.¹² For Mouche and the protagonist, the unexpected civil unrest in the capital thwarts their plans to acquire the counterfeit instruments and instead sends them off on a different journey. In the same way, the defeat of the Greek mercenaries at Cunaxa brings to an end their original journey and now detours their intent. In both instances then, Cunaxa/Caracas serve as the locale where the original purpose of the journey goes awry.

As for other similarities in discourse, both works create a false sense of peripety, meaning that the two protagonists experience what seems to be a momentous turn of events only to find that nothing has changed. In the case of *Los pasos perdidos*, the narrator’s quest to discover the primitive instruments—although fraudulent at first—takes on legitimacy as he recovers an atavistic sense of self and experiences authenticity. When he ultimately finds the “roaring jar” he admits that his objective has been met and that his mission is complete. If solely an adventure story, then, the novel would end here, especially given his climatic declaration “... hav[ing] secured that roaring jar ... was the first outstanding, noteworthy act of my life to that moment” (174).¹³ Instead, Carpentier has created a false ending. The anticipated reversal of fortune in fact does not occur, and the protagonist continues on his

quest down the river. In other words, his epic struggle, to which we have been a witness, and a part of it for a sizeable amount of the narration, is nowhere near its ending. The moment has seemingly culminated in the first exceptional act of his life, and yet it is quickly and anti-climatically dismissed, leaving the reader with a sense of false expectation.

The same is true for Xenophon and the Greek mercenaries when they reach the Black Sea. Their exclamation: “The Sea! The Sea!” (IV.7.24) —the most recognizable quote of the work— signifies in the mind of the soldiers that they are no longer in the barbaric interior and are in sight of the portal of civilization again. Their relief and enthusiasm create the same sense of anticipation that the reader likely perceives in the *Los pasos perdidos* when the protagonist-narrator comes across the primitive instruments. In the *Anabasis* the reader witnesses the soldiers’ exaltation, perceives that we are before the work’s climatic moment, and understands that the long retreat has culminated in this very moment. If solely a work about a military retreat, then, the history would end here, just as *Los pasos perdidos* would have ended with the procurement of the instruments. But just as Carpentier does, Xenophon too sets the reader up for a false ending. Their elation is short lived once they realize that the symbolic sight alone of the sea will not deliver them to Greece. Instead, the narrative continues at great length as it documents their struggle to return home. It is this false climactic moment that has so often and so powerfully caught the attention of modern readers who tend to view the rest of the work almost as a mere denouement. In reading the *Anabasis* and writing *Los pasos perdidos*, Carpentier seems not to have been lured into this trap. Instead, he appreciates how the narration increasingly focuses on the personal struggles of the character Xenophon.¹⁴

Moreover, the false endings in both works are compounded further. In *Los pasos perdidos* the narrator first is removed from Paradise by a *deus ex machina* in the form of an airplane and subsequently is precluded from returning due to nature. In a mirror image, Xenophon at the outset struggles to overcome the natural elements of his surroundings only to find that his city’s degree of exile will preclude him as well. Regardless, in both cases the protagonists find themselves between two worlds: one is banished from returning, the other is impeded from advancing. One is secluded by the law of Nature; the other, by the law of Man.

Parallels between the Two Works: *The Thematic*

Beyond the striking resemblances regarding discourse, other similarities are even more evident when we consider the principle thematic focus of the two works: the central theme of *nostos*, or the return home. In discussing the concept of home, it is perhaps noteworthy first to call attention to how both protagonists perceive themselves in light of others whom they encounter along their respective journeys. First, the journey forth and subsequent retreat serve as a means for the protagonists in both instances to measure themselves in light of the symbolic other. More precisely, Carpentier and Xenophon lead the reader to associate both protagonists with the city and by extension civilization, whereas their opposing forces symbolize the barbaric. As Cawkwell points out:

On every page of the *Anabasis* the contrast between Greek and barbarian is sharply drawn – the barbarian world vast and diverse, feudal and ancient or tribal and savage, the Greek world compact and united by the sea, and, despite variety, essentially one in its approach to life. (9)

The characterization that the “journey up into the interior” of Asia Minor reveals the barbaric should not be surprising since it holds to Aristotle’s notion that all that is beyond the city is barbarous: “Outside the *polis*, no one is truly human, but either a god or beast” (Aristotle Book I, 5).

The same is true to an extent in *Los pasos perdidos*. As one would expect, initially the cosmopolitan setting —associated with Ruth— symbolizes civilization whereas the American jungle signifies the primordial and uncivilized. But the traditional juxtaposition of “city/jungle” as “civilization/barbarism,” common in the Latin American telluric novels of the early twentieth-century, gives way to a more complex understanding, or at least a more complex valorization. The narrator ultimately comes to see the supposed *haute culture* of Mouche —and by extension, the city —as

decadent. In contrast, her allegorical opposite, Rosario, stands for that which is pure and untouched by modernity. Concurrently, by virtue of the *Adelantado's* influence the once unspoiled and idyllic setting of Santa Mónica de los Venados has already begun to enter the Western notion of civilization. Purity will give way to decadence; civilization will encroach upon the barbaric. Thus, in the narrator's mind his understanding of what constitutes civilization alters his conceptualization of home.

The thematic focus of *nostos* culminates in the narrator's inability to return to Paradise as well as his sense of alienation after having returned to the city. This ending has not always been viewed favorably by some readers. Vassar notes, for instance, that, "Barry and Echevarría interpret the novel's ending and message as entirely negative" (213). Smith, on the other hand, sees the narrator's struggle in a more positive light, in the sense that it is better to have been to paradise and unable to return than never to have been there at all: "At the end the protagonist is quite alone, but I disagree with the view that he is more thwarted than he had been at the outset because he has been allowed a tantalizing glimpse of an organic society..." (72). Both arguments seem to place too much emphasis on the narrator's success or failure to regain Paradise. Instead, when one views the narrator in relation to Xenophon (as the author invites us to do in his "Nota"), the real questions that seem to emerge are: How does he define home? Where does he want to be? Does the answer lie "back there" where he can find paper, or back at his new home where he has found inspiration? In other words, the ultimate dilemma for the protagonist culminates in the philosophic question "So which way is home?"

In terms of narrative tension, the answer for the Greek mercenaries is clear. They know where home is. They simply lose interest in getting there, and, thus, the narrative tension dissipates. For Xenophon and our narrator, however, the answer is not so clear, and the result is the state of alienation and existential crisis with which both wanderers are left. Xenophon's exile forces him to reconsider and redefine what home means, and whether it could be replaced, in his words, by some "fair place of refuge" (VII.7.34) or even by a new home as Cyrus had promised before the fateful battle of Cunaxa (I.7.4). The same could be said for Carpentier's narrator. At first, it may seem that his lack of *nostos* can be blamed on a physical barrier—that is, the river has risen and impedes his return—but we know that this is a dangling and false conclusion. The narrator would simply have to wait until the end of the rainy season when he could once again return to Santa Monica. If he did so, however, he would find Rosario now as the wife of Marcos (276). In other words, we know that it is more than the physical impediment. Instead, his homeward journey is ambivalent. He longs for "civilization" when he is in the jungle just as he longs for paradise once he returns to the man-made city. As an allegorical figure of the post-modern everyman, he does not know where home lies and blames the extraneous forces of nature for his lack of fulfillment and unrealized sojourn. It is not that he cannot get back to his newfound home; rather, akin to Xenophon, he is suspended between his former home and the one he now seeks.

This seems to be the real contribution of reading *Los pasos perdidos* with the *Anabasis* in mind. More than a series of coincidences, it informs the ambivalent ending of what the protagonist seeks, namely the "fair place of refuge" to use Xenophon's term. This same sentiment coincides precisely with the thoughts expressed by Victor and Sofía in Carpentier's equally acclaimed novel, *El siglo de las luces* (*Explosion in a Cathedral*). After they flee Havana and Victor asks Sofía if she wishes to return home, she declares: "I shall never go back to the home I left in search of a better." His response however—"Where is this better home you're looking for"—is met with her sobering realization "I don't know" (335).¹⁵ The exchange between Victor and Sofía duplicates so to speak the same question and answer sequence between the reader and the narrator of *Los pasos perdidos*. The narrator does not know. It is not merely that he keeps trying and failing as Carpentier would have us believe by referencing Sisyphus in the novel's conclusion—"Today Sisyphus' vacation came to an end" (278)¹⁶—nor is he the epic hero who will return to and remain with Penelope as Yannes would have us believe. Instead, the *Anabasis* serves as the corrective to the *Odyssey* just as our narrator represents the antithesis of the archetypal hero. That is to say, by framing *Los pasos perdidos* with the *Anabasis* we come to understand that the narrator's quest to return home is more complicated than the references associated with the *Odyssey*. Nonetheless, given the numerous explicit as well as implicit associations, it is evident that that Carpentier wants the reader to associate the novel with the *Odyssey* as the archetype of the

wanderer's tale. For example, our narrator sees a copy of the epic in a bookstore window before he sets out on his voyage (12). He equates the feast of eating the tapir to the feast of the swineherd in Book XIV (156). Upon his departure, Yannes gives his copy to the narrator as a present (188). The narrator reads aloud the section in the *Odyssey* regarding the lotus eaters (199). The narrator bases his *Threnody* on the *Odyssey* (218). And, Yannes remarks that Rosario has not waited for him by contextualizing her with the *Odyssey*: "She no Penelope" (276).¹⁷ In fact, the *Odyssey* figures so prominently in the work that as Smith points out "...the very notion of using it yet again appears to court boredom" (58).

In associating *Los pasos perdidos* solely with the *Odyssey*, however, we have succumbed to the author's trick. He has deceived us by dangling the myth of Odysseus in front of us, only to invite us to accept a false premise: If our hero is Odysseus who departs from home on his epic adventure to return as the hero, then why are we left with our narrator's ambiguous failure? González Echevarría attributes his failure to the protagonist's inability to reintegrate into society and interprets the novel as one of degeneration (*Pilgrim* 160). Similarly, John Barry suggests that typical of modern society our narrator falls short of the Odyssean archetype: "A diferencia de Ulises, al protagonista de *Los pasos perdidos* le falta la voluntad de forzar un destino; en este sentido es una versión degradada del héroe mítico.... De todos modos, el fracaso del narrador es total..." (Vassar 213). In light of the interpretations offered by Barry and González Echevarría, the reader may be tempted to view the narrator-protagonist as a failed Odysseus, but when we frame his quest for *nostos* in light of the *Anabasis* we come to see him more as an exiled Xenophon.¹⁸ Suspended in time and space between his former home and the one he now seeks, the narrator can neither return "back there" nor forge ahead to his supposed destiny. More than the epic hero who has failed, he —like Xenophon— is the modern anti-hero whose existential alienation keeps him from finding his way to a true home.

Conclusion

The unexpected revelation in the epilogue of the importance of the *Anabasis* to Yannes —the avatar of Western tradition— compels the reader to retrace the protagonist's steps not with Odysseus in mind but rather Xenophon who fails to make it back home. In the timeless realm of Homeric myth, a hero can leave home, embark on long adventures, and enjoy the day of homecoming in which he is recognized for who he is and re-integrated into the home he has left. In the 'real' world, however, the world of history and time (whether 4th century Greece or 20th century western hemisphere), home can no more maintain an abiding, immutable structure than art or literature can adhere to its primordial forms. A 20th century quest to find the roots of music in a vestigial "roaring jar" from epochs ago is no more possible than the attempt to return to a home that ceased to exist as it had been previously experienced the moment the traveler set foot on his journey. The modern 20th century man, alienated from his present role in the march of history and civilization and unable to find his way back to a primordial Eden does not find his soul mate in Homer's Odysseus with great voyages of knowledge (of self and others) and successful homecoming. He is, rather, more akin to the modern 4th century BC man, Xenophon, in his failure to find his place in the home he had left in search of another, better home, and in his ultimate alienation. Perhaps that is why Carpentier chooses to leave in the reader's mind, as the very last word of the text, the image of Xenophon.

End Notes

¹ Differing from the original, the English translation places the authorial "Note" as a Foreword and not as an Epilogue. The decision to alter the placement —presumably an editorial decision— alters in our estimation Carpentier's intent. In the original text, the *Anabasis* stands as the very last word in the novel and holds special significance as the concluding image that the author imparts to the reader.

² “meros prototipos ... comunes a muchos países” (331). When citing Carpentier’s text we have incorporated quotes from the Onís translation. The corresponding original Spanish quotes, from the González Echevarría edition, are included as notes throughout the study.

³ “a partir del lugar llamado Puerto Anunciación” (331).

⁴ “junto a La Odisea admiraba sobre todas cosas La Anábasis de Jenofonte” (332).

⁵ Since the first-person narration is recounted by an un-named character, in all instances we refer to the main character merely as the narrator.

⁶ Goldhill uses this phrase in his review of Rood’s book in referring to the generations of readers who focus on, almost fetishize, the powerful emotional outpouring of the Greeks upon seeing the Black Sea which they believe signals the end of their journey. These readers see this scene as the *telos* of the story of the *Anabasis*, although it occurs only slightly more than halfway through the text. The emotional pull of such a scene is easier to latch onto than the messier and incomplete tale of one man’s thwarted *nostos*.

⁷ Bradley’s narratological reading of the *Anabasis* shows how the portrayal of the character Xenophon supersedes the story of the Ten Thousand’s march and ultimately “provides the overarching structural and thematic coherence to the narrative” (540).

⁸ “Ahora se iba hacia el mar, y más allá del mar, hacia el Océano inmenso de las odiseas y anábasis” (*El siglo de las luces* 149).

⁹ Selena Millares makes reference to this particular quote to frame her study of *El siglo de las luces*, but at no time does she distinguish the one classical work from the other.

¹⁰ Bradley makes the case that the *Anabasis* is a *sui generis* work and can be seen as novelesque autobiography (521).

¹¹ For a study of *Los pasos perdidos* as auto-biographical travel literature, see Mary Louise Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*.

¹² González Echevarría discounts that the setting can be Caracas since the capital is described as being near the sea. (*Los pasos perdidos* 107). Still, for our purposes, since the journey takes them down the Venezuelan Orinoco, we refer to the anonymous capital here as Caracas.

¹³ “El rescate de la jarra sonora ... era el primer acto excepcional, memorable, que se hubiera inscrito hasta ahora en mi existencia” (236).

¹⁴ Rood surveys the modern literary reception and appropriation of the *Anabasis*, and demonstrates how generations of readers have misread “The Sea! The Sea!” as the climax and goal of the work. Bradley details how Xenophon builds to this false climax and then subtly shifts the focus of the narration to the individual travails of the character Xenophon, a tale that ultimately has no adequate closure.

¹⁵ “Jamás volveré a una casa de donde me haya ido en busca de otra mejor.”/ “¿Dónde está la casa mejor que ahora buscas?”/“No sé” (*El siglo de las luces* 290).

¹⁶ “Hoy terminaron las vacaciones de Sísifo” (330).

¹⁷ Expresión que en español equivale a algo como: “Ella no es ninguna Penélope” (328).

¹⁸ Alexopoulou analyzes how the Odyssean and tragic conceptions of *nostos* inform the theme of homecoming in the work of Seferis. Alexopoulou sees in Seferis more of a tragic notion of the impossibility of returning to an idealized, unchanged home rather than an Odyssean return to and reintegration into the home that the hero had left. We similarly see Carpentier eschewing as impossible a Homeric *nostos*, but with a nod to a different classical forebear.

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