

Alejo carpentier's a
kingdom of this world



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Alejo Carpentier's *A Kingdom of this World* In 1949, when Alejo Carpentier formulates his theory of the marvelous reality of Latin America and the Caribbean, he remains insistent on being able to identify sites of difference. As he remarks, the Haitian Revolution represents a history that is impossible to situate in Europe. For Carpentier, "lo real maravilloso," America's marvelous reality, resists the discourses of Europe that seek to name and dictate Caribbean reality chiefly because of the presence of black culture and the New World's untamed natural world that represent breaks in the continuum of European History. By virtue of its difference from Europe, "lo real maravilloso" provides the promise of escape from the grip of colonialism. As his commentary about regionalist prose reveals, despite the distance he wishes to create between his work of the sixties and that of the thirties and forties, Carpentier did not abandon the aspiration that literature might somehow reach the transcendental essence of things. The difference in his later novels, beginning with *The Kingdom of this World*, and more emphatically apparent in *Explosion in a Cathedral*, is that Carpentier acknowledges and exploits the baroque ironies that result from the writer's repeated failures to identify unambiguously the parameters of marvelous reality.

In *Explosion in a Cathedral*, Carpentier uses the conch shell as a metaphor of the kinds of baroquisms that paradoxically signify language's limitations in representing reality:

The snail [caracol] was the mediator between evanescent, fugitive, lawless, measureless fluidity, and the land, with its crystallisations, its structures, its morphology, where everything could be grasped and weighed.... Esteban reflected on how, for millenium upon millenium, the spiral had been present

to the everyday gaze of maritime races, who were still incapable of understanding it, or of even grasping the reality of its presence. He was astonished by this science of form which had been exhibited for so long to humanity that still lacked eyes to appreciate it [sin ojos para pensarla]. What is there round about me which is already complete, recorded, real [definido, inscrito, presente], yet which I cannot understand What sign, what message, what warning is there, in the curling leaves of the endive, the alphabet of moss, the geometry of the rose-apple

The arbitrary fluidity of the ocean, similar to the lawlessness of European colonialisms, has clashed with the solidity of the islands to form the baroquism of the shell. The inability of language borrowed from European discourse to grasp Caribbean reality creates cultural practices that, like this shell, act as mediators between the two poles. The task for the Caribbean writer, then, is to create baroquisms like the shell by attacking the void created by the various absentee paternal cultures with all the force of language at one's command, by attempting to " name it all. Such audacity becomes, paradoxically, a humble confession of language's limitations before the primordially of an American reality. Precisely because reality always offers surprises and exposes the limitations of representation, an American language must be audaciously baroque. Carpentier demands of great prose: " Show me the object; make it so that with your words I can touch it, evaluate it, feel its weight.... But the prose that gives a thing life and consistency, weight and measure, is a baroque, a forcefully baroque, prose.